Integrating e-Writing Homework Assignments (Asynchronous Tasks) into a F2F Discussion Curriculum: Does it Make Sense?

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ABSTRACT
As a result of the March 11, 2011 Tohoku earthquake, several universities in the Tokyo area shortened their spring academic calendars; requiring program administrators to create supplemental learning opportunities to compensate for the reduced classroom hours. This study looks at one such adjustment made by a university’s freshmen English Discussion program which, for one semester only, required learners to complete an on-line written homework assignment (e-WHA) as a part of their preparation for a classroom face-to-face (F2F) group discussion test. More specifically, the learners in this study were asked to evaluate the e-WHA for: 1) Difficulty using the online system (e-task); and 2) Usefulness of writing (w-task) for a F2F discussion class. The results show that 76% of the learners found the e-task to be easy - not very difficult; and with 83% further selecting the minimum time on e-task option (15-30 minutes). As for the w-task, 95% of the learners reported a favorable view of writing as a F2F discussion test preparation tool, and 89% further reported a favorable view of the w-task when compared to their weekly Reading Homework Assignment.

INTRODUCTION
Technology in the 21st century has provided the world with a seemingly dizzying array of forms and forums for having extended and globally interactive discussions of “individual” ideas. Along with this hyper-integration of technology-mediated communication into our daily lives, it seems only natural that second language instruction might benefit from not only providing an integrated language skills approach…but to also find ways to enhance the L2 learning experience by integrating technology into the curriculum. Moreover, due to the reasonable expectation that university graduates will be required to use some form or another of technology-mediated communication in their professional lives, a second language program that provides for purposeful outside of class e-learning may come to be viewed by the learners as developing more “real world” authentic skills; which may, in turn, lead to an increase in learner L2 willingness to communicate both in the real and virtual worlds of global communication.

In order to create the framework for answering the question presented in the title of this paper, a brief overview of second language acquisition, technology-mediated communication, and learner motivation will be discussed below.

Second Language Acquisition (SLA)
When considering the process(es) involved in SLA, many discussions invariably turn to three basic elements: Input + Noticing + Output. These ingredients have served as the basis for much debate and elaboration in research literature on what it takes for second language learners to be successful. This section will briefly explore these ideas, and then view them in the light of using an electronically written task to facilitate acquisition of face-to-face (F2F) discussion skills.

For this paper we will start with the end, in that as Swain (1985) points out in her output hypothesis, students need to be “pushed” to test their hypothesis about the language they are
studying so they can notice the gap between what they want to say and what they can actually say. Swain also adds that learners need an opportunity to reflect (metalinguistic function) on language form and meaning; suggesting that learners benefit from self-directed feedback based on their own language production experience (spoken/written). Next, if we then consider Schmidt’s Noticing Hypothesis (1990) which states, in order for learners to produce target features in an L2, those features must first be noticed by the learners. This seems obvious, but it does serve as a useful reminder that the input the learners are being presented with must contain noticeable target features in order to prompt the learners to use the target language in their output. This notion is supported by Levelt and Kelter’s research on spoken discourse which shows that “previous talk sets up a more or less abstract frame in the mind of an interlocutor, which is then used in the formulation of the next turn” (1982, p. 79). Now then, how does all of this fit together in terms of technology assisted language learning?

Technology-mediated Communication in Language Learning

Research literature related to technology-mediated communication often separates e-tasks according to the degree of “real time” interaction afforded by the type of technology (software/hardware) being used. The two most common categorizations of e-tasks are as synchronous and asynchronous computer mediated communication (SCMC/ACMC). The first type (SCMC), relates to electronic communication that is either “real time” (e.g. video-conferencing) or “near” real time (e.g. chat rooms). In contrast, the second type (ACMC) generally refers to media that involves a delay in interaction; such as email, threaded discussions, online bulletin boards… the difference being that participants are not required to be “on-line” at the same time. And while there are many distinct benefits to both types of e-tasks, there are several key factors that might make an ACMC-like task particularly useful to learners in a F2F discussion class. For example, in terms of SLA (above), an ACMC task can transform the traditional student to teacher written homework assignment into a “public” event; in that the perceived audience for on-line posted assignment may extend far beyond the confines of the learners’ classroom to include: other teachers and students, program administrators… This potential for “going public” with one’s own ideas, may actually facilitate SLA as learners approach the task with a heightened focus on the form/meaning of the language input, leading to deeper noticing (processing) of the target language features, and resulting in a written output (text) that is more accurate and appropriate for the learning context (a F2F Discussion Class). As Sotillo (2000, p. 82) in her research on language learning and computer mediated communication concludes:

Asynchronous discussions [tasks] in particular allow language learners more time to plan their writing…encourages them to think critically and post carefully prepared responses to teacher and student queries. Learners are thus able to focus on both form and meaning to a greater extent than when they are engaged in rapid fire exchanges and socializing via synchronous [or F2F] discussions.

The idea that learners might benefit at some point from planning, processing, and discussing their ideas in a “delayed” response environment is also supported by researchers taking a cognitive approach to SLA; for example, Skehan (1998, p. 142) suggests that “greater time pressure [e.g. in an interactive F2F discussion] will mean that there is less time for attention to form in terms of accuracy or complexity.” He later adds that the learner is more likely to focus on “lexicalized processing, and a reduce concern with analysis, and accuracy” (p. 176). In other words, due to limitations in short term memory, the acquisition (use) of appropriate discussion
discourse functions as well as developing and articulating one's ideas may not be fully realized without an opportunity for a delayed and more reflective interaction (e.g. e-WHA task). Another ACMC task advantage may be that as learners become more reflective and notice the form/meaning gap between the message that they want to and can communicate, they will become better at being able to restructure their message, resulting in fewer communication breakdowns and negotiation of meaning in their “real time” F2F group discussion.

Using a Motivational Theory for Learner Post-task Self-Reflection
One of the most important variables when it comes to determining the degree of learning that a task, lesson, or curriculum may provide is - learner motivation. The role of motivation in the EFL classroom has been the focus of many research studies and papers, along with discussions on who should take responsibility for motivating learners to achieve course outcomes: the teacher, the learners, or both. An in-depth discussion of motivation is outside the scope of this paper, however, when designing any task, lesson, curriculum...and/or when assessing a task for effectiveness, it might be helpful to have a construct of motivation in mind. The research questions in this paper have a general connection to the components of Pintrich & De Groot’s (1990) Expectancy-value theory of motivation: 1) expectancy (i.e. a learner’s belief about their ability or skill to perform a task), 2) value (i.e. a learner’s belief and goals in terms of the importance of a task and their interest in that task), and 3) affective (i.e. the learner’s emotional reaction to a task). More specifically, this research project asks students to reflect upon questions related to: expectancy (“Could I do the task?”), value (“Was the task useful?”), and affective (“How did I feel about the task?”). Considering learner motivation can be of significant importance in determining whether or not to fully integrate an outside of classroom activity as with an ACMC task. With this motivational framework in mind, the following sections present the research context, questions, and findings.

BACKGROUND
Instructional/Research Context
This research project was conducted at a Tokyo area university with a recognized commitment to foreign language instruction and learning as demonstrated by its requirement for all incoming freshmen (approximately 4,000 students) to enroll in a variety of English language courses including: 1) Discussion, 2) Presentation, 3) Writing, and 4) E-learning. The first two courses (Discussion and Presentation) provide for two semesters of instruction, while the Writing and E-learning programs are limited to one semester of instruction each. Currently the English Discussion Class program is self-contained; does not utilize resources or materials from the other required English courses.

English Discussion Class (EDC)
The EDC program is particularly unique in that all first year students are grouped together by academic major (college/dept.) and English language proficiency into small class sizes of 7-9 students. The small class size allows the program to emphasize an English only communicative language teaching and learning approach with the goal of developing L2 fluency through F2F interactive group discussions. The program utilizes a weekly Reading Homework Assignment (RHA) as the basis for activating prior knowledge and as a primer for in-class discussions. The program further facilitates the learners’ discussion competence by introducing and integrating formal “discussion” discourse functions into its weekly 90 minute lessons.
Shortened academic calendar
Due to the Tohoku earthquake of March, 2011, the EDC program’s spring 2011 syllabus was shortened from 14 weeks of instruction with three formal F2F discussion tests to 11 weeks with two discussions tests (Appendix A). To compensate for the decrease in classroom instructional time, the program created extended learning opportunities including an online written homework assignment (e-WHA), the focus of this paper.

The online written homework assignment (e-WHA)
During the spring 2011 semester, learners in the EDC program were given two computer-mediated written homework assignments (e-WHA) scheduled to coincide with the learners’ preparation for each of their F2F discussion tests. As such, one week prior to their first discussion test, learners were provided with an in-class handout detailing how to use the university’s on-line website (e-task) and how to respond in writing (w-task) to F2F Discussion topic/questions presented in the handout. Due to several idiosyncrasies related to submitting the assignment online (e.g. sessions timed out after 30 minutes), learners were advised to complete the e-WHA first on a p.c. using a separate word processing software program (e.g. MS Word) and then to copy and paste their answers to the EDC program website. Learners did not receive teacher support or in-class assistance beyond the e-WHA handout. The submitted e-WHAs were not accessible by other students or teachers; however, there existed a perception that their texts could have a public audience or an audience that went beyond that of their classroom teacher. Finally, due to time constraints, no evaluation was performed or feedback given to the learners in regards to either component of the e-WHA (e-task/w-task).

RESEARCH PURPOSE
This learner questionnaire based research project was originally created to provide learners with an opportunity to self-reflect and give feedback to the teacher regarding a homework assignment that was not directly integrated into classroom instruction, but had the goal of directly facilitating their in-class F2F discussion performance. Subsequently, however, when the results of the survey were viewed from the broader perspective of using an ACMC-like task to enhance acquisition of F2F discussion skills, it was decided that the survey could be used as the basis for a more formal study to answer the question: Does it make sense to integrate e-WHAs into a F2F discussion class curriculum?

Research Questions
This research will be conducted in two stages, with the Stage 1 focusing on analyzing data collected from learner questionnaires in order to address the following research questions:

- RQ1: Were the computer/on-line aspects of the e-WHA task difficult for first year students?
- RQ2: Did the learners value the e-WHA as useful for their F2F discussion test preparation?
- RQ3: In general, did the learners value the non-integrated e-WHA (productive skill) as much as the fully integrated Reading Homework Assignment (receptive skill)?

Stage 2, a follow-up research project, will focus on analyzing the e-WHA submitted work for a cross-modality connection between the learners’ written assignment (e-WHA) and their spoken F2F discussion assessment.
METHOD
Participants
The participants consisted of 105 first year university students, from 14 classes, grouped together according to nine different academic departments and across three language levels: high beginner, intermediate, and advanced (Appendices C & D).

Data Collection Instrument (e-WHA Learner Questionnaire/Survey)
Data was collected using an anonymous questionnaire (Appendix B) which was administered in-class after the learners had completed their first F2F group discussion test. The questionnaire included five survey questions asking the learners to reflect and give feedback on the difficulty of the computer/online aspects of the task (e-task) and the value of writing (w-task) in a F2F discussion class. Two basic types of questions were used in the survey, with the first type asking students to choose from four response options ranging from most to least favorable view of the target-question being asked. The survey responses did not include a neutral position option for the target-questions; this was done in order to encourage learners to express an opinion (favorable/unfavorable) on the e-WHA activity; in similar fashion to instructional activities associated with the discussion program curriculum. The second type of question asked the learners to select a time-range (in minutes) spent on each element of the assignment (e-task/w-task). The questionnaire also provided learners with an opportunity to write comments regarding any aspect of the discussion class (e.g. e-WHA, discussion test, discussion class lessons...). Finally, while the survey was intended and presented as a brief 3-minute activity, the majority of learners spent between 5-10 minutes reflecting and completing the survey.

RESULTS
In this section, the three research questions for Stage 1 will be addressed individually using data collected from 99 student questionnaires (n=99). Six students (6%) from the original 105 participants did not complete the e-WHA activity for the following reasons: four students forgot; one student was absent/did not get the e-WHA handout; one student for undetermined reasons.

RQ1: The e-Task
While it may be safe to assume that most first year university students have experience submitting an L1 handwritten homework assignment to their classroom teacher, it might not be as safe to assume that learners have experience submitting an L2 “computer written” homework assignment to an academic department (i.e. the English Discussion program) online. Therefore, this research question attempts to determine the degree of difficulty that the learners may have had with the computer/online aspects of the e-WHA. To answer RQ1, the study compiled and analyzed the learners’ responses to the following:

Survey questions
1. Was it difficult to use the English Discussion program website (on-line system)?
2. How long [in minutes] did it take you to:
   a. Answer the questions [w-task]?
   b. Use English Discussion program website [online system] to send your answers?

Results for survey question #1
As Table 1 shows, a combined 76% (32% + 44%) of the learners considered the online system to be “easy” – “not very difficult” to use. Furthermore, the next group of learners (19%) reported the task to only be marginally difficult (“A little difficult”); thereby suggesting that 95% of the learners did not encounter any significant problems in completing the e-task. As for the
remaining 5% who reported the system as “very difficult” to use, they may have encountered one or more of the online system idiosyncrasies including: System times out after 30 minutes (data lost); once submitted no editing/resubmission permitted… (Appendix E).

Table 1 Using the On-line System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulty Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easy</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very difficult</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little difficult</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very difficult</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>n=99</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Time-on-Task

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Range</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15-30 minutes</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-60 minutes</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-90 minutes</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90+ minutes</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>n=99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results for survey question #2
This survey question attempts to isolate and quantify the e-task difficulty by asking the learners to report time spent on both the w-task and the e-task. As can be seen in Table 2, the majority of students spent more time composing their answers to the homework questions (w-task), than they did with the computer/online aspects of the e-task. More specifically, 83% of the learners selected the minimum time option (15-30 minutes) for the e-task, with several students reporting to the teacher in-class that they actually spent less than one minute “copying and pasting” their answers into the on-line system. As for the w-task, only 13% of the students selected the minimum time option suggesting that computer/online aspects of the e-WHA did not inadvertently become the focus of the assignment. In other words, for the majority of students the “writing” assignment did not become a “computer” assignment. In contrast, however, Table 2 does indicate that 12% (9% + 1% + 2%) of the learners reported spending more than 30 minutes on the e-task. This may have been a result of the idiosyncrasies related to e-task, and/or the learners’ inexperience with computers and word processing software (refer Appendix E).

RQ2: The w-Task
The student questionnaire was administered immediately after the learners completed their first F2F group discussion test in order to try and capture a more direct learner connection/reflection of the e-WHA as a useful discussion test preparation tool.

Survey question
• “Do you think the Homework Writing Assignment helped you with the Discussion Test?”

Results for survey question
The results in Table 3 show that a combined 95% (61% + 34%) of the learners chose one of the two favorable view response choices, of which, 61% strongly agreed (“Yes!!”) that the e-WHA helped them to prepare for their F2F group discussion test. Moreover, in the comments section of the survey, the most frequently cited comment (Appendix E) was to the effect that the w-task helped learners to think more deeply about the topic and/or about how to better communicate their ideas (in English). In contrast to the above positive view of the w-task, Table 3 also shows that 5% of the learners reported a less than favorable view (“No, not really”) of the activity as helping them to prepare for their discussion test. However, it should also be noted that 0% of the learners selected the least favorable view of the e-WHA (“No, not at all”).

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RQ3: The e-WHA alongside the RHA

To determine whether or not the learners valued the e-WHA activity beyond that of a tool to prepare for their F2F discussion test, the survey asked the learners to rate the importance of the e-WHA in general terms; alongside that of their weekly Reading Homework Assignment (RHA). The RHA was used as the basis for comparison because the EDC program values the RHA to the extent that it serves as the topic/theme for all lesson activities, including the two timed group discussions. The importance (value) of the RHA is even further emphasized to the learners through the use of a RHA multiple choice quiz which is given at the beginning of each class. The following questions were used to answer this third and final research question:

Survey questions: Generally speaking do you think...
- Homework WRITING Assignments are important for English Discussion Class?
- Homework READING is important for English Discussion Class?

Results for survey questions

The findings presented in Table 4 show that the learners clearly placed a higher value (“Yes, very important”) on the weekly RHA (75%) as compared with the e-WHA (41%). However, if the two favorable view survey response choices were combined, then 89% (41% “Yes…” + 48% “A little”) of the learners may be considered as having a positive view of the e-WHA as compared with 95% (75% + 24%) for the weekly RHA; narrowing the gap between the two instructional activities from 34% (75% - 41%) to 6% (95% - 89%). On the other hand, Table 4 also shows that 10% (8% + 2%) of the learners now have a negative view of the e-WHA as a general learning activity; compared with 5% of the learners in Table 3. In the next section, the impact of framing the e-WHA alongside the RHA is further considered by determining a rating gap between the class(es) with the most/least favorable view of each (e-WHA/RHA).

The favorability gap (e-WHA/RHA) at the class level

As mentioned previously, the e-WHA was originally created and communicated to the learners (and teachers) as a one semester only extended learning opportunity; and not as an on-going fully integrated learning tool as with the RHA. Therefore, the learner’s perception, and the results in Table 4, may have been influenced to some degree by the Discussion program’s own view of the fully integrated (valued) RHA versus the non-integrated (undetermined value) e-WHA. To explore this notion in more detail, the survey data presented in Tables 3 & 4 were reconsidered by calculating a mean average response for each of the 14 classes surveyed (Appendix D). The highest/lowest ratings were then used to determine a favorability gap (FG) and to serve as a basis for comparison across survey questions.
SECTION FOUR: Action Research Part 4- Tasks

### Range of Responses at the Class Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>WHA Helped</th>
<th>WHA Important</th>
<th>RHA Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) Least Favorable View</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>1.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) Most Favorable View</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) Favorability Gap (A-B = C)</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5** The Favorability Gap by Class  
**Table 6** The Favorability Gap Summary  
[1= Strongly Agree 2= Agree 3= Disagree  4= Strongly Disagree]

For example, the first survey question (*Do you think the WHA helped you with the discussion test?*) shows (Tables 5 & 6) that at least one class had an average rating of 1.00 indicating that everyone in the class *strongly agreed* that the e-WHA helped them with the F2F discussion test. And on the other end of the favorability gap, the class with the least favorable view of the e-WHA as a test preparation tool averaged a score of 1.83 indicating that as a class they only *agreed* that the e-WHA was useful for their F2F discussion test; resulting in a favorability gap for the survey question of a 0.83 (1.83-1.00).

The FG for the next survey question (*Do you think homework writing assignments are important for Discussion class (as compared to the RHA)?*) was calculated at 1.18 (Tables 5 & 6) and shows two noteworthy differences from the first survey question. First, the most favorable rating for each target question is different (1.00 vs. 1.25) resulting in a starting point gap of .25. Second, the favorability gap for the current survey question is considerably wider at 1.18; and if the two gaps are combined (.25 + 1.18 = 1.43), the results show a 72% ((1.43 - .83 = .61)/.83) increase across survey questions. The reason for the ratings difference may lie somewhere in that the first question asks the learners to value the e-WHA based on their real F2F discussion test experience. Meanwhile the second question asks the learners to hypothetically consider the e-WHA as an ongoing activity alongside that of their “real” weekly RHA; thereby, asking the learners to imagine the value of the task and/or to rely on the Discussion programs view/value of the two tasks (e-WHA/RHA).

In attempt to view the data in terms of the learners’ “real” experience (tasks), a FG was calculated for the RHA and then compared to the first survey question. As Tables 5 & 6 illustrate, both survey questions have the same starting point of 1.00 indicating that at least one class strongly agreed as to the importance or the benefit of the RHA/e-WHA. Next, the results also show that at the whole class level, both tasks have very similar range between the most/least favorable view of the task (RHA = .86 vs. e-WHA = .83). The closeness in FG between the two “real” tasks may suggest that if the Discussion program were to fully integrate an e-WHA activity into the curriculum, learners may come to equally value both for their Discussion class.

One final note for this section, while at the individual level 5-10% of the learners held an unfavorable view (value) of the e-WHA (Tables 3 & 4), at the class level, however, none of the 14 classes had an average score falling into the unfavorable/negative zone (3.00/4.00).

**Student Questionnaire/Survey Comments (Appendix E)**

As a part of the survey, learners were told that they could choose to write or not write comments regarding any aspect of the English Discussion class (e.g. the e-WHA, the Discussion test, Discussion program…). Despite the extra time required to write comments, 89% (88/99) of the
students chose to express their ideas on a variety of Discussion class issues including: the e-WHA, the EDC program, their own English language abilities…

More specifically, in regards to the w-task, 52% (46/88) of the learners’ comments could be categorized as indicating that the w-task: Helped me to think more deeply about the topic and/or how to more effectively communicate my ideas in English. This is in contrast to 4 learners (5%) with the view that writing tasks are not necessary for English Discussion class. As for the e-task, 16% (14/88) commented that they had encountered one of several different types of computer/online related issues while completing the e-WHA (e.g. session timed out, lack of computer experience…). Overall, the comments seem to support the learners’ response to the survey questions, in that 52% provided favorable comments to the w-task, along with 61% of the learners strongly agreeing (“Yes!!”) that the w-task helped them to prepare for the F2F discussion test. Similarly, the majority of learners (86%) did not comment on having any significant difficulties in regards to the e-task which is also reflected in the findings presented in Tables 1 & 2 above. This consistency between learners’ comments and responses to the survey questions, may suggest that the learners were genuinely interested in providing useful feedback regarding the e-WHA task.

**DISCUSSION**

*Does it make sense to integrate an e-WHA (Asynchronous Task) into a F2F Discussion Class?*

To answer this question, three RQs were asked in order to isolate and measure the e-WHA in terms of the learners’ view of the computer/online aspects of the task (e-task), and their perception on the benefit of using a writing task in a F2F Discussion class (w-task).

The results show that a combined 76% of the learners found the e-task to be “easy” – “not very difficult”; with an additional 19% finding the computer generated assignment only marginally difficult (“A little difficult”). This combined total of 95%, along with 83% of learners selecting the minimum time-on-task response choice (15-30 minutes) suggests that the majority of learners did not encounter any significant difficulties with the e-task. Moreover, it might be reasonable to assume that for the second e-WHA scheduled later in the semester (Appendix A), most if not all learners would have moved up the e-task learning curve as no changes or additional steps were added. This finding is important in that it would not make sense to assign learners an asynchronous task if the computer/online aspects created an e-learning burden greater than that of the w-task itself.

Next, the findings for the w-task are of particular interest in that, even though the w-task was submitted to an undetermined “public audience” (the Discussion program website), and the learners did not receive any feedback based on their written work, 61% of the learners still strongly agreed (“Yes!!”) that the w-task helped them to prepare for their F2F Discussion test. In addition, another 34% of the learners reported that the w-task had some value (“Maybe a little”) indicating that 95% of the learners were able to connect (and value) the outside of class writing experience with the in-class F2F group Discussion experience. In other words, from a SLA perspective, the w-task may have provided learners with an opportunity to notice the L2 form/meaning gap between what they would like to say and what they could actually say in a F2F group discussion test. In essence, the w-task may have acted as an L2 productive “dress rehearsal” for their discussion test.

A third finding of interest is that, when the w-task (as a “Discussion test preparation tool”) was compared to the fully integrated RHA, both tasks resulted in very similar favorability gaps. More specifically, the range between the class(es) with the most/least favorable view of the two activities were very similar (.83 vs. .86 respectively). This finding may indicate that if
the Discussion program were to fully integrate the e-WHA as a permanent test preparation tool and/or use the e-WHA to “bootstrap” the activity into an on-going e-learning instructional activity, the learners might come to value the e-WHA activity as well as their weekly RHA.

Finally, from the broader perspective, 94% (99/105) of the learners were able to successfully complete the task without any in-class/teacher support, suggesting that both the e-task and the w-task were within the learners’ level and ability. As for the remaining 6% who did not complete the task, four reported that they simply forgot to do the assignment. Moreover, as can be seen in Appendices C & D, there were no significant differences noted, based on the learners’ language level and/or academic major. Any differences related to the e-task/w-task may more likely be due to individual learner preferences and/or experience with computers and writing in English. This finding may be viewed as indicating that adding an e-WHA task to the curriculum would not create any significant teaching/learning burden...but might actually provide for a useful (valued) English Discussion skills learning opportunity.

CONCLUSION
In the fast-paced learning environment of an intensive oral communicative discussion class, the idea that learners may need some individual processing time before they can adequately notice and acquire language features may be overlooked. And while there are no universally predetermined rules for creating materials that will be noticed for SLA by every learner every time, there is however, evidence from this research project that learners believe -It does make sense to integrate an asynchronous task into a F2F discussion curriculum– in order to enhance a focus on the form/meaning of the message that they want to be able to communicate in their group discussions. Furthermore, due to the asynchronous nature of the e-WHA, the learners’ submitted materials could easily be retained as a part of a learner e-portfolio and used by the learners to build upon and to provide self-directed feedback on their learning progress throughout the semester.

As for implementing an e-learning task/portfolio into the curriculum, the process could be facilitated by entering into a “joint venture” with the university’s freshmen e-learning program. This “joint venture” approach could further serve as the catalyst that not only interconnects the various freshman English programs, but also extends to the learners’ required academic classes (major course of study).

Finally, the next stage of this study will move from a focus on the learners’ perception of the e-WHA, to a contrastive analysis of their submitted written work with their assessed performance in the group discussion test.

REFERENCES

**APPENDICES A-E: Available upon Request**