



UniSA

Designing and using digital resources for embedding academic writing in English into a transcultural teaching and learning context

Dr Monica Behrend

Teaching Innovation Unit,

University of South Australia, Adelaide

monica.behrend@unisa.edu.au

Embedding academic literacies using digital technologies – Why?

Embedding academic literacies

- means to teach literacies explicitly in the disciplines
- benefits all students engaged in new assessment practices, esp. students with English as an Additional Language (EAL)

Digital technologies

- a way to provide 24 x 7 access to teaching and learning
- Much research conducted, but many unknowns about how EAL students use online writing resources

CHALLENGE: What influences the design and use of an online assignment writing resource for EAL students?

Research context

Context

- transnational: Australian ‘flying lecturers’ have students in Hong Kong (+ Australia)
- students failed report writing in 3rd year computing course
 - ... in Australia students had face-to-face writing workshops
 - ... in Hong Kong students had nothing

Location	Mode	Outcome
On-campus in Australia	Face-to-face workshops	✓
Off-shore in Hong Kong	Online workshops	?

The research study

Literature

Despite broad implementation of online technologies in higher education:

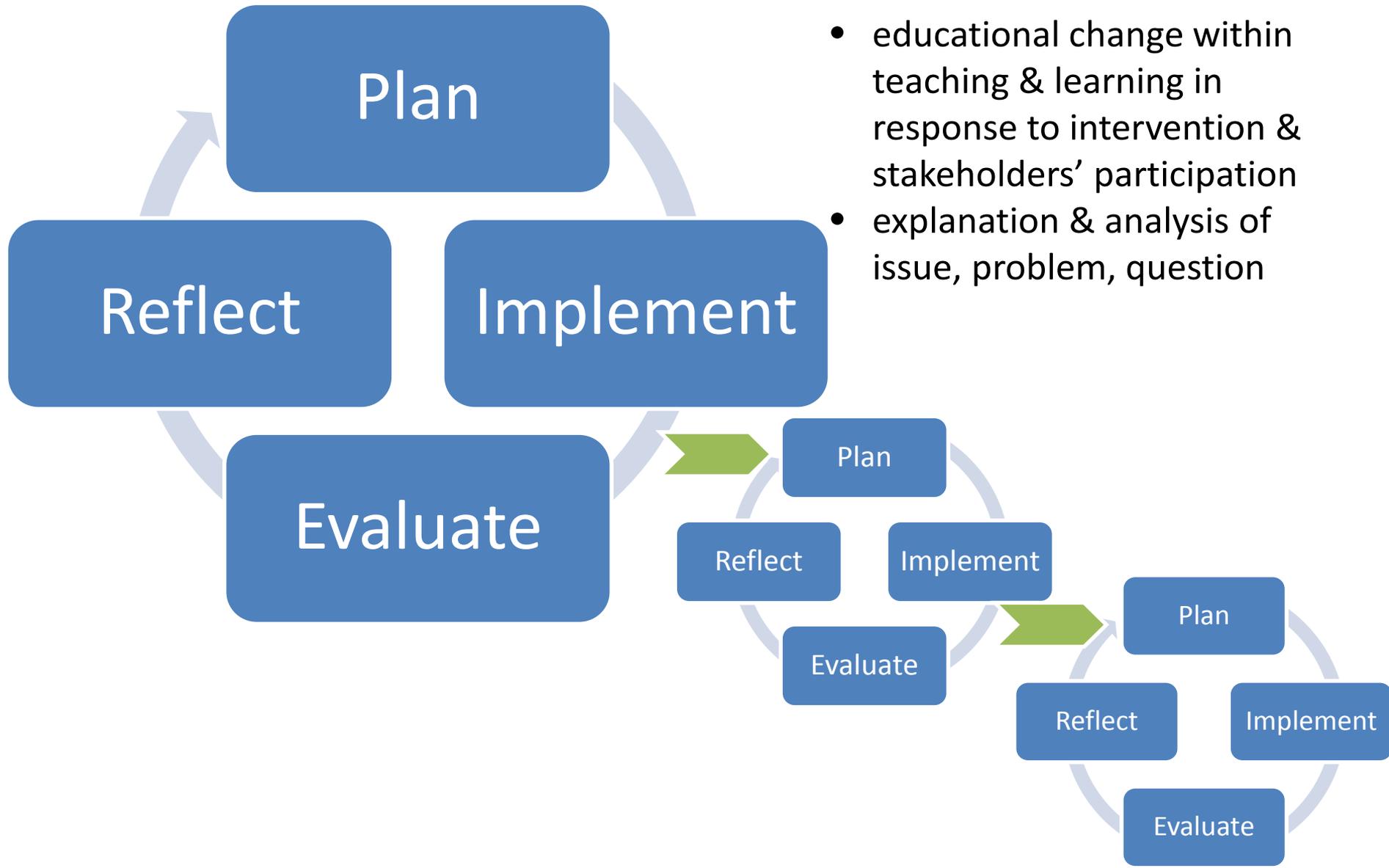
- limited understanding of how EAL students use online writing resources, especially in distance education modes
- voice of transnational students and their experiences absent from research

Research focus

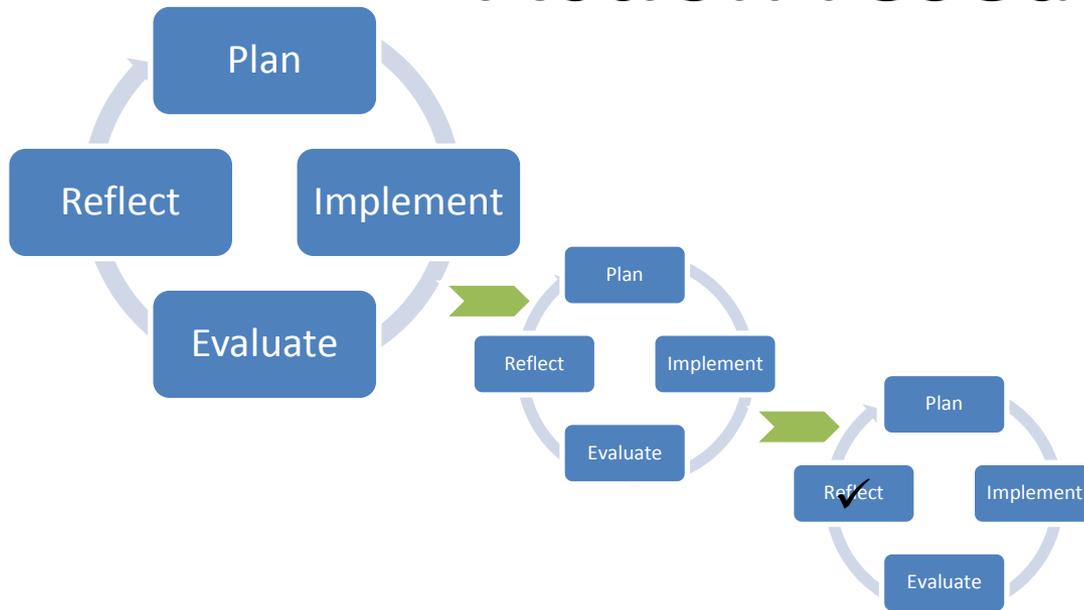
- provide support for EAL students through an online writing resource (OWR)

Data – interviews with course team (n = 3) & students (n = 18)

Action research (Lewin 1950's)



Action research



‘ ... action research, in its more effective forms, is phenomenological (focusing on people’s actual lived experience/reality), interpretive (focusing on their interpretation of acts and activities), and hermeneutic (incorporating the meaning people make of events in their lives)’ (Stringer 2007, p. 20).

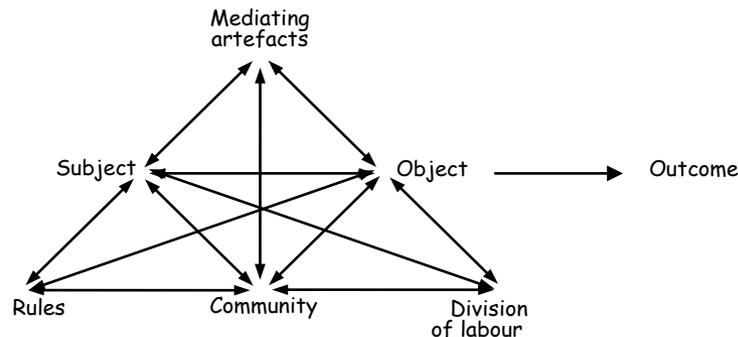
Principles of AR

- 1 Generating knowledge about phenomenon with stakeholders
- 2 Facilitating changes over time

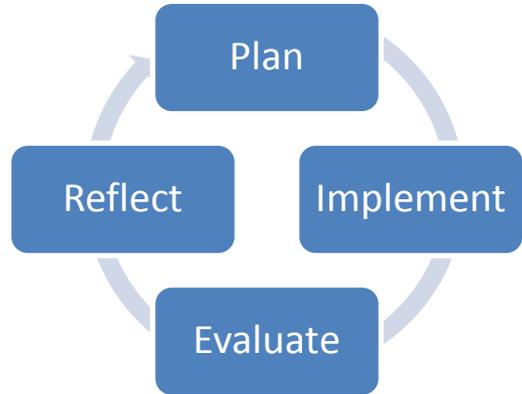
Analysis through Activity theory

Considers

- Role of mediation tool
- The sociocultural context of activity
- Contradictions within the activity (Engeström 1987 ...)



Zooming in and out of the data



Plan – designed OWR & placed online

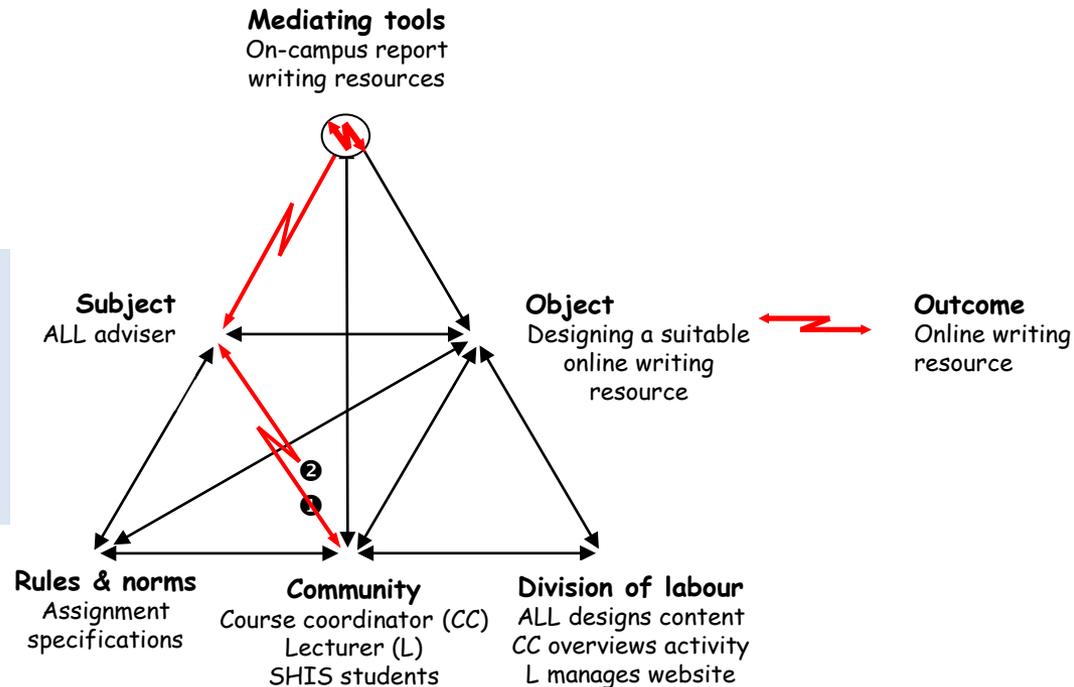
Implement – for students to use

Evaluate – 0 student research participants

Reflection – ?

Contradictions

1. Unchanged mediating tools
2. Individual not collaborative
3. Marginalised location of OWR



Zooming in and out of the data

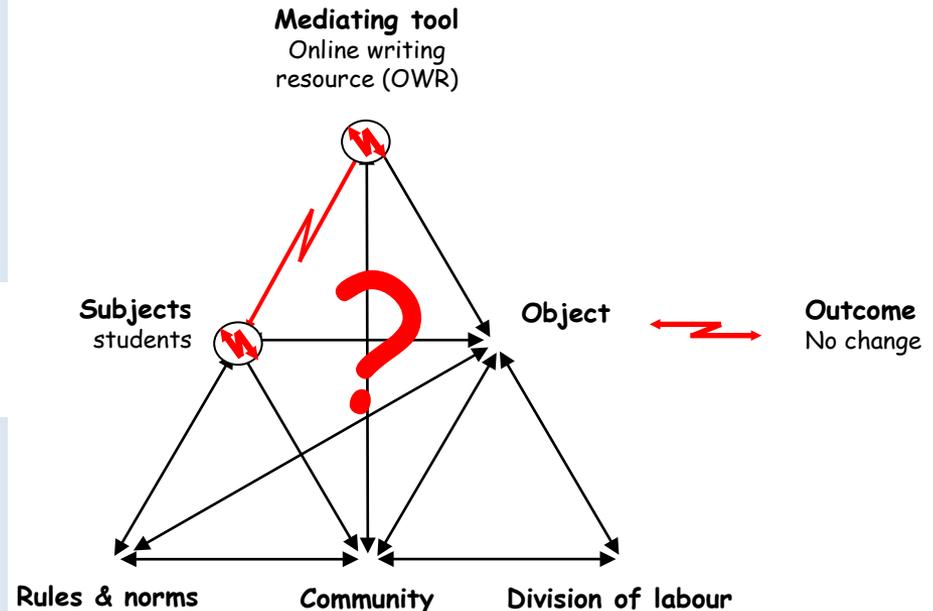
Contradictions

(Use activity system)

1. Students did not use the OWR
2. No increased knowledge about students
3. No change in assignment quality

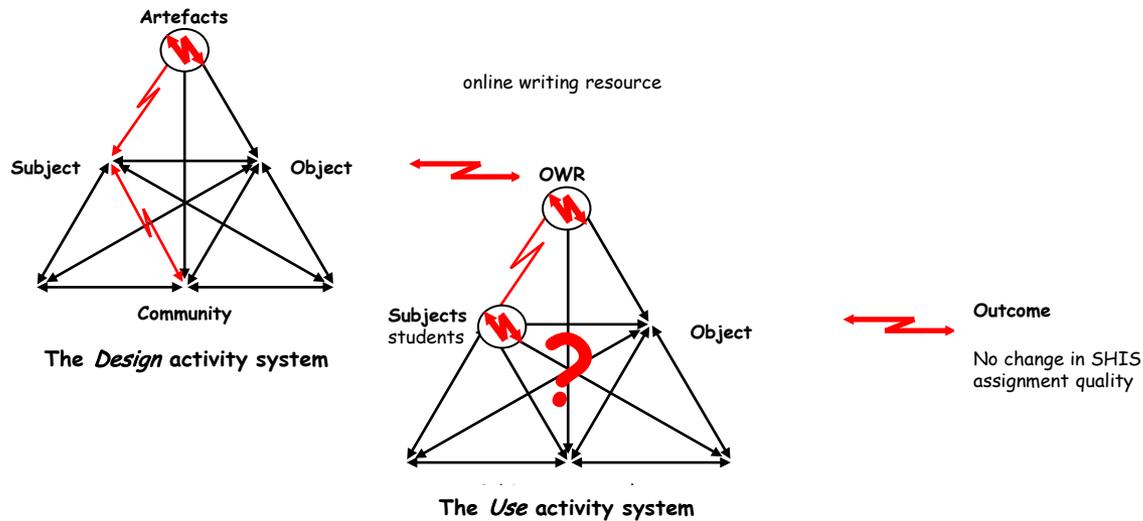
Response

- Much dialogue with course coordinator and lecturer as research participants
- Ongoing changes – integrated, marks focused, ...



Activity theory – breakthrough

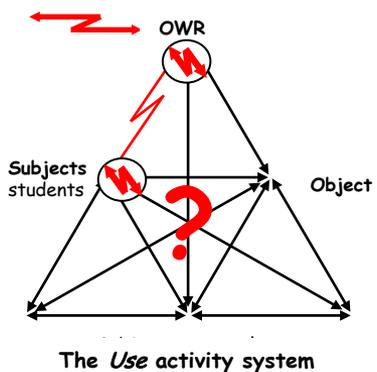
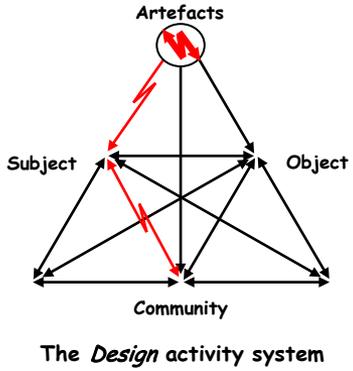
AR 1



Response

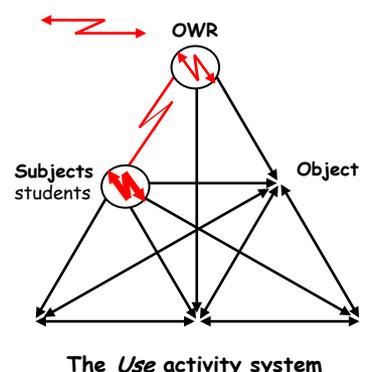
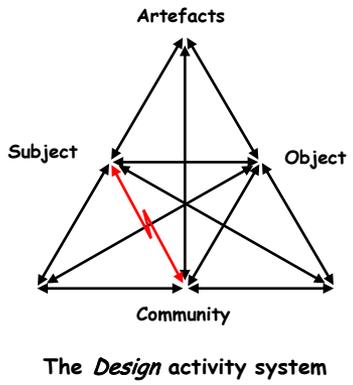
- Analysed as a networked activity system – analysed contradictions

AR 1



Outcome
No change in SHIS assignment quality

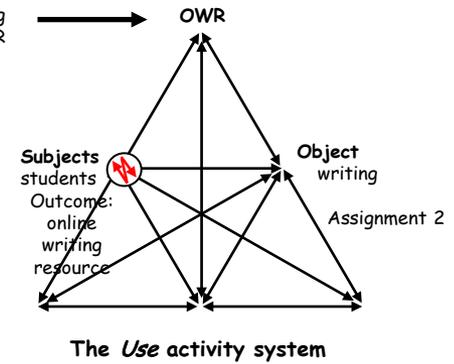
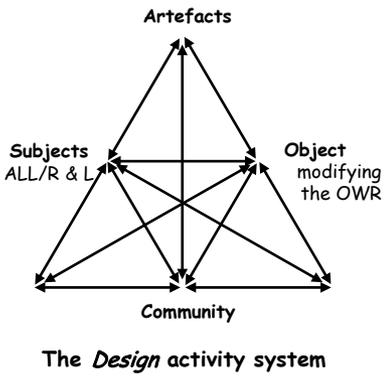
AR 2



Outcome
Improved SHIS assignment quality

Interview

AR 3



Outcome
Improved quality of Assignment 2

Role of research interview

- mediated the mediating tool
- made a difference, changed **use** of resource
- found out much about students
 - rarely used English
 - mutual exchange about Hong Kong and Australia
 - multiple factors limited their use – ‘earner-learner’
 - willing collaborators to improve resource
 - motivated to speak English
 - dialogue/social interaction helped students engage

Changes to *design* of resource

- addressed/made explicit marking criteria
- focused on teaching report genre by criteria
- students liked
 - each marking criteria was explained
 - use of simple models of structure or language use
 - images and colour, minimal words (dot points)
 - knowing resource could help them interpret task

Implications

- Embed academic literacies by clarifying assignment expectations in collaboration with discipline lecturers
- Need to use blended learning mode
- Students' contribution to research & design of resource was invaluable
- Despite not explicitly teaching 'English', report writing improved

Future research: make interactive, engaging, specific,

References

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Somekh, B & Nissen, M 2011, 'Cultural-historical activity theory and action research', *Mind, Culture and Activity*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 93-97.

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