

## **Exploring the affordances of The Writing Portal (TWP) as an online supplementary writing platform (for the special issue of GLoCALL 2013 and 2014 conference papers)**

### **Abstract**

The writing process has traditionally been seen 'as a lonely journey' to typify the lack of support that students experience for writing outside the classroom. This paper examines an attempt of The Writing Portal (TWP), a supplementary online writing platform, to support students' writing needs throughout the five stages of the writing process, viz., planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing. Social constructivist principles underpin TWP, which was designed to engender collaboration amongst its student participants. Not only does TWP provide links to evaluated Internet resources and a writing portfolio, but it also features collaboration tools such as the Group Forum, chat, a writing portfolio, a private messaging system, and a comment function for pages or articles created. Thus, it is very much akin to a 'one-stop centre' for academic writing within a flexible and supportive environment. In this qualitative case study, 16 third-year TESL pre-service teachers at a Malaysian Teacher Education Institute embarked on a 12-week writing course using TWP. Qualitative data in the form of students' online discourses, task reflections, log files, and digital artefacts were captured to explore how TWP's affordances supported students' writing needs. In addition, Soller's collaborative learning conversation skills (CLCS) taxonomy was used as an analytical framework to investigate the collaborative learning engendered in the online environment. The findings indicate that TWP served its purpose by addressing students' writing needs at all stages of the writing process as they accomplished multiple writing tasks. Additionally, evidence of collaborative learning is evident in three functions of TWP: the Group Forum, chat, and the comments for pages/articles. However, there are differences between the frequencies of the specific skills used for each function. To conclude, TWP appears to be a successful tool at supporting students at all stages of the writing process.