

# Empowering English Teachers to be Grammar ‘Experts’ and Coursebook Analysts via Perusall

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## Abstract

Perusall, a web-based collaborative reading platform characterised by its social annotation functionalities, was introduced in a postgraduate teacher-training language-awareness course in Hong Kong during the shift to online teaching and learning brought about by the global COVID-19 pandemic. Tasks were designed on Perusall to engage the participants in reading the literature and references on grammar and lexis teaching and in analyses of coursebook materials and classroom-teaching excerpts. In this article, I discuss why Perusall was adopted, the pedagogic innovations at different stages, the impact this had on sharpening participants’ teacher language awareness, and the implications this has for both teacher education and language learning. I aim to highlight how autonomy can be fostered via effective task design and student-centred pedagogies. I maintain that it is not just the platform that matters but how Perusall is utilised with a strategic blend of synchronous and asynchronous classroom activities and instructor intervention to promote teacher language-awareness gains and the empowerment of teachers as grammar specialists and critical coursebook analysts and users.

## Keywords

Perusall, social annotations, teacher language awareness, textual analysis, students as partners, experts, community of inquiry, empowerment, autonomy

## Introduction

Teacher language awareness (TLA) is acknowledged as a central attribute of effective teaching and learning of a language. TLA is ‘the knowledge that teachers have of the underlying systems of the language that enables them to teach effectively’ (Thornbury, 1997: x) with subject-matter knowledge of grammar and lexis being regarded as the core. Andrews (2007) asserts that being a language-aware teacher involves not only

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mastery of grammar and lexis (i.e. knowledge *of* the language, KoL) but also knowledge *about* the language (KaL) and knowledge of students (KoS). KaL refers to teachers' declarative knowledge about how grammar and lexis is taught – presented, explained, exemplified and practised in the classroom through teaching materials and other resources. KoS entails teachers' awareness of, sensitivity to and ability to respond to the needs of the target students. Having been an English teacher in secondary schools in Hong Kong for nearly a decade and having observed teachers in action in English classrooms in the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors for over 20 years as a teacher educator, I am convinced of Andrews' (2007) assertion. Based on my teaching and observational experience, I identify among others three salient elements needed in strengthening teachers' TLA: a solid knowledge base of the language from reference grammars, coursebook evaluation, selection and adaptation skills (McGrath, 2002), and teachers' reflection on their own classroom practices (Shepard-Carey and Gopalakrishnan, 2021).

With sound KoL and KaL, teachers are capable of identifying misrepresentations of grammar and lexis found in textbooks. Aside from spotting potential limitations, teachers with solid KoS can arguably use textbooks more effectively. Depicting the nature of textbooks, Graves (1999: 197) argues that 'this text is written for everyone and this text is written for no one'. Textbooks thus need to be adapted for one's specific teaching context. Littlejohn (2022) recommends that teachers be trained to be more critical of daily teaching materials and more sensitive to the accuracy, appropriacy and accessibility of language use. To sharpen teachers' TLA (KoL, KaL, KoS), a reflection of their own teaching practice and that of other teachers is what I am convinced is beneficial. Using videos and transcribed classroom excerpts may be an effective way to do this.

When faced with the sudden and eventually prolonged suspension of face-to-face (F2F) teaching due to the pandemic, all such activities involving minute textual analyses online under the instructor's guidance were made difficult. After a long search, I identified two collaborative online annotation platforms (COAP) to be appropriate for the web-based collective analyses and reflections described above: hypothes.is and Perusall. Comparing their relative effectiveness in promoting the critical reading of reference grammars and analyses of materials in textual, visual and multimodal forms via distance learning as suggested by recent studies (e.g. Issa et al., 2021; Kohnke and Har, 2022; Porter, 2022a, 2022b) and after hands-on practice, I pinned it down to Perusall. I found the user-friendly social annotation features on Perusall, its annotating functionalities going beyond the written text, its more social-media-type interface, the automatic flagging of questions and its upvoting tab supporting my pedagogic design. This article elucidates my experimentation with different functionalities of Perusall in phases, my incorporation of student-centred pedagogies in designing synchronous and asynchronous learning activities on a course focusing on TLA, and my innovations in the midst.

## Teaching Context

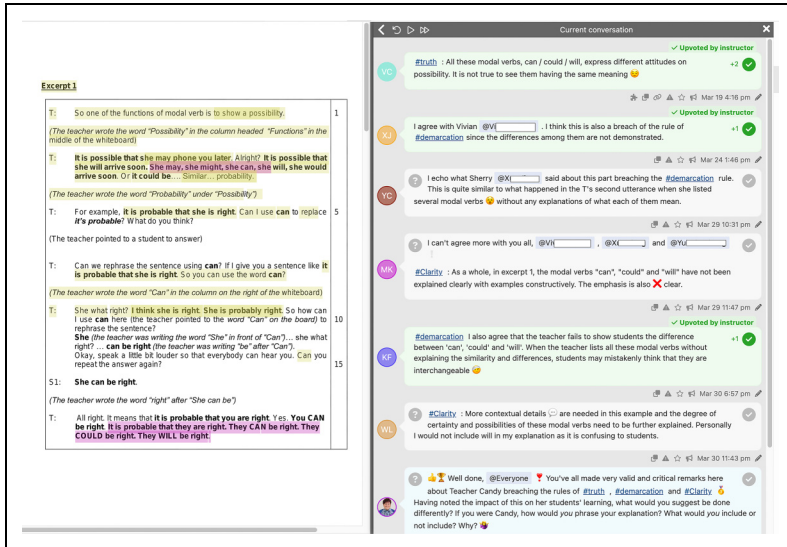
This innovation is situated within the context of English language teacher education and was applied in a six-credit course titled 'Language Awareness: Grammar and Lexis', a core component of the English language education specialism in the Master of Education (MEd(ELE)) programme at The University of Hong Kong. The course participants are 3 cohorts of 24–31 in-service teachers of English as a second or foreign

language in primary and secondary schools in Hong Kong and Mainland China. English is also the second or foreign language of the majority of these teachers whose teaching experience ranged from 1 to 12 years. With the prime goal of raising their TLA, this module aims at: (a) enhancing their mastery of grammar and lexis (KoL), the interrelationship between the two and the implications of this for their TLA in making pedagogic decisions, implementing classroom practice and facilitating student learning; and (b) sharpening their skills in critically analysing the treatment of grammatical and lexical issues in textbook materials and classroom teacher–student interactional discourse (KaL) with attention being given to the abilities and needs of the target students (KoS). All this is to equip them to be language-aware teachers and critical users of published materials, informed designers of their own teaching materials, and reflective classroom practitioners who make principled decisions concerning how these materials are used to optimise learning.

## Reasons for the Innovation

With the drastic shift to online teaching and learning caused by the pandemic, an often-discussed challenge was to monitor participants' pre-session reading to ensure the quality of in-class discussions. Research has shown that only 20–30% of students come to class prepared (Burchfield and Sappington, 2000; King, 2021). For me, an added challenge foreseen during F2F class suspension is to identify an e-learning platform that has the affordances of technology to support textbook and discourse analyses activities in (b), on the basis of which professional dialogues on TLA could take place in virtual space for both (a) and (b) to be achieved. Before the switch, in an F2F environment, in-class tasks would be designed for participants to closely analyse textbook materials and classroom excerpts in collaborative tasks requiring them to colour-code and annotate parts that may present issues using pen and paper. In view of the course aims and anticipated hurdles, I spent two months exploring existing e-learning platforms that offer the technological affordances to facilitate such granular analyses, individual and team work, and focused discussion.

After a thorough investigation, I decided to use Perusall because of the opportunities I see in 'retooling' (Tsui and Tavares, 2021) some of its functionalities to serve my intended pedagogic purposes. Perusall is a free web-based collaborative reading platform designed to encourage students to read and be ready for class, and to create an avenue for social learning (Perusall.com, 2023). With any copyrighted textual and graphic material in portable document (PDF), video and webpage formats uploaded onto Perusall, students could bookmark and annotate any part that interests them, make comments in line with the text, ask questions and take part in conversations with their coursemates and instructor(s), add emojis as in social media, tag individuals, create hashtags, upvote ideas, attach files or images, insert hyperlinks and upload files to share additional resources depending on the settings made by the instructor. One prominent reason for choosing Perusall is that its annotation functions facilitate highly detailed analysis, creating a learning space for in-depth study and professional dialogues targeting aspects that grab students' attention. This is clearly revealed in Figure 1 by the diversity of the annotations in the classroom-teaching excerpt. The lines flagged in purple stimulated a conversation among six students (VC, XJ, YC, MK, KF, WL) who engaged in joint inquiry, raising multiple issues that question the teacher's (T's) KaL and KoS.



**Figure 1.** Collaborative annotation showing the detail, depth, breadth and level of analysis of texts on Perusall.

I was also attracted by how the platform offered an avenue for the instructor's mediation of discussions in line with the text to foster more critical thinking and co-construct new learning with students as a class.

In the subsequent sections, for ease of reference, I shall refer to myself as the instructor as teachers are named on Perusall, and learners on the course as participants and students. Official ethical clearance was sought, and I was given consent to use the initials of participants' names. To ensure confidentiality, all students' names in the figures are blurred.

## Implementation of the Innovation

Figure 2 presents an overview of the innovation in three phases. The acronym SAMR refers to Puentedura's (2013) model of Substitution-Augmentation-Modification-Redefinition to be discussed in Phases 2 and 3 of this section.

### *Phase 1: Students as Active Participants and Engaged Readers*

In my first trial, my students and I joined Perusall to explore its benefits. Although I was impressed by how students felt tempted to interact with the text and their coursemates by Perusall's interface which resembled social media platforms such as Instagram, I noticed their tendency to rely on me as the instructor to pose questions which they then responded to. Comments were instructor-initiated, and their posts were long, written in a relatively formal register and like individual 'answers' to prompts instead of conversations. I was also nearly always tagged for answers to their questions. This is not uncommon in an Asian context where the instructor is viewed as the authority (Swierczek and Bechter, 2010) and the Mr/Ms Know-All. I used to find myself busily intervening and drawing conclusions following their discussions for review in the next lecture, as Figure 3 shows.

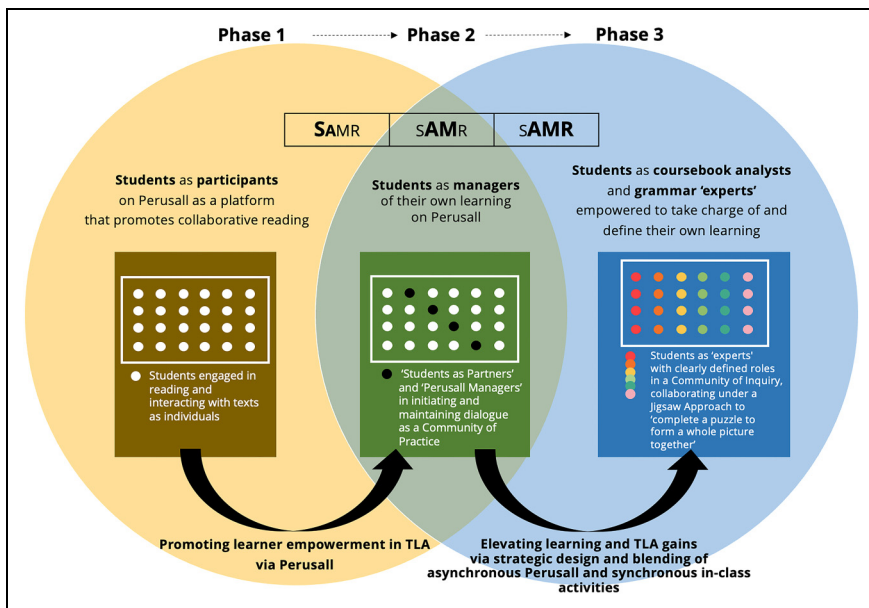


Figure 2. Model capturing the gist of the practices in the three phases of the innovation.

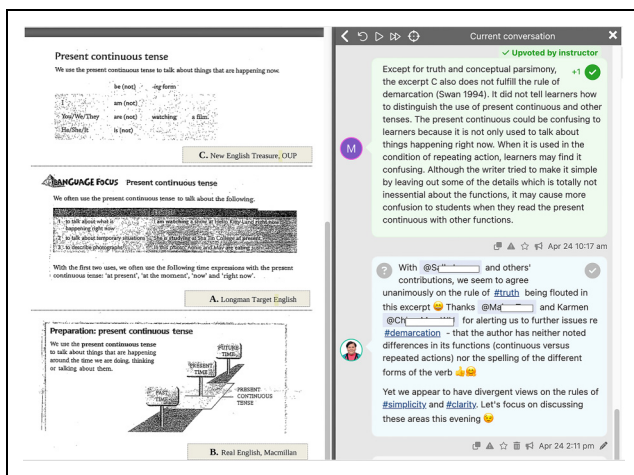


Figure 3. Instructor pooling students' ideas on Perusall together for further discussion in the next lecture.

Added to this are some potential shortcomings of Perusall I observed. These included loosely connected annotations if tasks lacked a focus and disorganised conversation threads if students commented with different emphases. The annotations may be distracting for intrapersonal learners or those who prefer completing readings before interacting

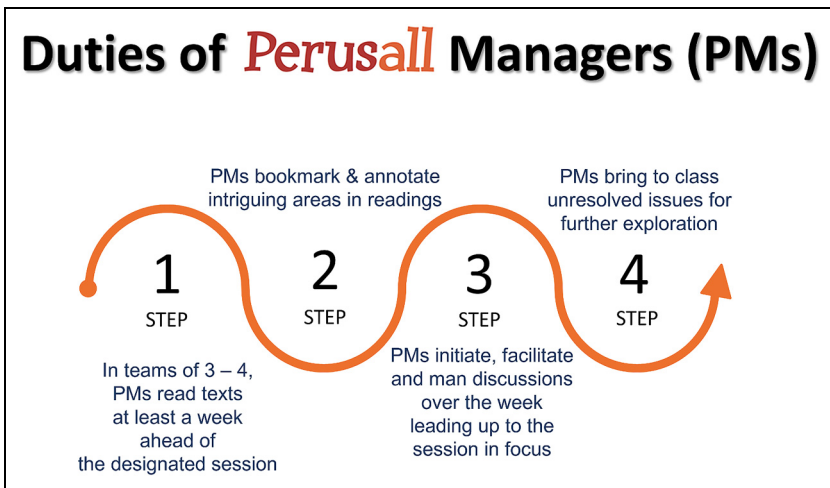
with their peers. This confirmed Li and Li's (2023) and Porter's (2022b) findings regarding the number of annotators and the amount of annotations as well as the messiness and redundancy of comments.

This led me to think: how do I encourage my students to be autonomous learners? How do I facilitate more meaningful and focused annotation and discussion?

As autonomous learners, participants are expected to manage and take ownership of their own learning (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991), learn to collaborate with their coursemates in teams, assume responsibility for their respective roles (Smith, 2008) and work towards attaining mutual goals (Benson, 2013).

### Phase 2: Students as Perusall Managers

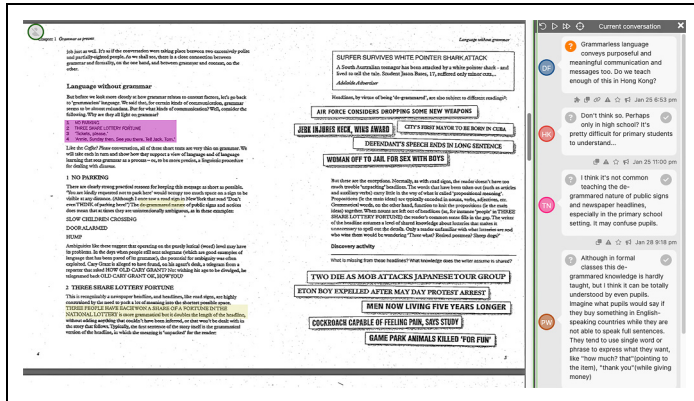
In order to reduce instructor dependence and promote a greater sense of autonomy among them, I adopted the Students as Partners (SaP) model advocated by Healey et al. (2014). SaP is grounded on the belief that with the instructor and students equally actively engaged in achieving a shared goal, mutual trust and respect are gradually fostered, learners' responsibility strengthened, sense of community engendered, ownership of the task felt and empowerment developed. This guided my 'Students as Perusall Managers (PMs)' initiative as outlined in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** Description of the duties of Perusall Managers.

With the PM initiative, posts were observed to be significantly more learner-driven, personal, dialogic and organic. In Figure 5, we see a participant (DF) initiating a chat about teaching grammar in Hong Kong, which naturally turned into a discussion on how grammar may be handled differently (KaL) in primary and secondary schools (KoS).

With PMs as leaders, it became more common to witness students' questions being addressed on their own initiative without the instructor's intervention. As discussions



**Figure 5.** Conversation thread on Perusall showing participants exchanging views on grammar teaching.

evolved during the course, participants began developing learner autonomy and establishing a stronger sense of identity as a community. This aligns with Lave and Wenger's (1991) Community of Practice (CoP) framework. They felt more comfortable raising questions about grammar and vocabulary teaching (KoL/KaL) that puzzled them, as in Figure 6.

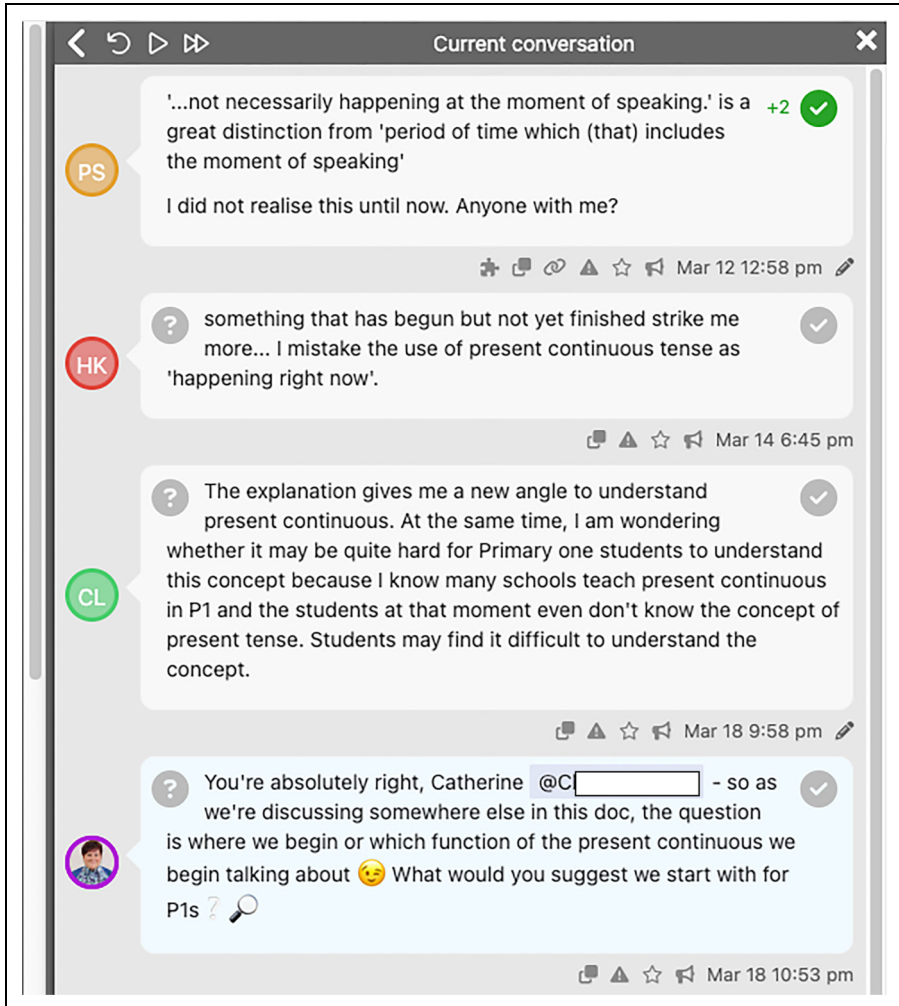
They reflected on their own learning (PS), frankly sharing their misunderstandings (HK) and discussing the challenges of teaching the present continuous in primary school (CL), thereby giving me the chance to urge them to explore how it could best be taught with our knowledge of learners' needs (KoS). This corroborates Kerrigan and Andres' (2022: 479) finding that students appreciate knowing that they share similar experiences, dilemmas, 'realizations, misunderstandings, or questions'.

In Figure 7, a participant (XW) frankly admitted his lack of KoL and KaL. This generated responses from more than five participants about an interlanguage issue triggered by the reading on 'Tense and Aspect'.

Figure 8 captures another participant recognising her peers as resources for learning as the question 'Can my coursemates help?' conveyed, demonstrating her trust in her peers as a CoP.

It was invigorating to record moments of participants supporting each other in their learning (Figure 9) and others capitalising upon the KoL strengths of their peers as we note this participant in Figure 10 inviting her American coursemate Wesley William Veach (consent obtained for his name to be disclosed), whom she identified to be one who could 'enlighten' her on the use of the simple past and present perfect.

Overall, participants' conversations were more student-initiated, driven by their own interests and needs, and dynamic. They interacted much more closely with the texts than in Phase 1; co-construction of knowledge occurred within texts, and discussions about KoL, KaL and KoS were more substantial, rich, in-depth and critical. As Biro (2021: 252) vividly depicts, this collaboration becomes visible in the 'living document', and shared knowledge in written and visual form is obvious (Bharath and Brownson, 2021), indicative of active and autonomous learning. What is manifested in Figures 5–10 is how participants managed their own learning, how they bonded as a CoP and how their TLA and analytical and critical thinking skills grew, as reflected in their end-of-course assignments.



**Figure 6.** Participants discussing the meaning of the present continuous (Knowledge of the Language – KoL) and how to teach it (Knowledge about the Language – KaL).

This innovation may in fact be conceptualised using the four-stage SAMR model of Substitution (S), Augmentation (A), Modification (M) and Redefinition (R) created in 2010 by world-renowned technology and education expert Ruben Puentedura (2013). In Phase 2, Perusall is clearly not just a direct Substitution (S) of the F2F classroom. Participants' learning was Augmented (A) as previously anticipated challenges were tackled, analyses of texts were more detailed and precise with the help of Perusall, and tasks were Modified (M) with PM roles assigned to participants on Perusall, leading to dialogues of a higher quality. This 'retooling' (Tsui and Tavares, 2021; Tavares, 2022; 2023) of its functionalities initially developed to encourage collaborative reading to achieve course learning outcomes yielded positive results. While interacting with the participants on Perusall, I regard the '@' used to tag them as a powerful feature: '@' enables



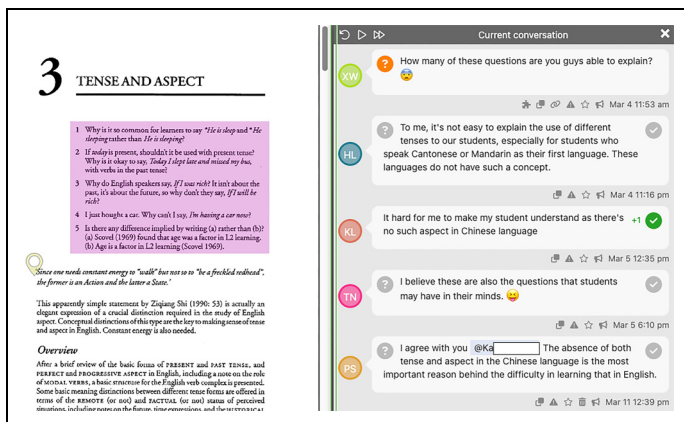


Figure 7. Participants openly sharing doubts, uncertainties and views on the topic of 'Tense and Aspect'.



Figure 8. Participant taking the initiative to seek help from coursemates on Perusall.

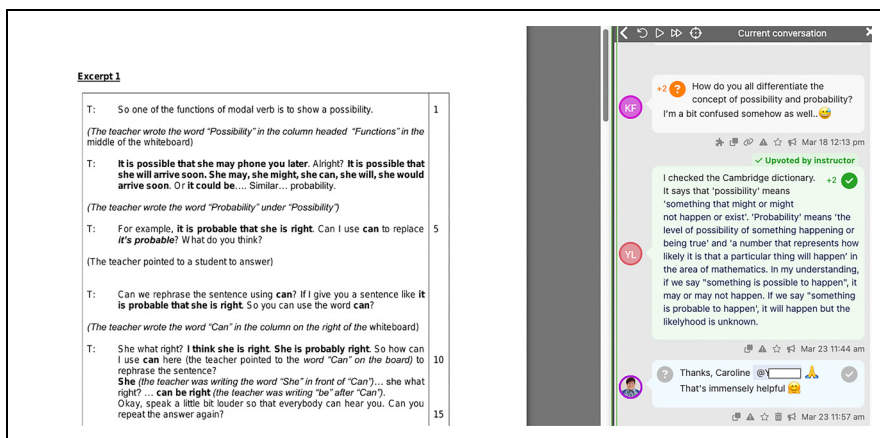
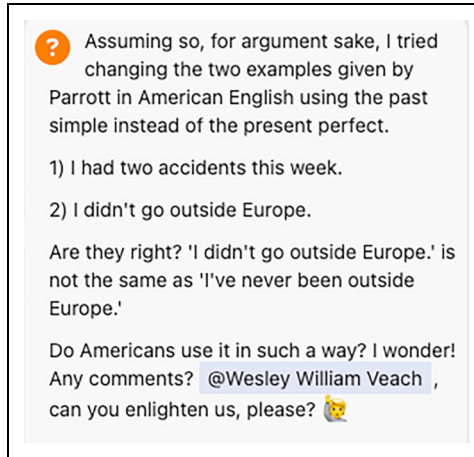


Figure 9. Participant sharing knowledge of grammatical concepts about modality.

the instructor and/or students to acknowledge one another's contributions by name. Once tagged, one gets an immediate notification via email that one's comment has been read, making everyone more engaged in the communication, knowing they have a visible audience. As the instructor, I find such alerts helpful in enhancing the spontaneity of replies and hence simulating real-life conversations. I strategically used '@' with the 'Upvoted



**Figure 10.** Participant inviting comments from a designated coursemate.

by instructor' tag, especially for less vocal or active or more soft-spoken students whose voices I seldom heard in our online sessions. According to these students, this tag 'is seen as a gesture of the instructor to recognise ideas that shine', as is shown in Figures 1, 9 and 13. This gave them the 'reassurance' that their contributions were valued and motivated them to express themselves more both on Perusall and in class.

As this participant, who represented the views of many in his cohort, explained:

One feature I have found to be most useful is the 'Upvoted by instructor' feature as it has given me incredibly useful feedback. This allows me to see if my own comments are on the right track. It also indicates which of my classmates' posts I should take a closer look at or respond to. Having an idea of how the instructor views my analysis has helped to build my confidence in analysing the textbook treatments of grammar points. This feature, along with seeing my classmates' thoughts, has helped me avoid feeling like I am stumbling around in the dark.

This finding urges me to put forward a counter-argument to Fazza's (2021) claim that instructors' presence on the platform causes anxiety to students. I maintain that if mediational strategies are effectively used, instructors can play influential roles in moving learners forward, as the above participant testifies.

Following the achievements mentioned earlier in Augmentation (A) and Modification (M) in Puentedura's SAMR model, I continued my journey of innovation in search of higher levels of A, M and Redefinition (R).

### *Phase 3: Students as Grammar 'Experts' and Critical Coursebook Analysts*

Building on the success of Phase 2, the goal of the next step was to turn the participants' learning experience into a more transformative one, following Puentedura's (2013) conceptualisation of Redefinition, with the support of Perusall. In this third phase, in addition to retaining the weekly 'Students as PMs' practice, participants were entrusted

with the title of Grammar ‘Experts’ with different areas of expertise in the later course sessions. Using Swan’s (2017) Six Design Criteria for Pedagogic Language Rules, an essential course reference, as the guiding framework, participants were made ‘experts’ in tasks such as the one in Figure 11, a critique of a Secondary 5/Grade 11 English teacher’s presentation of modality on Perusall from the lens of the following six delineated roles.

**PREP-TASK:** As a class, let’s engage ourselves in some collaborative inquiry on *Perusall* before Session 7.

The 4 classroom excerpts of the teacher candy’s S.5 lesson on ‘Modality’ are now on Perusall (File name: Prep-Task-Classroom\_Excerpts\_of\_the\_4\_Critical\_Incidents\_in\_Candy’s\_S.5\_Lesson\_on\_Modality). As a class, let’s attempt to critically evaluate Candy’s approach to the handling of her teaching points on ‘Modality’ by each focusing on one of Michael Swan’s 6 Pedagogic Language Rules as experts –

**‘Truth’ Experts: Nos. 1 - 5 (Ya, Yi, Al, Ch, S)**  
**‘Demarcation’ Experts: Nos. 6 – 10 (L, Je, A, Sh, Cd)**  
**‘Clarity’ Experts: Nos. 11 – 15 (C, Ca, Li, Ja, Li)**  
**‘Simplicity’ Experts: Nos. 16 – 20 (Ka, H, Sh, Sa, N)**  
**‘Conceptual Parsimony’ Experts: Nos. 21 – 25 (V, J, L, M, R)**  
**‘Relevance’ Experts: Nos. 26 – 30 (Lj, Ra, Pr, K, Ya)**

Analyse *all 4 excerpts* of Candy’s lesson in your capacity as the \_\_\_\_\_ Expert by Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> March – so we are all prepared for a more critical, in-depth and rich discussion on Candy’s management of ‘Modality’ in her lesson when we meet in Session 7 :)

**Figure 11.** Instructor assigning students to be Grammar ‘Experts’ in six clearly defined areas.

This idea was inspired by social psychologist Elliot Aronson (2021), whose Jigsaw Cooperative Learning Technique empowers every learner to be an expert with adequate training, peer support, joint endeavours and the instructor’s subtle mediation during the learning process.

**Excerpt 3**

T: Okay basically we get an idea...  
*(The teacher drew a wavy line in the middle column below ‘Certainty’)*

T: ... Already? How these words work when it means probability, possibility and certainty. (The teacher pointed to each of these words whilst she was speaking)  
 Well, can it mean something else? What about obligation?

*(The teacher wrote the word ‘Obligation’ under the curved line in the middle column)*

T: Anybody remember what’s obligation? Obligation means it is necessary. Sometimes when you are giving advice, you say to yourself, you say to your friend, you say to your classmate it is necessary for you to do that just like what we discussed before: as a good citizen, you must. What you must do? Anybody? It means something a responsible citizen should do.

*(The teacher looked towards a student called Fanny)*

T: Fanny.  
 (Fanny stood up)

T: Nothing? You can’t do that. At least you are at the age of eighteen, you should... What would you do when you reach at the age of eighteen?  
 You get married? You start working?

S2: Vols.  
 T: Yeah, right. You should vote. Any more?

*(Student 3 tried to give an answer)*

S3: Should not...  
 T: Should not... Should not talk? No, you should have the right, the freedom.  
 to talk, is that? As a good citizen, when?

S3: Should not throw rubbish.  
 T: Right. Should not throw rubbish. Should not spit. What about as a daughter, or as a son? What is the obligation? What you should you do at home, Ben?  
*(The teacher was writing ‘Ben should’ in the right column as she was saying ‘Ben should’)*

S4: behave himself.  
 T: I see. Only at home?  
*(The teacher was writing ‘behave himself’ after ‘Ben should’)*

T: Any more? Okay, it is necessary for Ben to behave himself. So it is an obligation. That means it is necessary, it is necessary for you to vote. It is necessary for everybody not to throw rubbish, not to litter and to behave yourself. So this is what we call obligation (the teacher was pointing to the word ‘obligation’)

**Search** All conversations

Page 1

Not only modal verbs can show a possibility, modal adverbs, modal adjectives and modal nouns also have the function to... 2

Clarity: The teacher tries to recap as many modal auxiliaries in one example (e.g. will/may/might/would...) to explain t... 3

How do you all differentiate the concept of possibility and probability? I’m a bit confused somehow as well...sweat\_smi... 4

In terms of demarcation, ‘probability’ and ‘possibility’ are actually two concepts that could be quite hard for students t... 5

Looking at the sentence structure, ‘it is probable that she is right’ is more complicated than ‘she can be right’. This... 7

Clarity: When the teacher was explaining ‘can’ that expresses possibility, she herself used ‘can’ to express ability repea... 2

Clarity: The teacher chose the verb ‘rephrase’ that is not common for students and a non-finite clause ‘using can’. Both la... 2

This explanation violates #Simplicityalong with #Truth (badly) and #Clarityas well. Not only do we typically use can to ta... 4

I wonder how students were participating during this deduction process, and if students can understand how the sent... 2

Again about simplicity, this is an example of oversimplification where the teacher just threw different modals with ‘right... 6

Page 2

Again it’s a nice attempt to expand the students’ vocabulary, but that can probably wait till they have learnt all the tar... 4

Student2 may be confused by the instruction of ‘replace the words ‘I am certain’ with ‘she’... As student2 continues t... 4

Maybe the teacher can use rephrase or emphasize ‘She WILL be home by ten o’clock’ after students’ response. ins... 20

As an American, this use of must came off as a bit odd to me as it’s mainly a BrE usage and not an AmE usage of the w... 4

Page 3

To simplify things, it might be better to use the obligations as a student as an example so the students can better relate... 11

‘Should’ is mentioned here, but the teacher did not focus closely on the learners’ point of difficulty, appreciate that the tea... 5

Relevance...When it comes to the idea of relevance, I think students have demonstrated a good usage of ‘should’ in... 8

Page 4

Clarity: According to the reading, ‘will’ can be used to show willingness and intention. The example given by the stud... 1

In terms of relevance, I think the teacher did not focus closely on the learners’ point of difficulty, appreciate that the tea... 5

Clarity: The teacher tries to demarcate the use of ‘will’ in ‘future tense’ from showing ‘possibility’, but it ends up misin... 6

**Figure 12.** Fifteen conversation threads initiated by participants analysing a classroom excerpt of teacher–student interaction on modality expressing ‘possibility’ and ‘probability’.

What is shown in Figure 12 is an analysis of one of the four classroom excerpts based on the task in Figure 11 that led to 15 student-initiated conversation threads on KoL, KaL and KoS, with the most popular topics attracting 9–11 exchanges and a total of 88 comments made by 30 course participants. This is typical of the exchanges they had on Perusall which, as Adams and Wilson (2020) depict, mirror the classroom dynamics in an F2F setting to a large extent.

Notably, participants were observed to be perceptive and analytical in their evaluation of the classroom excerpts wearing their ‘expert’ hats, critically reflective in their interpretation of the teacher’s (T’s) TLA, and gradually deepening their understanding of Swan’s (2017) six rules of thumb through their discussion. In the dialogue in Figure 13, three participants (YZ, LW, CH) were seen putting their KoL, KaL and KoS into practice as they engaged themselves in a friendly debate over T’s explanation of the modal auxiliary ‘should’, use of examples and management of the student responses in light of their prior knowledge. Specifically, CH’s reply to YZ and LW, which was ‘Upvoted by (the) instructor’, revealed his confidence both in his arguments on the critical issues presented in the lesson and in his points made beyond his role as a ‘demarcation expert’ as he remarked. Applying the SAMR model, augmented learning (A) was evident. The modified (M) asynchronous jigsaw task, consolidated in a follow-up in-class activity, enabled ‘experts’ from other teams that participants had not previously worked with to come together. This portrays Redefinition (R), the creation of a new experience for students by devising synchronous tasks based on the outcomes of Perusall analyses.

**Excerpt 4**

T: Give me one example here.	1
(A student stood up)	
S6: Will you come to the party tomorrow?	
T: Will you come to the party tomorrow? And you think it's possibility? Future tense?	
(The teacher wrote on the board "She will come to the party tomorrow")	
T: But it sounds more like future tense. You will probably be there tomorrow. They will be there... we will come to the party tomorrow. They will probably be at the party tomorrow. But it sounds more like a future tense, Okay? But anyway, it shows that one of the examples for... it's possible that you will be there tomorrow. It is possible. You are not definitely sure something will happen tomorrow. I will be there tomorrow. Okay? So possibility or probability.	5
(The teacher pointed to the words "Possibility or Probability")	10

**Current conversation**

YZ: #relevance ...When it comes to the idea of relevance, I think students have demonstrated a good usage of "should" in their responses. The teacher is making it more complex/confusing to understand how to use "should" and link it to the idea of obligation... If students have already known how to correctly use "should", is it necessary to emphasize the idea of obligation?

LW: Well, in terms of students' responses, I am not sure whether they have demonstrated a good command of 'should' since they replied in phrases instead of using 'should' in a complete sentence to express the meaning of non-binding obligation. I think the teacher emphasized 'obligation', aiming to distinguish it as another function from possibility/certainty. @YZ

CH: I feel like this lesson misrepresents the level of 'should' in terms of how imperative it is. While the theme seems to be good citizens of society, the teacher doesn't talk as much about language and rather emphasizes societal rules. Perhaps I'm mistaken, but "must" seems like the appropriate modal to represent a "necessary obligation" that better coincides with absolute obedience to societal rules, whereas 'should' inherently requires a goal, such as "If you want to be a good citizen you should..."; "If you want to bake a good cake you should...". Meanwhile an obligation exists without a goal, "You must obey your parents". Again I'm discussing matters which are not about demarcation while being a demarcation expert. lol

As I've said in previous excerpts, the part I find erroneous could be itself an example of a lack of demarcation in that since there is a clear line between subtle differences the teacher could have taken the chance to demarcate that boundary between what exactly things mean and don't mean. It's hard to see where the teacher made a specific mistake in teaching grammar since most of this excerpt only discusses meaning rather than form: what should/shouldn't be done in society.

Upvoted by instructor

**Figure 13.** Participants taking part in a friendly debate over the teacher’s explanation of ‘will’ in the lesson.

These quality professional dialogues among participants on Perusall and areas identified by PMs for subsequent joint exploration allowed for their synchronous discussions in class to go to greater depth and higher levels of critique than without

pre-class Perusall exchanges. This is evidenced by participants’ evaluation of their own experiences in the following section.

With the participants’ roles as not only coursebook analysts but also Grammar ‘Experts’ with specific angles of foci, learner empowerment was amplified. They autonomously initiated, led, facilitated and manned every conversation on Perusall, enabling me to enjoy conversations with them as a co-participant while grasping opportunities to provide feedback and stimulate further inquiry or more critical thinking in a timely manner.

### Evaluation of the Innovation

Viewing the innovation through a Community of Inquiry (CoI) lens (Garrison et al., 2000) with the three interrelated and interdependent domains of social presence, cognitive presence and teaching presence given equal emphasis, its impact on participants’ KoL, KaL and KoS learning and TLA growth was evident (Figure 14).

Findings from 30 students in the most recent MEd(ELE) Language Awareness: Grammar and Lexis cohort, who experienced both the ‘Students as Perusall Managers’ and ‘Students as Grammar Experts’ initiatives, were highly positive. The following comments were collected based on their written reflections, semi-structured interviews, post-course evaluation of teaching and learning questionnaires administered by the university, and my presentations at Perusall Exchange 2021 and 2022 with selected students (Tavares, 2021; 2022).

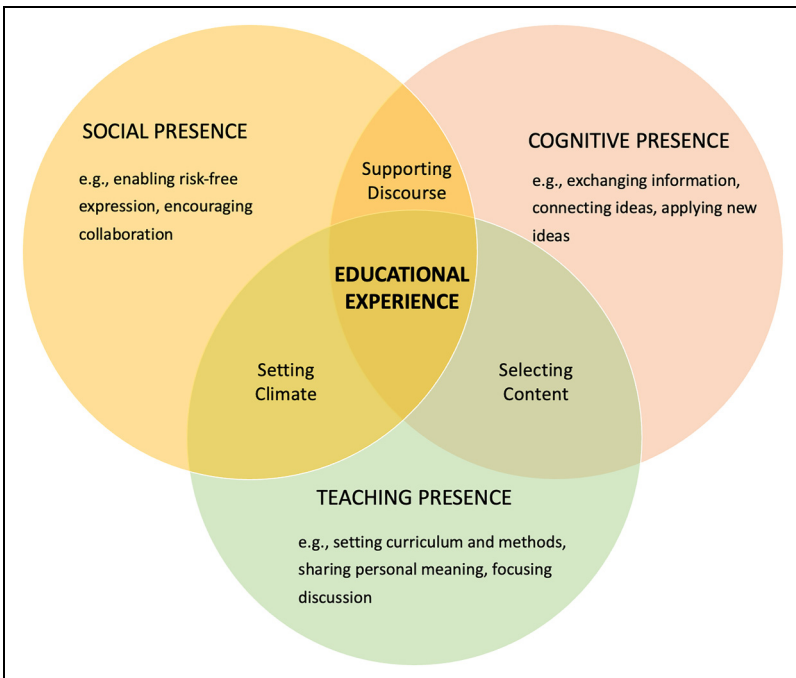


Figure 14. Community of inquiry model (Garrison et al., 2000).

Participants acknowledged one another's visible social presence on Perusall, identifying their peers as 'grammar experts', 'leaders and facilitators of the discussion of their responsible parts'. They joyfully admitted 'enjoying' their 'collaborative inquiry' 'as partners in the learning process', 'feeling supported', knowing that they were 'not alone' as they responded 'in a timely manner' to posts, working closely in expert teams 'as partners' in a CoI to 'complete a puzzle to form a whole picture together' to heighten their TLA. As an experienced native English-speaking teacher-participant (CH), mentioned in Figure 13, acclaimed,

the conversations on Perusall in a warm and friendly tone with my peers help me perceive the analysis tasks a little less like formal homework and a little more like casual discussions where tangible learning takes place ... Having raised my TLA, I now realise how problematic some textbook materials can be. This is eye-opening.

This was reinforced by CH's coursemate LW, a novice primary school English teacher-participant from Hong Kong who expressed her appreciation:

The empathy, encouragement, and eagerness for knowledge co-construction shown in the process influence me to be more open-minded and more willing to share my ideas confidently on some complicated grammar topics as ... there will always be someone to seek help and strength from.

To cultivate a 'supportive risk-free climate' in a 'warm' and 'friendly' learning environment, which Garrison et al. (2000) advocate and which the participants experienced, I concur with Adams and Wilson (2020) that the instructor's responses should not be judgemental, evaluative or corrective. I constantly reminded myself to be patient, not to jump to conclusions prematurely and to allow room for more ideas from different participants to emerge and interactions to occur freely.

Echoing this thought and bringing in more elements of cognitive presence, CH and LW's coursemate from China commented on how the design of the online collaborative tasks provided her with the 'opportunity to interact with the readings and co-construct knowledge within the learning community'. As she elaborated,

it allows me to raise questions about the readings and discuss them with my coursemates online, which helps me better understand the concepts and construct a shared understanding based on the readings. As I process others' questions, I'm prompted to take another step forward and reflect on the readings from a different perspective, thus deepening my understanding of certain issues and developing my critical thinking skills.

A local secondary school teacher-participant of Indian origin recalled how 'this learning journey has transformed [her] from a passive reader to an active learner as [she] gain[ed] inspiration and support from [her] peers and instructor' through 'the in-depth exploration of grammatical issues and analytical tasks as an expert focusing on one part of the task'. Attaching importance to teaching presence, she stressed how the instructor's upvotes contributed to her intellectual development:

Seeing my point ‘Upvoted by (the) instructor’, I evaluate my own comments and determine what needs to be improved ... It is like a ‘personalized’ online discussion forum that allows me to think critically and develop a sense of engagement, which in turn strengthens my confidence in teaching.

Commenting further on instructor presence, another teacher-participant reported:

Our professor often makes good use of the issues raised on the platform and incorporates them into our class activities in synchronous learning on Zoom. We may refer to the comments made on Perusall to provoke further discussion or support the completion of more challenging tasks and our assignment.

The participants’ experiences, perceptions and opinions all added up to show how social, cognitive and teaching presence interact in a CoI. They also indicated how Perusall effectively created the learning space for knowledge to be co-constructed, for their KoL, KaL and KoS to be strengthened and for them to feel empowered as Grammar ‘Experts’ and coursebook analysts with the support of well-designed TLA tasks and the instructor’s strategic use of a blend of synchronous and asynchronous activities to optimise learning.

## Reflection and Future Pedagogical Directions

Reflecting on my journey in the use of Perusall to enhance learner autonomy and TLA in English language teacher education and insights gained from the different phases of the innovation, there are three main areas that I encourage teachers to consider.

First, despite the platform looking seemingly self-explanatory, I recommend that teachers explain the rationale for its choice to students and create opportunities for them to be acquainted with its functionalities even before course commencement. To do so, one possible activity is to engage students in annotating a syllabus using a prompt such as: ‘Tell us what you would most like to learn or any questions you have about any part of the syllabus.’ This is also a strategy of negotiating course expectations with students to shape a co-constructed and ‘negotiated curriculum’ (Edwards, 2011; Yuksel, 2010). Through the process, teachers could hone students’ annotation skills and train them to use features such as hashtags ‘#’ to organise their ideas and to create new topics. Teachers could also cultivate a warm and friendly online learning space by modelling conversational language and the use of emojis. To avoid the density of the annotations and messiness in documents that Porter (2022b) and Li and Li (2023) observed, I suggest that teachers assign specific pages to specific students and groups like the PMs and their respective teams in my example. This could be set up in the ‘Assignments’ tab on Perusall, as exemplified in Figure 15.

Second, as previously highlighted, it is about more than just making an informed selection of the COAP; it is about how it is utilised. Teachers should consider their students’ language, learning, socio-affective and other needs when using a platform. In the case of this innovation, what mattered most was how some functionalities were ‘retooled’ (Tsui and Tavares, 2021) to facilitate the attainment of pedagogic goals. For instance, English teachers may creatively think about how to take advantage of its functionalities in language learning for more students’ voices to be heard. I appreciate how Perusall

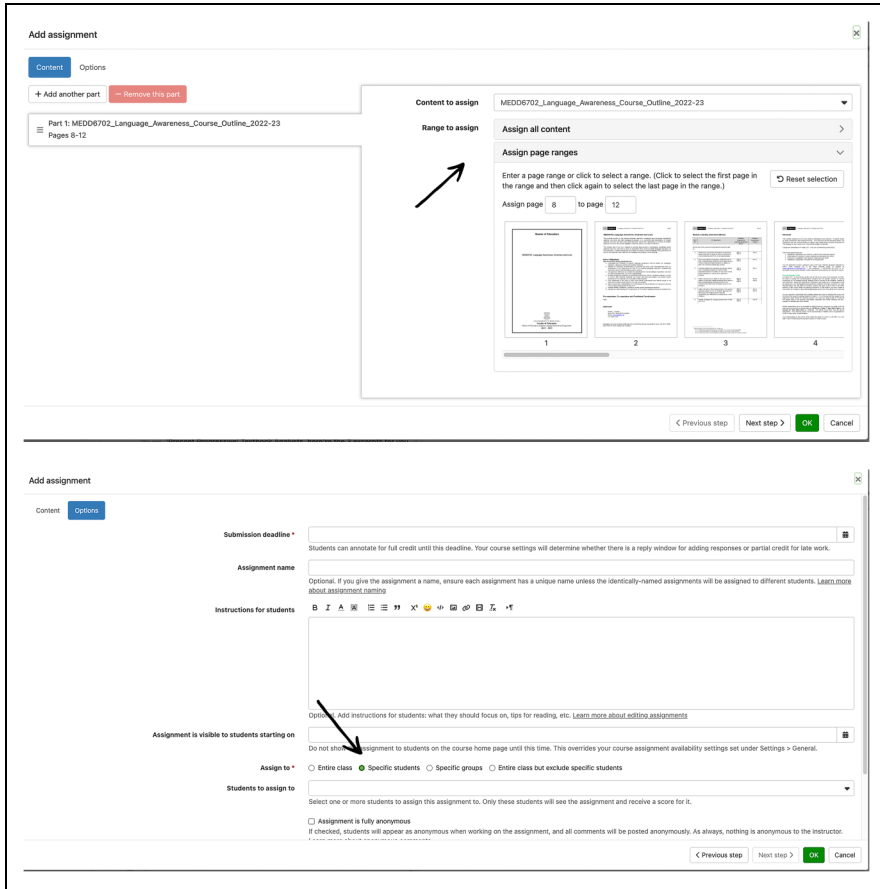

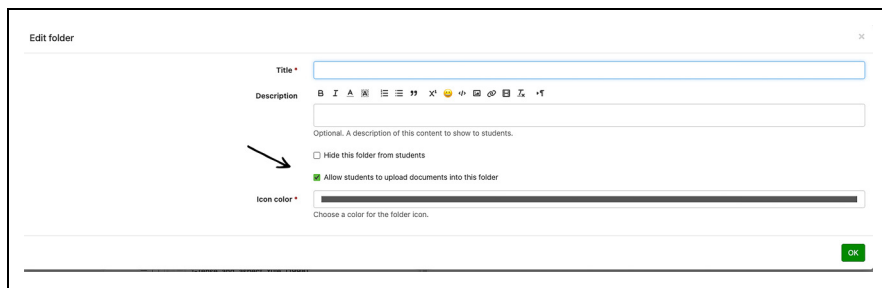


Figure 15. Diagrams showing the steps to 'Assign page ranges' to 'Specific students'.


creates room for students' thoughts (otherwise private) to be articulated, their thinking processes made visible and better understood, and voices made public. Teachers could also explore how to enable linguistically weaker learners of English, who are likely to be less vocal in class, to feel respected and valued. Features like the 'One-on-One Chat' could be used to encourage resilient and introverted learners to pose questions, the 'Upvoted by Instructor' tab to acknowledge the contributions of the less confident, the '@' to stimulate more critical thinking and invite comments, and the in-built 'Analytics'  to find out more about students' learning styles so as to take appropriate and prompt action based on what the figures suggest (Tavares, 2023).

To cater to different learning styles, like students who prefer first reading and understanding a text privately before interacting with their peers, teachers have the option of allowing them to 'download' the materials. This could be adjusted in the 'Settings' as seen in Figure 16. Similarly, the 'uploading' function could be enabled to promote greater learner autonomy and ownership. Students could be tasked with selecting resources like reading passages and preparing comprehension questions or vocabulary quizzes for their peers to maximise co-learning opportunities on Perusall.





**Figure 16.** How to adjust settings to allow students to upload documents on Perusall.

While attempting to benefit from its multiple features, I advise teachers to make judicious choices on the use of different functionalities. To cite an example, although the ‘Confusion report’  Perusall produces is generally regarded as a useful tool in flagging students’ commonly asked questions (King, 2021; Suhre et al., 2019), I found student-selected areas of focus from the PM initiative outlined in Figure 4 conducive to more fruitful and relevant discussions.

A third and final point worthy of teachers’ consideration is how the asynchronous tasks and activities on the platform could be coherently designed using a flipped classroom or blended approach to optimise learning in synchronous in-class settings, be they online or F2F. My experimentations using Perusall revealed how students’ learning could be reinforced and leveraged through consolidatory tasks developed based on evidence of their learning progress, (lack of) understanding and (mis)interpretations shown via their performance on Perusall. Compared to tasks devised before the pandemic when e-learning tools were less often used, it was illuminating to discover how COAP pre-class activities could be impactful if effectively orchestrated under the teacher’s supervision.

These valuable lessons learnt for us as teachers could help us reconsider student-centred pedagogies that may foster more active, social and autonomous learning in the post-pandemic age with the help of technology in hybrid, blended and online modes. Technological tools should no longer only be seen as adding fun and games to English lessons.

Summing up the article by viewing this pedagogic innovation from a research perspective, I stress the following observation. Although there has been an increasing number of studies on the impact of Perusall on language-related learning, most of them centre around these areas: student engagement (Suhre et al., 2019), reading motivation (Li and Li, 2023), collaborative reading, reading skills development in general and critical thinking specifically in students in middle school (Issa et al., 2021) and in higher education (Cecchinato and Foschi, 2020; Fazza, 2021; Kohnke and Har, 2022; Lee and Yeong, 2018; Miller et al., 2018; Woodward and Neunaber, 2020). It would be pedagogically enriching if more attention were given to investigating students’ language gains in teacher education and language courses to examine how Perusall and other similar COAPs could promote literacy and reading skills development. Kohnke and Har’s (2022) study reported that students’ critical reading skills were enhanced, but seeing more examples of this would be helpful. Adams and Wilson’s (2020) research was on pre- and in-service teachers’ engagement with the readings instead of literacy skills, which was the course the teachers were attending.

With the movement towards Content and Language Integrated Learning worldwide, looking into how students learning a content subject in a second, foreign or additional language may be facilitated by COAPs will shed light for educators on language education too.

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