The use of action research in an in-service course to foster reflective practice in scoring student writing

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an INSET (In-service Education for Teachers) course taught by the authors at Universiti Brunei Darussalam. This course taught two things: firstly, holistic and analytic methods for scoring student writing and secondly, how to carry out action research to evaluate the relative effectiveness of these two scoring methods.

The first sections of the paper briefly describe the lingusitic commmunity of Brunei Darrusalam and provide some background on the emergence of action research as an investigative and evaluative tool for classroom teachers. The INSET course is described in terms of rationale, course objectives and participants and then the three parts of the course are outlined. A detailed evaluation of the course, guided by a set of research questions, is then presented.

Concluding remarks reflect on the relative merits of including action research within such in-service courses.

Key Words: analytic, holistic, action research, in-service

INTRODUCTION

The official language of Brunei Darussalam is Malay but English is widely used, especially in the commercial and professional sectors of Brunei society (Jones, 1997). In 1985, bilingual education in Malay and English was introduced from primary four and through secondary school. Bruneians thus have considerable exposure to English in the education system, particularly at the upper secondary and tertiary levels where increasing emphasis is placed on academic English. In the wider community readily available English language, private and public sector documentation increasingly printed in both English and Malay, high levels of English-based ICT usage and a well-travelled populace have all contributed to a wide-spread use of the language. Jones (1997: 27) has pointed out that, "…most Bruneians are able to use English, obviously with greater or lesser effect, but sufficiently well not to feel excluded from situations in which English is employed".

To reinforce what may be described as a technical-rationalist view of human resource development (Prescott, 2002: 247) Brunei has an education system driven by examinations with attainment markers at various stages. In the context of this system, secondary school English teachers in Brunei, mark a large amount of student writing and the quantity of marking results in mostly holistic scoring methods being used. But there is a growing awareness of the need to provide better feedback to student writers in order to try and improve writing standards amongst students at secondary school level. As Universiti Brunei Darussalam offers courses for the professional development of school teachers it seemed appropriate to offer an INSET (In-service Education for Teachers) course that examined two broad approaches to scoring students' writing; holistic and analytic. Moreover, it also seemed appropriate to provide teachers taking the course with a means of applying their new understandings in the context of their own classes because as

Wallace (1998) has pointed out teachers "are usually interested in their own unique situations: *their* students; *their* lessons; *their* classes and so on" (p. 161). Action research offered this opportunity.

The INSET course offered used a course design format based on earlier work reported by Prescott and Svalberg (2000) and contained a mix of input and implementation sessions. Briefly, teachers were introduced to holistic and analytic scoring as well as an action research framework; they then had to design a small-scale action research project to implement the scoring approaches in their schools; finally they reported on their implementation of the action research framework. As with the earlier work on which the idea for this course was based we, the INSET course providers, considered it important to evaluate the extent to which the INSET course achieved its objectives. In the sections that follow, we discuss classroom based action research in general, describe briefly the INSET course we conducted and, finally, present our findings and conclusions.

CLASSROOM BASED ACTION RESEARCH

Since Kurt Lewin (1946) first wrote about action research it has gradually attracted more and more interest from practitioners and researchers in the 'human' sciences and has become increasingly significant in the field of language teaching (Nunan,1992). This increased significance is indicated by the publication of a number of works concerned with small-scale, investigations of this type, such as the series Teachers' Voices*, which seek to enable teachers to reflect on their classroom practices as a basis for critical appraisal and future growth and planning.

* The <u>Teachers' Voices</u> series is published by the National Centre for English Language Teaching and   Research, Macquarie University, New South Wales, Australia.

Among the best known writers in the action research field are Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). In their view action research exhibits three defining attributes. These attributes are:

- action research is carried out by practitioners,

- action research is collaborative, and,

- action research is aimed at effecting change.

Cohen and Manion (1989) stress the situational nature of action research in that it is concerned with identifying and solving problems in a particular research context. They also lay emphasis on collaboration as a defining characteristic of action research as is the desire to improve circumstances in the context in which the research is being conducted. Another writer who emphasises the collaborative nature of action research is Burns (1999: 13) who points out that these "research processes strengthen the opportunities for results of research on practice to be fed back into educational systems in a more substantial and critical way". Burns argues that this kind of collaborative work encourages teachers to share common problems and work cooperatively to examine existing practices, values and beliefs within the contexts of the systems and the institutions in which they work.

Nunan (1992) has argued that collaboration is highly desirable in action research but believes that it should not be one of the key determining attributes. Nunan points out that many teachers who are interested in exploring processes of teaching and learning in their own context are either unable, for practical reasons, or unwilling, for personal reasons, to do collaborative research

(1992: 18). He also disputes the claim that action research must be concerned with change. A teacher may initiate a descriptive case study of a group of learners, or of a particular class, or even of a single learner. Similarly, an investigation into an existing system or method might be conducted in order to identify strengths or short-comings. If such an investigation is guided by a question and supported by data and interpretation, but not primarily concerned with change in the teacher's context or situation it also falls into the field of action research in Nunan's view.

In the context of South East Asian language classroom inquiry, the descriptive case study, initiated to make classroom processes and circumstances more explicit, has an important role. This role is associated with the development of a reflective approach to teaching, which descriptive case studies certainly encourage. Reflective practices with respect to pedagogic and learning issues are becoming more important in teacher education in Southeast Asia, Brunei Darussalam being a case in point. In the Sultanate, as in a number of countries in the region, this is a recent development (Minnis, 1999) so it is not possible to assume that the skills needed to instigate such practices have necessarily been developed by teachers, particularly if their training was not recent. The descriptive case study is one means of developing such skills. But engagement in descriptive case study is not passive and engagement in such work implies evaluation about what is happening in the site under scrutiny. Scrutiny implies reflection and reflection constitutes to some extent a changed state. As well, a change in practice may well follow as a result of that reflection. This is where the writers tend to differ from the stance taken by Nunan (1992) mentioned above.

In a recent work, Mills (2003) having reviewed a number of models of action research notes, as has Wallace (1998), that action research embodies a reflective stance. Action research for teachers involves systematic inquiry with the goals of "gaining insight, developing reflective

practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment … and improving student outcomes" (Mills, 2003: 4).

Furthermore, the use of an action research framework to give structure to a professional development course reflects the concerns of other teacher trainers with respect to professional development. Work in The Philippines reported by Vilches has been concerned with designing "their training programs in such a way that they can motivate teacher learning and, consequently, professional development" (Vilches, 2003: 1). The programme Vilches describes was aimed at maximizing the teachers' potential for process and reflection and facilitating teacher learning. Richards (1990) argues that the principles and content of second language teacher education should reflect a theory of effective language teaching. Such a view shifts the focus of teacher education and professional development towards being more process-oriented and task-based.

THE INSET COURSE

Rationale for the Course

Reflection on pedagogic and learning issues, which action research encourages, has become more prominent in Bruneian teacher education programmes in recent years and teachers are increasingly being encouraged to practise such reflection. Therefore this course had significance for the developing role of classroom reflection and action research in secondary school English classrooms.

Secondary school English teachers in Brunei, who are both first language and non-first language users of English, mark a large amount of student writing. As already remarked, the quantity of marking required of teachers means that holistic scoring methods are generally used. On the other hand there is a growing awareness of the need to provide informative feed back to student

writers in order to encourage a more analytical approach to writing, particularly given the writing problems of Bruneian students, for whom grammatical and syntactic accuracy is often problematic (Svalberg & Fatimah, 1998). With this dichotomy in mind the presenters offered an INSET course that examined two broad approaches to scoring students' writing; holistic and analytic. Enhancement of the teachers' new understandings using action research as a tool in the process, was seen as a natural development in the course, permitting both structured application and reflection. This equally applied to the course providers who perceived a need to reflect on the success of their overall course provision.

Course Objectives

The INSET course itself had a number of objectives. The first part of the course aimed:

- To increase the teachers' knowledge/understanding of holistic marking.

- To develop the teachers' knowledge/understanding of analytic marking.

- To develop the teachers' strategies for utilising these approaches in their marking of student writing.

In order to permit application and trial of these three aims the second part of the course aimed to:

- Instruct the teachers in the features of a simple model of classroom-based action research.

- Assist each of the teachers in developing a small-scale, school-based project for holistic & analytic marking.

- Guide the implementation of the action research projects within an advisory framework.

In part three of the course the aims were:

- To implement the scoring approaches within individual or group action research projects.

- To report orally on the implementation.

- To submit an action research project report.

Overall Objective

- To evaluate the extent to which the INSET course achieved its objectives.

Course Participants

Twenty-one teachers undertook the course, which was delivered in two parts. Ten teachers took the first stage, 5 men and 5 women. They were all secondary school English language teachers working in Bruneian Government schools at levels one to four (student ages 12 years to 15 years). All ten teachers completed the course; three expatriate native English speakers, two expatriate Asian teachers of English and five Bruneians. Eleven teachers took the second stage, 2 men and 9 women. They were all secondary school teachers working in Bruneian Government schools at levels one to four. However, they were a mixture of English, science, geography and history teachers. The teachers of subjects other than English wished to take the course because they too engage in a substantial amount of marking of student writing under the practices of the Brunei Government lower secondary curriculum. All eleven teachers completed the course; one was an expatriate Asian teacher of English, the remainder were Bruneians. The course coordinators/researchers were two male mother tongue-speakers of English working at lecturer and senior lecturer level at Universiti Brunei Darussalam.

Course Description

The course consisted of the following sessions. Part 1 consisted of three input sessions; one on holistic scoring, one on analytic scoring and one on action research. Part 2 consisted of one input session for design and implementation (the implementation was also concurrent with Part 3)

of a small-scale action research project in schools. Part 3 consisted of two sessions for reporting back on the action research and evaluation. The input and evaluation sessions were conducted once a week at Universiti Brunei Darussalam at the end of the school day for two hours on six occasions over a period of four weeks (input) and two weeks (evaluation) respectively. Action research implementation sessions took place in the teachers' schools over a period of two weeks within this framework.

Part I introduced the teachers to ideas concerning the holistic scoring of students' writing, then they were each given ten scripts to assess. Following the assessment the teachers were asked to complete a descriptive protocol in which they identified the issues that each believed had been intuitively considered in scoring the ten scripts. Comparisons of the range of scores and the contents of the descriptive protocols were made in small groups.

Next, the teachers were introduced to ideas related to analytic scoring and then they were asked to develop an analytic scoring scale based on a collaborative analysis of their descriptive protocols. Following this, the teachers were each asked to assess a further ten scripts utilising their newly developed analytic scoring scales. Comparison of the range of scores across the whole group was made and these were contrasted with the range of scores obtained from the holistic scoring exercise. Any necessary further adjustments to the analytic scoring scale were then completed. Three further scripts were then assessed as a final check on the adjusted analytic scoring scales. Finally, in this first part of the INSET course the teachers were introduced to a simple model of action research (Figure 1), which became the framework for individual or group, small-scale school-based projects.

Figure 1: Steps in the action research process: an example

1.	Specifying what you want to know more about	Stating the issue in terms of a problem. *The feedback on essays is not helping my students.*
2.	Preliminary Investigation	What's going on? Observing and recording; evidence from teachers' records.
3.	Hypothesis	Students are not getting helpful information from the present system of feedback on their essays.
4.	Plan intervention	Teacher uses a different system to help students gain more information from feedback on their essays.
5.	Outcome	Reduction in student repeat errors.
6.	Reporting	Evaluative framework provided in INSET course.

In **Part 2** the teachers designed small-scale action research projects (involving scoring the writing of a small, selected group of students) and implemented these in their schools. With respect to assisting the teachers develop hypotheses the intention was to guide them in deriving operational hypotheses from more general statements. Key criteria for judging hypotheses (clearly and precisely stated; able to be tested; limited in scope and consistent with known facts)

were used to help the teachers with this important aspect of their action research projects. It was suggested that a sensible procedure was for each individual or group to formulate a preliminary hypothesis and then re-examine it in the light of what was tested with the action research and if necessary reformulate the hypothesis. With respect to the developing of research questions the teachers were encouraged to narrow the focus of the issues they had identified for investigation by asking question(s) to guide their enquiries. Several illustrative examples of action research questions from the work of other classroom teachers were introduced and discussed before the teachers attempted this task themselves. Following the design phase the teachers designed and implemented their individual action research projects in their schools.

In **Part 3** the teachers were scheduled to report verbally to the whole group and the coordinators, on the conduct and findings of their action research projects. This was to be followed in the same session by a report-writing workshop in order to allow the teachers to make a start on their action research reports with the coordinators present in order that any problems and uncertainties might be dealt with promptly. In the final session of the course the teachers and the coordinators were to discuss the benefits and professional growth which resulted from participation in this course. The coordinators were to initiate this discussion and then invite the teachers to share their perceptions with the whole group. This was to be followed by an evaluation of the INSET course using the document prepared for this purpose (Appendix Six).

In the final session of the course the coordinators discussed with the teachers the benefits and professional growth they had experienced during the course. Then the teachers identified aspects of the course, which they had found particularly beneficial. This discussion was followed by more time allocated to final report writing and completion of the evaluation form.

EVALUATION OF INSET COURSE

Research Questions

The evaluation of the course was framed in terms of the following research questions:

Q. 1. Will exposure to the two scoring approaches increase teachers' awareness

and understanding of assessment of student writing?

Q. 2. Will the use of an action research procedure enable teachers to implement

and evaluate aspects of the two scoring approaches?

Based on these research questions the following hypotheses were proposed:

H.1. Exposure to the two scoring approaches will enhance teachers'

awareness/understanding of assessment of student writing.

H.2. Action research will enable teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of aspects

of the two scoring approaches.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for the evaluation of the INSET course was collected and analysed in terms of the above research questions from three different sources; teachers' reporting back, teachers' action research project reports, and teachers' course evaluations.

Teachers' reporting back

Concurrent to the implementation period two final sessions were planned. The first was for teachers to share the progress achieved on the implementation of their action research projects with the whole group and to seek clarification or resolution for any problems they had encountered. The second session was used in part for verbal reports to the whole group and to the coordinators on the conduct and findings of their action research project. A report back format was provided (Appendix Two) to guide the discussion in this session. The teachers were asked to comment on what they had discovered in terms of their research question, whether they

had been able to prove their hypothesis and if they had any recommendations for change of method for their investigation. They were also asked if they had any suggestions for their teaching colleagues as a result of their action research project, if they thought they had gained any benefits from the project and if they believed they had gained professionally as a result of the INSET course. The course coordinators took notes during the report back sessions, independent of each other, and subsequently collated the information.

The verbal reporting by the teachers in the penultimate session of the course was limited in terms of overall successful achievement. There were a variety of reasons for this situation, which included some teachers being unwilling to present in front of peers and several teachers not having their action research projects at a stage where they could talk easily about them due to the pressures of other school commitments. As a result more time in this session was devoted to the report-writing workshop with which the teachers felt more at ease. The format for this part of the session followed the guidelines shown in Appendix Three.

This lack of successful oral reporting meant that the observations of the teachers' reporting back to the group did not really provide the richness of data expected. Hence, no conclusions were drawn in relation to the research questions based on this data source. This aspect of the course design may require refinement.

Teachers' action research project reports

The plan for the course was that the teachers would submit their action research reports at the conclusion of the final session so they could be assessed and returned to the teachers. Due to a combination of practical and organisational problems and pressure of work in the schools it proved impossible to adhere strictly to the planned schedule. Because of these factors some teachers submitted their action research project reports after the course had finished.

In the assessment of the teachers' reports by the course coordinators, a standard five-point scale was used to rate the level of fulfilment (extent of completion) of each of the criteria in the teachers' reports (Appendix Four). The researchers rated the reports independently then combined their results. A breakdown of the ratings for the report of the teachers who undertook the course in each of the assessment components is shown in Appendix Five. Tallies for the teachers' ratings on the five-point scale are summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Task Fulfilment Rating

TEACHERS ⇒

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	
EA	8	8	10	1	1	1	3	3	3	3	1	1	10	3	3	3	3			2	2	31.16%
SA	2	2	1	2	2	2	7	7	7	7	6	6	1	6	6	6	6	3	3	5	5	39.82%
AA	1	1		3	3	3	1	1	1	1	4	4		2	2	2	2	5	5	2	2	19.50%
LA				4	4	4												2	2			08.65%
PA																		1	1			00.86%

Ratings
EA = excellent achievement

SA = satisfactory achievement

AA = adequate achievement

LA = less than adequate achievement

PA = poor achievement

Table 1 shows that in terms of task fulfilment in the teachers' action research reports more than two thirds (70.98%) of the ratings registered at the two most positive levels while only 9.51% of the ratings registered at the two most negative levels.

Another 19.50% of the ratings registered at the neutral level. It is clear that these results are too general to draw any particular or strong conclusions. It can, however, be stated that the level of positive achievement in the teachers' action research reports tends to reflect the positive comments made by the teachers in the course evaluation comments. With respect to the hypothesis that *Action research will enable teachers to evaluate the effectiveness of aspects of*

the two scoring approaches it is possible to conclude that there is some positive evidence to support the hypothesis. With respect to the research question *Will the use of an action research procedure enable teachers to implement and evaluate aspects of the two scoring approaches?* it is also possible to conclude that there is sufficient evidence in these results to provide a positive answer to the question. Clearly neither the hypothesis nor the question has been fully tested and future work might well concentrate on eliciting more substantial evidence to enable better-informed conclusions to be reached.

Again with respect to the research question *Will the use of an action research procedure enable teachers to implement and evaluate aspects of the two scoring approaches?* it was clear from the teachers' comments in discussion and then subsequently in their reports that the majority of them were able to utilise the action research format to consider the two scoring approaches. The ratings assigned to the **outcomes** component in the teachers' reports were used to ascertain their achievement with respect to their ability to reflect on the two scoring approaches. Of the twenty-one teachers six exhibited excellent achievement (EA) while thirteen teachers exhibited satisfactory achievement (SA) in the **outcomes** component of their action research reports. The other two teachers registered less than adequate achievement (LA). These results are summarised in Table 2:

Table 2
Report Task Fulfilment

excellent achievement	satisfactory achievement	Adequate achievement	less than adequate achievement	poor achievement
6 teachers	**13** teachers		**2** teachers	

Referring again to the extent action research enabled the teachers to evaluate the relative effectiveness of the scoring approaches, there was a higher degree of excellent and satisfactory

achievement exhibited. This was ascertained from ratings assigned to the ***conclusions*** component in the teachers' reports. In this component twelve teachers exhibited excellent achievement (EA), four teachers exhibited satisfactory achievement (SA) and five teachers exhibited adequate achievement (AA). These results are summarised in Table 3:

Table 3
Use of action research to evaluate relative effectiveness of scoring approaches

excellent achievement	satisfactory achievement	Adequate achievement	less than adequate achievement	poor achievement
12 teachers	4 teachers	5 teachers		

Teachers' report comments

The teachers' action research reports contained a number of observations pertaining to the research questions and hypotheses posed in this evaluation. In relation to the first research question, a number of teachers commented that conducting the research had increased their understanding of assessment procedures. The following extracts illustrate this perceived gain in understanding.

> ***…****it was revealed that many of us only have a hazy knowledge of these two methods of scoring. Now we could work towards a better way of scoring our students' work.* [Rafiq et al: 2001]

> *It [the project] can improve the knowledge in scoring students' writing. We are able to give our confidence in scoring students' writing.* [Jasni et al: 2001]

> *Professionally, we believe that this project helped us to improve in our teaching and scoring skills for the future. From the research, teachers will realise there are better ways of marking.* [Haslinda & Fatimah: 2002]

The above comments also reveal, in generalised terms, the perceived benefit this gain in understanding has for teaching. This perception is articulated in more specific terms in the following observation.

> *This project has improved my understanding of how I go about scoring and evaluating my students' work. It will help me fine-tune the balance that is needed in low ability groups between providing motivation and delivering more objective judgement in terms of national standards.* [Smith: 2001]

As the following observation reveals, for another teacher the gain in understanding reaffirmed her current assessment practice.

> *As a result of this study I have gained a better insight into the process of analytic and holistic scoring. Professionally I feel more confident to continue using the holistic approach in scoring my students' writing...* [Lee On Nee: 2002]

The preceding quotation also addresses the second research question posed in this study. A number of teachers also expressed a similar perception namely that conducting the action research had enabled them to implement and evaluate the two approaches to the assessment of student writing. The following comment is representative in that regard.

> *This approach [analytic] forces the marker to be explicit in what they judge to be worthwhile in a student piece of writing. The analytic process is much more reflective. The process is diagnostic yielding more information for the teacher about his class, which may be used to bring about further improvement in student performance.* [Meehan: 2001]

This evaluation and reflection is also embodied in the following observation, which addresses the need for further research. Interestingly, the link between assessing and teaching is raised again but this time in terms of the teaching of writing itself.

Further research into these two methods would need to focus not on whether the two methods yield different results but rather why they yield different results and whether one or the other is a more effective tool for teaching writing rather than assessing.

[Dwyer: 2001]

For many of the teachers, the process of evaluating the use of the analytic scales they had developed revealed a positive outcome in terms of improved feedback for their students. Some teachers saw it as a theoretical or potential benefit as revealed in the following remark.

Secondly, a complete and thorough set of criteria would provide students with more effective feedback to develop and improve their writing. [Dwyer: 2001]

Others had actually investigated the effectiveness of the feedback as revealed below.

Our discussion with students showed that most prefer analytic scoring with the details displayed on the script. They can identify their weaknesses and they try and improve on them. [Rafiq et al: 2001]

Comments from students towards analytic marking have been favourable. A number of students were pleased that they were made more aware of their particular writing weaknesses. [Meehan: 2001]

As the observations quoted in this section of the paper reveal, there is support for the two hypotheses posed in this action research. Based on the action research reports of the teachers it is possible to conclude that the teachers felt that they had increased their understanding of

assessment procedures and had been able to implement and evaluate the two approaches covered in the INSET course. Implicit in many of the perceptions expressed above has been an increase in the teachers' confidence to assess. As expressed by one group the professional gain was *"that our evaluation of tests would be more accurate and uniform."*

[Rafiq et al: 2001]

Teachers' course evaluations

During the final session the teachers completed course evaluation forms (Appendix Six). These provided the coordinators with semi-structured feedback on the three parts of the course.

Course evaluation comments

Burns (1999) reports that teachers who have conducted collaborative action research generally identify a number of positive outcomes. Specifically, the teachers in Burns' study felt the benefits of conducting action research were, closer engagement with classroom practice, increased understanding of the reasons for change, collaboration with other teachers, and personal and professional growth.

The teachers' evaluation of the action research component of this INSET course noticeably emphasised the issue of insufficient time to undertake the action research thoroughly because of heavy workloads at school. Nevertheless, a number of teachers commented on the benefits of conducting action research. The collaborative nature of action research was thought to *"lead to plenty of discussion and clarification"* and the inherent teamwork enabled one group to achieve its goal *to "develop, trial and contrast analytic/holistic scales."* In terms of personal and professional growth, one teacher noted that *"by conducting the small scale action research project we can apply what we have learnt."* Another teacher felt that a major benefit of action research was *"finding out ourselves"* rather than reading about research. For another teacher the

professional growth for the group came because their *research "revealed the weaknesses of teachers' scoring"*. These reflective observations about the benefits of conducting action research are concordant with those identified by the teachers's in Burns' study. The comments are, by themselves, somewhat subjective. However, if they are considered in association with the comments from the teachers' action research reports and the assessment of task fulfilment for those reports they do indicate a generally positive level of satisfaction amongst the majority of the teachers with respect to the enabling capacity of action research as an appropriate school-based research tool. In terms of the research question *Will exposure to the two scoring approaches increase teachers' awareness and understanding of assessment of student writing?* it is possible to conclude that there is sufficient evidence in the evaluation comments to indicate a positive answer to the question. Likewise it is possible to conclude that there is support for the hypothesis *Exposure to the two scoring approaches will enhance teachers' awareness/understanding of assessment of student writing.*

OUTCOMES AND FINDINGS

The model this INSET course followed was not the usual format for such courses. The introduction of a mix of input and implementation sessions as well as a number of ideas relating to scoring writing and action research were new to the teachers. The fact that the course was of limited duration meant that assimilation time was restricted. Analysis of the teachers' action research reports and course evaluations enabled two general benefits to be identified. These were:

(1) an overall impression that the course had been successful, and

(2) that the same format could be continued to be used.

The particular findings included:

- Firstly, there was a strong perception that awareness of holistic and analytic scoring of student writing had been enhanced. This perception was reinforced by the teachers' comments in their action research reports.

- It was clear from the action research reports that a number of teachers would modify their practices in the scoring of student writing following the INSET course.

- The teachers' evaluations of the INSET course indicated that they felt they had developed as professionals and gained a better understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of the two scoring approaches.

- One teacher commented six months later that he had been able to conduct a more extensive action research project on scoring student writing for a post graduate study he was completing and that the INSET course had provided the academic foundation for this investigation.

- As was the case in the earlier work reported by Prescott & Svalberg (2000) the course format - input regarding some aspect germane to teaching and action research implemented as small-scale research projects – again worked well and was worth repeating.

CONCLUSION

The research questions posed have been answered in a moderately positive manner. Exposure to the two scoring approaches enhanced teachers' awareness of the relative strengths and weaknesses of each method. The use of action research provided support for a reflective implementation of these scoring approaches. Indeed, both from the perspective of the course designers and participants, the use of action research as part of an in-service course seems to have been justified as it enabled the teachers on the course to question practice, affirm practice, change practice and generate ideas for future investigation.

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APPENDIX ONE
ACTION RESEARCH PLAN

Issue for investigation

Preliminary investigation

Hypothesis

Research question

Procedure

Data collection method

Data analysis method

Anticipated problems/possible solutions

APPENDIX TWO

Holistic and analytic scoring of students' writing

REPORT BACK

We would like to be able to share the findings, outcomes and conclusions (benefits, and professional growth) that you encountered as a result of participating in this INSET course. The categories to address are listed below. Try to include comments under each one in what you say. We will initiate the discussion.

Findings   What did you discover in terms of your research question?

Outcomes   Have you been able to prove or not the truth of your hypothesis?

                 Have you any recommendations for change of method of undertaking the investigation? On what basis do you make these recommendations?

                 What suggestions (if any) do you have for teaching colleagues as a result of your AR project?

Conclusion   What benefits do you think you have gained? How might your teaching be modified as a result?

                 What do you believe you have gained professionally as a result of this INSET course?

APPENDIX THREE
Report writing guidelines

Focus	This is the issue/problem you have been investigating; the focus may form the title to the report; e.g. *Reduction of tense errors in Secondary Four Students' Writing*.
Context	This includes detailed information about the situation in which the ACTION RESEARCH occurred and can include the type of class, the type of syllabus taught, comments about the learners, the amount of English learning they have had etc
Hypothesis	This is a proposition which can be tested by your research e.g. *Analytic scoring of students' writing will result in a smaller range of marks that holistic marking*. Wording a hypothesis is a difficult thing to do and in particular distinguishing the hypothesis from the issue for investigation and the research question often poses problems. One method is to develop a "working hypothesis" and then to examine what you have investigated with your action research and then formulate the final wording of the hypothesis.
Research Question	This is where you have narrowed the focus of the issue for investigation by asking a question to guide your enquiry. *Can I reduce the range of marks when scoring my students' writing if I use analytic scoring instead of holistic scoring?* is a RQ which narrows the focus of a more general concern about ICT in your school.
Rationale for RQ	In this component you state why you are concerned with the research question and what effect the finding of an answer might have on your teaching, the learning of your students and on your colleagues and on your school.
Procedure	Here you must explain **EXACTLY** what you did in carrying out the investigation. **ALL** details, no matter how small and seemingly irrelevant should be included.
Data collection method	You should explain your method(s) of collecting data; include some samples of the data (meeting notes, observational jottings etc). These samples would normally be appended to the report.
Data analysis method	Here you explain how you analysed the data. Again it is important to be precise and not to omit small and apparently irrelevant details as often these can be crucial in helping to account for discrepancies in your

	findings or for unexpected results.
Findings	What you have discovered in terms of your research question. For instance if your RQ was *Is goal-setting an effective tool for improving student writing?* then you would discuss what you had discovered in your investigation with regard to this question.
Outcomes	**Hypothesis** Have you been able, or not able, to prove the truth of your hypothesis; is the proof inconclusive, strongly suggestive of support or only a weak indicator? **Recommendations for changes of method.** Often you will realise by the end of an investigation that there is a better way of going about the enquiry so recommend the change(s) and justify it/them (say why). **Suggestions/implications for other teachers/your school.** Here you discuss the outcomes of your investigation in terms of the revelations/insights they offer other teachers/your school.
Conclusion	**Benefits** Here you discuss how your teaching might be modified or improved as a result of this action research project. **Professional growth** What do you believe you have gained professionally, or learnt as a result of conducting the action research project?

APPENDIX FOUR
REPORT ON ADAPTATION & IMPLEMENTATION

INSET August - October 2001
INSET February - April 2002

Holistic and analytic scoring of students' writing

Teacher: _____

TASK CRITERIA	COMMENT	RATING *
Focus		
Context		
Hypothesis		
Research Question		
Rationale for RQ		
Procedure		
Data Collection method		
Data Analysis method		
Findings		
Outcomes		
Conclusion		

Structure & Presentation of Report

_____

Appropriateness of Language

_____

Overall quality of Report

_____

*Task Fulfilment Rating
EA (Excellent achievement),
SA (Satisfactory achievement),
AA (Adequate achievement),
LA (Less than adequate achievement),
PA (Poor achievement

APPENDIX FIVE

Assessment Ratings - First Group

	TEACHERS									
Criteria	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**
Focus	SA	EA	EA	SA	SA	SA	EA	EA	EA	EA
Context	EA	EA	EA	LA	LA	LA	SA	SA	SA	SA
Hypothesis	EA	EA	EA	EA	EA	EA	AA	AA	AA	AA
Research Question	EA	EA	EA	AA	AA	AA	SA	SA	SA	SA
Rationale for RQ	EA	AA	EA	NC	NC	NC	EA	EA	EA	EA
Procedure	EA		AA	LA	LA	LA	SA	SA	SA	SA
Data Collection Method	AA	EA	EA	LA	LA	LA	SA	SA	SA	SA
Data Analysis Method	EA	SA	EA	LA	LA	LA	SA	SA	SA	SA
Findings	SA	EA	EA	AA	AA	AA	SA	SA	SA	SA
Outcomes	EA	SA	EA	SA	SA	SA	SA	SA	SA	SA
Conclusion	EA	EA	EA	AA	AA	AA	EA	EA	EA	EA

Assessment Ratings - Second Group

Criteria	TEACHERS										
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**
Focus	AA	AA	EA	SA	SA	SA	SA	LA	LA	SA	SA
Context	AA	AA	EA	EA	EA	EA	EA	AA	AA	EA	EA
Hypothesis	AA	AA	EA	AA	AA	AA	AA	SA	SA	SA	SA
Research Question	AA	AA	EA	AA	AA	AA	AA	AA	AA	AA	AA
Rationale for RQ	SA	SA	EA	SA	SA	SA	SA	PA	PA	NC	NC
Procedure	SA	SA	EA	SA	SA	SA	SA	SA	SA	SA	SA
Data Collection Method	SA	SA	SA	SA	SA	SA	SA	AA	AA	AA	AA
Data Analysis Method	SA	SA	EA	EA	EA	EA	EA	SA	SA	SA	SA
Findings	EA	EA	EA	SA	SA	SA	SA	AA	AA	NC	NC
Outcomes	SA	SA	EA	SA	SA	SA	SA	LA	LA	EA	EA
Conclusion	SA	SA	EA	EA	EA	EA	EA	AA	AA	SA	SA

Note: NC = not completed

APPENDIX SIX
Holistic and analytic scoring of students' writing

EVALUATION OF INSET COURSE

In this exercise we would like you to reflect on the various components of the INSET course and respond to the questions we have asked about each. The purpose of this is to allow us to review the course in terms of its effectiveness of purpose and to incorporate such changes and improvements as are identified by you, the teachers.

For each component we ask questions and require written responses. These do not have to be extensive responses but where you need extra space please use the backs of the forms and make sure you identify (number) any entries of this kind. The questions have been numbered for ease of identification.

Prior to the writing of the responses there will have been a general group discussion on the pluses and minuses of the INSET course which we hope has helped focus your thinking. In writing your responses please consider the questions from YOUR point of view **only** even if you know of problems or ideas others have had. It is important that we get a range of individual responses.

INPUT
1. What do you consider were the main strengths of the three input sessions?

2. What do you consider were the main weaknesses of the three input sessions?

3. What recommendations do you have for improving this component of the INSET course?

ACTION RESEARCH
4. What do you consider were the main strengths of the session on action research?

5. What do you consider were the main weaknesses of the session on action research?

6. What recommendations do you have for improving this component of the INSET course?

REPORT WRITING
7. What do you consider were the main strengths of the session on report writing?

8. What do you consider were the main weaknesses of the session on report writing?

9. What recommendations do you have for improving this component of the INSET course?

10. Please add any other comments here.

Biodata

Michael Head is a lecturer in the School of Language Studies at Massey University where he teaches papers in linguistics, SLT and EAP. Formerly, as a lecturer at Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Michael taught courses in applied linguistics including language assessment and conducted in-service programs for teachers of English in Brunei.

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