

Theorizing how teachers manage the use of exemplars: Towards mediated learning from exemplars

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Abstract: Exemplars are samples which illustrate dimensions of quality and enable students to understand assessment expectations. The theoretical basis for using exemplars lies principally in social constructivist approaches to assessment and the notion of tacit knowledge. Through a constructivist grounded theory methodology, this paper theorizes how twelve teachers of English for Academic Purposes managed the process of using exemplars. Data collection involved triangulation between semi-structured interviews and classroom observations of the twelve teachers. Data analysis utilized constructivist grounded theory strategies: initial and focused coding, memoing and abductive reasoning. The findings analyze teacher decision-making in relation to exemplar use; the different ways in which criteria are deployed in conjunction with exemplars; and controlled or more open dialogues about exemplars. The theoretical contribution arises principally from a threefold typology comprising structured, guided discovery and dialogic approaches to managing the use of exemplars. It is suggested that a mediated dialogic approach has most potential to maximize learning benefits of exemplar use. Implications for practice explore tensions between what is recommended in the exemplars literature and the complexities of classroom implementation. Methodological implications arise from the triangulation between observations and interviews, and the discursive gap between social constructivist approaches and theories of mediation.

Keywords: Exemplars; Assessment criteria; Dialogue; Mediation

Introduction

The teaching of academic writing includes supporting students to compose various academic and disciplinary genres. These genres contain a variety of rhetorical features and formats that are often hard for students to acquire. One of the classic ways of learning how to write in a new genre is to borrow and adapt from examples. As Sadler puts it in his seminal article on

formative assessment, “emulation is an ancient and still almost universal learning method” (Sadler 1989, p. 128).

Exemplars are key examples chosen as typical of designated levels of quality (Sadler 2005). Exemplars help students to recognize features of quality and understand assessment expectations (Bell, Mladenovic and Price 2013). Authentic student samples are most commonly used as they represent a suitable target level for students (Hawe, Lightfoot and Dixon 2019) but the use of teacher-constructed exemplars also has its adherents in making specific features visible to students (Handley and Williams 2011). It is generally recommended that students be exposed to multiple exemplars so that they can see a continuum of different standards (Sadler 2010). The main misgivings which sometimes make teachers hesitant to share exemplars is that they may be seen as model answers to be imitated or copied (Handley and Williams 2011), thereby stifling student creativity (Hawe et al. 2019).

Hendry, Armstrong and Bromberger (2012) is one of few studies to explore how multiple teachers manage the use of exemplars. Five teachers in a first-year Law course shared three student exemplars of different standards. Interviews with three of the teachers revealed that they used them in different ways. All began with peer discussion of exemplars and then one teacher organized a teacher-led discussion, another summarized only the weaknesses of the exemplars, and the third did not carry out any follow-up at all. It was concluded that teacher-led discussion of exemplars is an important part of the process (Hendry et al. 2012), yet as no classroom observations were carried out the study provides only limited insight into exemplars practice.

A gap filled by the current study involves using interviews and classroom observations with twelve teachers of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) to theorize about how teachers manage the use of exemplars through constructivist grounded theory. As far as we know, this is the first paper on exemplars use in higher education to involve classroom observations of multiple teachers. Observations enable us to supplement self-report data by analyzing what takes place in classrooms. The significance of the paper lies in developing a typology of teacher approaches to managing the use of exemplars, and discussing related implications for practice.

Literature review and theoretical starting points

The main theoretical influence on our initial thinking arose from social constructivist models of assessment that seek to induct students into the meanings of assessment criteria and standards. Social constructivist models of assessment hold that acquiring knowledge and understanding of assessment processes, criteria and standards requires active student participation in structured learning activities (Rust, O'Donovan and Price 2005). Student analysis and evaluation of exemplars coupled with related small group discussion is one of the learning activities associated with this position. Through interaction with peers, students apply implicit or explicit criteria to the analysis of exemplars, then teachers mediate students' interpretations of assessment standards (To and Liu 2018). Through co-constructed insights, teachers help learners to notice features of quality and develop their evaluative judgement (Tai et al. 2018). The quality of the dialogue about exemplars is important in enabling teachers to share their tacit ways of interpreting standards, so that students can begin to see those standards embedded in the exemplars (Carless and Chan 2017).

Tacit knowledge represents the kind of knowledge which is difficult to codify and challenging to transfer from experts to others (Sadler 2010). The sharing of tacit understandings is part of the rationale for social constructivist models of assessment as socialization processes are necessary for knowledge transfer to occur (O'Donovan, Price and Rust 2008). Students need to be provided with substantial evaluative experience to enable them to recognize quality and explain their judgements to others (Sadler 2010). Through practice in making judgments, tacit knowledge is built up and shapes students' understanding of standards and expectations (O'Donovan et al. 2008). Planned exposure to exemplars provides students with experience in making judgements about quality and participating in evaluative conversations with teachers and other students (Sadler 2010).

A goal of social constructivist approaches to assessment is to enable students to make sense of criteria, and this goal can be facilitated in different ways. Students can, for example, be encouraged to evaluate exemplars based on the factors that they consider salient so that they make a holistic judgement without being confined to preset criteria (Sadler 2015). Less social constructivist in orientation are approaches in which criteria are explained and shown to students first, before they apply them to exemplars (e.g. Hendry et al. 2012). When students are coached to meet assessment requirements through working towards explicit criteria, there are dangers of instrumentalism, criteria compliance and a limited learning experience

(Torrance 2007). More productive approaches conceptualize criteria and exemplars less as means of transparency and more as invitations for students to enter learning dialogues and contribute their own thinking about quality (Bearman and Ajjawi 2019).

Whilst the above is suggestive of some theoretical work relevant to exemplars, teacher use of exemplars seems somewhat under-theorized. Detailed analysis and theorizing of teachers' actions and associated rationales carries potential to make a significant contribution to the field.

Method

This study adopts constructivist grounded theory, an interpretivist perspective seeking to theorize by illuminating our understanding of what is taking place in a specific context (Charmaz 2014). It is distinguished from the classical versions of grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss (1967) in rejecting the idea that researchers come to the research without any preconceived notions or knowledge of literature. The goal of grounded theory is to generate conceptual theorizing that accounts for patterns of behavior. This theorizing can lead to various outcomes, including an explanation of a process; relationships between core concepts; a model; a typology; or an abstract understanding.

The overarching issue guiding this study is as follows:

How do teachers manage the process of using exemplars?

In order to answer this main question, three sub-questions are posed:

What decisions do teachers take when using exemplars with students?

How are assessment criteria used when using exemplars?

How is dialogue managed when using exemplars?

Context and Sampling

The context for the study is the teaching of EAP at an English-medium university in Hong Kong within a centre focused on teaching academic writing genres across multiple disciplines. Students take general and then disciplinary-focused EAP classes throughout their undergraduate studies in class sizes of around twenty. The first author has taught in the EAP

centre for more than ten years, this provides the advantage of familiarity with the context and its pedagogic approaches but raises the need for reflexivity in being open to reconsidering previous assumptions.

Teachers were invited to participate in the study based on initial maximum variation sampling aimed at investigating differences in their behaviors and thinking. Ongoing theoretical sampling was focused on selecting cases which could add to, or refine, the emerging typology of approaches to managing the use of exemplars. The sample for the study and years of teaching experience are shown in Table 1. There are twelve research participants which is within the generally expected range for a grounded theory study. Three of the teachers teach Core University English, a first-year bridging course which involves students from mixed disciplinary backgrounds. The other nine are teaching disciplinary-specific classes designed to support students in writing assignments in their academic disciplines. Ethical approval was obtained from the University ethics committee and all teacher names are pseudonyms.

Table 1. Sample for the study

Teacher	Total experience teaching	Years teaching EAP	Nationality	Class observed
Anika	16	15	Chinese	Year one, Core University English
Bethany	22	15	Australian	Year one, Core University English
Carl	7	3	Chinese	Year two, English for Education students
Debbie	10	8	Chinese	Year two, English for

				Science students
Eddie	10	8	Chinese	Year four, English for Engineering students
Felicity	12	11	Chinese	Year two, English for Social Science students
Gwen	7	6	Chinese	Year two, English for Social Science students
Howard	6	2	Chinese	Year two, English for Education students
Isabella	10	2	Chinese	Year one, Core University English
Janet	21	15	Chinese	Year two, English for Architecture students
Kimberley	12	9	Australian	Year two, English for Pharmacy students
Lawrence	25	8	British	Year two, English for

				Pharmacy students
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Pilot work

The pilot work involved a survey completed by thirty-two teachers in the centre; and interviews and classroom observations with three teachers who had co-taught with the first author using exemplars and were not included in the main study. The survey informed theoretical sampling by highlighting a range of views about exemplars implementation. Pilot interviews helped to trial, shape and refine questions to be asked in the main study. Pilot observations supported the development of a protocol for classroom observation, focused on key issues in the implementation of exemplars.

Data collection

Data collection for the main study was through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Participants were interviewed at the outset to discuss various issues, including how they selected and used exemplars, what successes and challenges they experienced, and what they thought students were learning. These initial interviews were between forty and sixty minutes in length, and were audio-recorded and transcribed by the first author as part of immersion in the data.

Subsequent to the initial interview, a classroom observation of teachers using exemplars with one of their classes was carried out. Observational data enable researchers to probe what is actually taking place in classrooms to supplement what teachers report in interviews. The classroom observations were video-recorded and transcribed. The observation protocol focused principally on the following questions: What kinds of exemplar are used? How are they used? To what extent and how are assessment criteria deployed? What kinds of discussion of the exemplars ensue? Audio-recorded and transcribed follow-up interviews were conducted with each of the twelve teachers to understand teachers' rationales for what they did, probe issues from the observations and seek clarifications.

Data analysis

Data analysis began with the coding methods associated with constructivist grounded theory: initial coding and focused coding (Charmaz 2014). Initial coding was done line-by-line in assigning labels to capture the essence of the raw data. Examples of initial codes included, 'Defining exemplars', 'Using different types of exemplars', 'Using criteria', 'Discussing exemplars', 'Encouraging students to go beyond the exemplar' and so on. Focused coding involved searching for frequent and significant codes and making constant comparisons across the twelve cases.

Writing memos is a key grounded theory strategy to facilitate focused coding and the development of draft categories. Memos were written on a regular basis, particularly after data collection episodes. Initially they consisted of reflections on the interviews and observations but gradually became iterative comparisons of different teacher practices, contributing to the development of categories. For example, in relation to how exemplars were discussed the three categories were closed questioning, exposing students to views of peers, and participatory evaluative dialogues.

The approach to theorizing involved abductive reasoning: the process of drawing inferences and double-checking these inferences against more data (Timmermans and Tavory 2012). The researchers keep various theoretical explanations in mind and through further analysis confirm or disconfirm each explanation, arriving at the most plausible interpretation. The critical engagement of the two authors was an important element in negotiating credible interpretations of the data. The trustworthiness of the data analysis procedures rests on prolonged engagement in the field, triangulation between multiple sources of data, and reflexivity developed from memoing and abductive reasoning.

Limitations

There are several limitations that need acknowledging. The number of informants is within the recommended range for a grounded theory study, although it is somewhat at the lower end of the range. Only one classroom observation per teacher was carried out which provides a valuable snapshot of exemplar use but does not enable comparison across multiple observations, and does not establish whether what was observed was typical. The study is of a particular EAP setting and cannot claim applicability to other disciplines and contexts.

Findings

The Findings comprise three sections which mirror the three research sub-questions followed by a fourth which describes the typology addressing how teachers manage the use of exemplars.

Decision-making in the use of exemplars

Teachers made decisions about the type, length, number and range of quality of exemplars (see Table 2). In terms of the number of exemplars they shared with students in the observed classes, seven teachers used one exemplar, three shared two exemplars and two used multiple extracts. Interview data revealed that even those who used only one exemplar were aware of benefits of exposing students to a range of quality:

It's useful to show some weaker examples so students can avoid making the same mistakes in their work (Howard)

Ideally I'd like one good and one weaker exemplar, I can see the logic of showing a range (Lawrence).

The main arguments for only sharing a single exemplar involved practicalities, such as time:

Providing a range and more examples is important but there's only so many you can include because of time (Kimberley)

In class we do not have enough time to show them a variety of texts. I guess we can put them online and students could look at them at home, but I wonder if they would do that (Howard).

Six teachers used published exemplars, three shared teacher-constructed exemplars and three used student exemplars. Interview data revealed that the teachers who used published exemplars aimed to demonstrate the choices that experienced writers make when constructing disciplinary texts. The three who shared teacher-constructed exemplars had little or no choice because they were teaching the Core University English course in which exemplars highlighting key learning points are included within the course textbook. The

teachers who shared student exemplars explained that they wished to encourage learning from the work of other students.

Table 2. Exemplar use in observed classes

Teacher	Type of exemplar shared	Length of exemplar	Number and range of quality of exemplars
Anika	Textbook sample written by a teacher	800 words	1 good answer
Bethany	Textbook sample written by a teacher	800 words	1 good answer
Carl	Published journal article	1500-2000 words	2 published articles
Debbie	Published popular science articles and research articles	Short extracts of a few sentences	22 published extracts
Eddie	Student report introductions	100 word extracts	4 short excerpts covering a range of quality
Felicity	Student literature review	600 words	1 of satisfactory quality
Gwen	Student literature review	600 words	1 of satisfactory quality
Howard	A published literature review	1500 words	1 example used for each section of a research report
Isabella	Textbook sample written by a teacher	800 words	1 good answer
Janet	Published government report	38 pages	1 published example
Kimberley	Published drug safety updates	1000 words	2 published examples
Lawrence	Published drug safety updates	1000 words	2 published examples

Purposes for sharing exemplars

Decision-making was influenced by what teachers perceived as the purposes of sharing exemplars with students. Analysis of the interview data revealed three categories of purposes: fulfilling students' perceived needs, opening up possibilities, and going beyond a specific exemplar to enhance broader academic skills.

Meeting students' immediate needs was a key stated purpose for six out of the twelve teachers, although they differed in how they perceived students' needs. Some teachers in this category predominately focused on language while others focused on genre features. What united these approaches was a view of learning as explicit and controlled instruction of specific features of good writing. Anika, for example, used a single teacher-constructed exemplar to represent a good model. She explained her approach as follows:

Smaller chunks of text help students know exactly what to do. This affords a sense of student satisfaction, getting things done within a short period of time. They feel satisfied that they have achieved something.

Her focus seemed to be on satisfying students by enabling them to learn from examples of disciplinary texts.

Three of the teachers (Janet, Kimberley and Isabella) expressed views that exemplars should open up writing possibilities rather than constrain students' creativity. Janet spoke as follows:

If the exemplar reduces creativity, it's a problem. It can be an eye-opener looking at others' work. An exemplar is a possibility not a model, it should open up more possibilities and increase students' options. I don't like a top-down approach where we get students to follow a model, I prefer a more constructivist bottom-up approach.

Taking all the interview data into account, Janet seemed to be aiming to involve students in a sense of discovery of increased possibilities for academic writing. It was not clear, however, the extent to which students were able to make the most of these opportunities, particularly as only one exemplar was shared with them.

Isabella described her practice as asking students to share with classmates their evaluation of the exemplar and its limitations. She hoped that exemplars could act as an inspiration for students to develop their work in different directions. Uniting the practice of these three teachers was the category of guided discovery whereby teacher use of exemplars involved options, possibilities, and exploring exemplars. The compromises between disciplinary factors, espoused beliefs and actual teaching practices are made salient through Janet and Isabella only using one exemplar in their observed classes.

A third group of three teachers (Bethany, Eddie and Felicity) were categorized as aiming to develop academic writing skills beyond the current text being analyzed. Bethany stated:

You could use the exemplar to compare with their writing attempts and articulate some differences between the two. So I integrate a task where they are comparing their work against an exemplar, forcing them to make some kind of intellectual leap that they wouldn't necessarily do by thinking reflectively about what they're writing.

In this reported practice, Bethany invites students to produce an outline or a draft before being exposed to an exemplar. She seems to be mediating students' learning by encouraging them to compare their own work with exemplars and draw relevant inferences for their academic writing.

Felicity felt that there was more to student learning than just the language features of a text:

It's not really the content or certain phrases or vocabulary that I want them to learn, it's the process of assessing a piece of writing that I want them to use when they write their own essays.

This suggests a broader goal of developing student evaluative judgement from analyzing an exemplar and transferring insights to their own academic writing.

Use of criteria

The interplay between exemplars and assessment criteria was a key issue occurring in the interview data and observations (see also Smyth, To and Carless 2020). Although there were some overlaps, we categorized the data according to three main strategies: teachers

analyzing exemplars and criteria sequentially; teachers downplaying reference to assessment criteria when discussing exemplars; and the development of student evaluative judgement.

Analyzing exemplars and criteria sequentially

Interview and observational data revealed that three teachers (Debbie, Howard and Isabella) used teaching sequences of a similar pattern which involved analyzing exemplars and then subsequently explaining assessment criteria. This was generally reported as involving analysis of exemplars in one class; explaining the criteria in another class about two weeks before the assessment deadline; and then students work on their assignments. Debbie began her observed class with short extracts from exemplars so that students “know the requirements of the assignment”, and then nearer to the assignment deadline she highlighted key features of the assessment criteria.

Howard reported an example of his practice:

I prefer spending more time analyzing sample texts with students before discussing the assessment criteria. The assessment criteria are loaded with abstract concepts that need unpacking.

He uses the term ‘unpacking’ which suggests that through discussing exemplars, teachers can help students make sense of different features of the criteria and develop a better understanding of them.

Downplaying reference to assessment criteria when analyzing exemplars

Six teachers revealed in observations and interviews that they avoided making explicit reference to the assessment criteria when using exemplars. Janet, for example, stated that highlighting the criteria alongside exemplars would be “too prescriptive” and Gwen was concerned that referring to the criteria when analyzing exemplars might encourage students to see them as a model, stating “I want to encourage students to do better than the exemplars rather than imitate them”. For teachers in this category an exemplar and the assessment criteria somewhat duplicated one another as the exemplar acted as a proxy for the assessment criteria, so reference to the criteria might be somewhat redundant. These teachers reported that highlighting criteria explicitly would be rather prescriptive, and might

inadvertently encourage criteria compliance or instrumentalism. Lawrence expressed these tensions as a dilemma: “If you show students a model, they’ll just copy it. But if you don’t give students any idea about their assessments, that’s wrong”.

The development of student evaluative judgement

The third approach used by three teachers (Bethany, Eddie and Felicity) focused on the development of student evaluative judgement. Bethany designs the teaching sequence so that students produce some draft writing before being exposed to exemplars and criteria. She invites students to self-evaluate their work before submitting it, noting that “generally they are aware of their strengths and weaknesses and can self-evaluate quite well”.

Eddie wanted students to “develop a feel for whether something is correct or not quite right” by making their own intuitive judgements rather than those based on predetermined criteria. His approach seems to resonate with social constructivist models of assessment by encouraging students to deconstruct quality for themselves. The observational data suggested that his students were engaged and challenged, and there was potential for them to internalize quality criteria and consider the implications for their own work.

Managing Dialogue

All of the teachers stated in interviews that the discussion of exemplars was important but observations revealed considerable variation in how this was managed, ranging from controlled, structured discussion to more open and exploratory dialogues.

Dialogue as closed questioning

Nine teachers were categorised as controlling dialogues about exemplars through using closed questioning. Anika exemplified a highly structured way of managing discussion. She asked students to locate specific linguistic features used in the exemplar and then share their answers. She split the class into four groups, respectively identifying hedging, arguments, reporting verbs, and citations. She then elicited from students using an Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) format.

Carl’s class focused on writing introductions and used a structured form of controlled questioning using display questions. He began by asking “what are the elements of an

introduction?” and “what are the functions of these elements?” He asked pairs or small groups to reveal one element and then asked them to state their answers:

Student 1: The objective.

Carl: Why's this important?

Student 1: So readers know why you are writing.

Carl nods then asks the next group.

Student 2: Some background information.

Carl: Yes, why is it important?

Student 2: Because you need to convince your reader the importance of the topic and why you need to investigate it.

Carl: Yes ok, the readers will know how important investigating this issue is...

The teachers in this category often used IRF modes of interaction with closed questions that required short answers. These controlled dialogues seem to be useful for checking understanding and gauging that students are following the flow of the instruction, and they make it relatively clear to students what they are expected to learn. They do not, however, enable much open-ended expression of students' views.

Exposing students to views of peers

Just one teacher, Felicity, was categorized as using an approach to exemplars dialogue which prioritized exposing students explicitly to the views of their peers. In the observed class, she invited students to read the exemplar individually, award a grade and discuss with peers the rationale for their proposed grade. She told the students, “This is a process I want you to go through to appreciate how we grade the papers as teachers”.

Students initially spent ten minutes reading and thinking before beginning their discussions. Their ensuing dialogues involved sharing and discussing different opinions. Felicity then elicited the criteria that students used to arrive at their conclusions about the grade, and they proposed ‘content’, ‘organization’ and ‘sources’. The dialogue about sources unfolded as follows:

Felicity: So when we assess sources, how do we go about it?

Student A: Number of sources.

Felicity: Right, quantity is important, you can't have too few sources when you write a literature review paper. Quantity is not everything, so what else are you looking for?

Student B: Is the source trustworthy?

Felicity: Yes, if it's relevant to the topic, is it trustworthy? Are they from blogs or Wikipedia, or from peer-reviewed journals?

In the post-lesson interview, Felicity expressed satisfaction that students were able to identify relevant quality features. The teacher-led dialogue was, however, somewhat truncated by the time allocated to it, just five minutes, and given that there was only one exemplar being discussed, students were not able to make broader comparisons about the qualities being exhibited.

Dialogue as participatory and evaluative

Eddie and Bethany were categorized as using a participatory and evaluative approach to exemplars dialogues. In the observed class, Eddie used four student exemplars of introductions of varied quality. The specific focus was on the structure and language of engineering report introductions. After an initial brainstorming of what would typically be found in introductions, students looked at the first exemplar in groups to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, and compare it with a quality checklist that each group had drawn up. The teacher then led a whole class discussion exemplified by the following exchange:

Eddie: So Billy, what else did you like in the exemplar?

Student: The third paragraph, the last sentence describes the goals of their project.

Eddie: Do you like this aspect?

Student: Well, it gives the purpose but it is not too specific and not entirely clear, so the readers may not know exactly what it is talking about.

Eddie: So you want it to be more specific?

Student: Yes.

Eddie: How could you make it more specific?

Student: Perhaps use more data

In this extract, the open-ended question at the outset invites a student opinion which leads to an exchange in which the teacher seeks clarification and helps the student provide a more precise contribution. This is an example of mediated interaction through which the teacher's feedback enables the refinement of the student response.

After the whole class discussion, Eddie summarizes implications for students' own work and encourages them to self-evaluate their writing. He then moves to a second exemplar in a similar way. These kinds of participatory dialogues seemed to enable teacher mediation of explicit and tacit knowledge about criteria and standards in ways analogous to social constructivist models of assessment.

A typology of how teachers manage the use of exemplars

From the findings of the three previous sections, a typology of approaches to managing the use of exemplars is developed to articulate distinct patterns of teacher practices. A typology is one of the main outcomes of grounded theorizing in educational research (Dimmock and Lam 2012). Our typology consists of three approaches identified from the coding, categorizing and theorizing processes: a structured approach, a guided discovery approach and a dialogic approach.

The structured approach is characterized by seeing exemplars as guides or models which make learning explicit for students and are discussed through closed questioning. The guided discovery approach views an exemplar as a resource for student learning which opens up possibilities for students, with dialogue involving some interaction controlled by the teacher. The dialogic approach envisages exemplars as providing an opportunity for co-construction of learning with exploratory dialogues encouraging broader student learning of academic skills beyond the specific exemplar being discussed. The main features, strengths and limitations of these approaches are summarized in table 3.

Table 3. Typology of approaches to managing the use of exemplars

	Structured approach	Guided discovery approach	Dialogic approach
View of Exemplars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exemplars as a guide or model • Learning explicit and fulfils students immediate needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exemplars as a resource for student learning • Learning more implicit and opens up possibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exemplars as an opportunity for dialogue • Co-construction of learning
Criteria and Dialogues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment criteria explained • Explicit socialization into academic practices • Closed dialogue, tightly controlled by teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment criteria typically downplayed • Implicit socialization into assessment standards • Dialogue involves teacher and peer interaction managed by teachers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment criteria negotiable • Learning experiences mediated by the teacher • Dialogue is participatory and evaluative, mediated by teachers
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easier to manage for the teacher • Makes what is to be learnt explicit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not limit student creativity • Opens up possibilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students actively engaged • Develops broader academic skills
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tends to limit student learning to what is covered • Inadvertently encourages instrumentalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging for students to exploit possibilities • Time taken for the approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires sophisticated teacher knowledge and skills • Need to allow time for exploratory dialogues

Teachers using the approach	Anika Carl Debbie Gwen Howard Lawrence	Felicity Isabella Janet Kimberley	Bethany Eddie

Discussion

At the outset, our main theoretical influences emanated from social constructivist models of assessment. Enabling students to understand and apply criteria represents a key element of social constructivist approaches to assessment, and the data provided evidence of teachers explaining and exemplifying criteria, inviting students to apply them or developing their evaluative judgement. The data can be interpreted as suggesting a continuum of exemplar use guided by social constructivist models of assessment as there were different degrees of student participation and socialization into the making of academic judgements. Within the structured approach, dialogues were tightly controlled and students' opportunities for acquiring tacit knowledge seemed limited. In the guided discovery approach there were more opportunities for students to be socialized into the nature of assessment standards, although this seemed to be dependent on their capacities to identify and act on key learning possibilities. Student participation in interpreting academic standards in line with social constructivist models was most evident in the practices of teachers in the dialogic approach where exploratory interactions were mediated by teachers.

Mediation is achieved through physical tools, such as digital devices, or symbolic tools, such as language (Lantolf 2000). The role of the teacher in mediating through language led our attempts at theorizing the data to Feuerstein's theory of mediated learning experiences (Feuerstein et al. 2015; Feuerstein et al. 1980) which we had not considered at the outset of the study. Mediated learning experiences are defined as "the outcome of an interaction with an intentioned mediator" (Feuerstein et al. 2015, p. 12). Feuerstein elaborates how teachers

mediate learning through intentionality by initiating, clarifying and interacting reciprocally around what they want students to learn; and transcendence in learning beyond the immediate context (Feuerstein et al. 2015). Based on our data, it seems that teachers using a structured approach emphasized intentionality by making it clear what they wished students to learn from exemplars but there was limited transcendence beyond the exemplar being discussed. In the guided discovery category, teachers tended to exhibit less intentionality and broader learning possibilities were encouraged but not explicitly mediated. Teachers in the dialogic category evidenced intentionality in going beyond the specific exemplars being discussed and mediated the learning of academic writing skills beyond the immediate context. Feuerstein's theories seemed to be a particularly good fit for the data in the dialogic category because the teacher practices mediated student learning through interaction and transcended the specific exemplar under discussion. Dialogic approaches to exemplars seem to resonate with mediated learning experiences (see also Chong 2019).

A number of implications for practice arise. First, teachers often shared only one exemplar in contrast with recommendations in the literature (e.g. Sadler 2010) to use a range of exemplars of different quality. The reasons seem to relate to disciplinary features of EAP in terms of modelling different genres and pressures of time available for discussing more than one exemplar. Although one might have expected teachers in the guided discovery and dialogic categories to make more use of multiple exemplars, this was not consistently evident in the observational data. There seemed to be some tensions or mismatches between espoused beliefs and actual practices which were uncovered by our triangulated combination of initial interviews, observations and follow-up interviews.

Second, the teachers made various decisions in relation to how assessment criteria were used or explicated in relation to the analysis of exemplars. Following Sadler (2015) and congruent with practices which focused on the development of student evaluative judgment, it may be useful for teachers to withhold teacher-generated criteria until students have had opportunities to produce a draft of their own work or analyze exemplars using their own resources. These strategies enable students to take some ownership of assessment criteria, and think more broadly about features of quality work. A key step is for teachers to support students to self-evaluate their work effectively before submitting it for assessment.

Third, the dominant mode of interaction in discussing exemplars was closed questioning which makes learning points explicit but only allows limited student participation. It is recommended that there are extended opportunities for peer dialogue where students rehearse their thinking about exemplars and express divergent opinions (To and Liu 2018). Peer discussion is suitably followed by participatory dialogues in which the teacher builds on student thinking to clarify issues arising, highlight key attributes or weaknesses of exemplars, and raise implications for students' own assignments (Carless and Chan 2017). The most critical element of the process of analyzing exemplars seems to be these teacher-led dialogues where student evaluative judgements are mediated by teachers and tacit knowledge is applied to specific features of exemplars. Managing dialogues is a complex undertaking as it needs both skills in planning and adroit thinking in response to 'moments of contingency' (Black and Wiliam 2009, p. 10). Teachers' abilities to make pedagogically well-motivated in-the-moment decisions are one of the attributes of fruitful dialogic teaching.

Implicit in the above is that the teachers' use of exemplars was in our judgement often sub-optimal which is not surprising given the complexity of the decision-making and interactions involved in managing exemplars dialogues. The teachers had their rationales for what they were doing but sometimes did not fully exploit the possibilities for mediating student learning from exemplar use. There were examples in our observational data of missed opportunities for enabling students to play a more active role in evaluating and discussing exemplars. These limitations of practice are not surprising in that they reflect the challenges of interactive teaching and echo the less than ideal practices reported by Hendry et al. (2012). The pedagogic expertise, assessment and feedback literacy that teachers might draw on to alleviate these challenges are sometimes lacking (Carless and Boud 2018).

The paper also makes methodological contributions. Observational data are valuable in identifying what is taking place in classrooms, comparing espoused beliefs with classroom practices, and identifying similarities and differences between multiple teachers. The analysis exemplifies how constructivist grounded theory can be applied to higher education pedagogy. In contrast to the lack of a discursive gap in educational theorizing where the initial theories seem to over-determine outcomes (Ashwin 2012), we have shown how we added to the initial social constructivist models of assessment by incorporating theories of mediation. Our

contention is that constructivist grounded theory carries potential to prompt these kinds of alternative ways of making sense of data.

Conclusion

This study has investigated how teachers use exemplars in a specific EAP context. The originality of the research lies in triangulating observational and interview data with multiple teachers to uncover teachers' actions and reasoning in relation to exemplar use. A threefold typology has been proposed, comprising structured, guided discovery and dialogic approaches to the use of exemplars. It has been suggested that teacher mediated dialogic approaches carry most potential in developing students' evaluative judgement and broader learning about academic writing.

There are a number of possibilities for further research. The informants in our study were mainly Chinese and teaching EAP in Hong Kong, further research in different contexts and different disciplines could add contrasting perspectives on the use of exemplars. The typology could be used as a framework to classify how different groups of teachers handle the use of exemplars and may also carry implications for other teaching strategies. The current study researched teachers: how students use exemplars to inform their ongoing academic writing represents an alternative focal point.

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