Development of an Exemplar-based Writing Instruction Textbook for Teaching IELTS Writing

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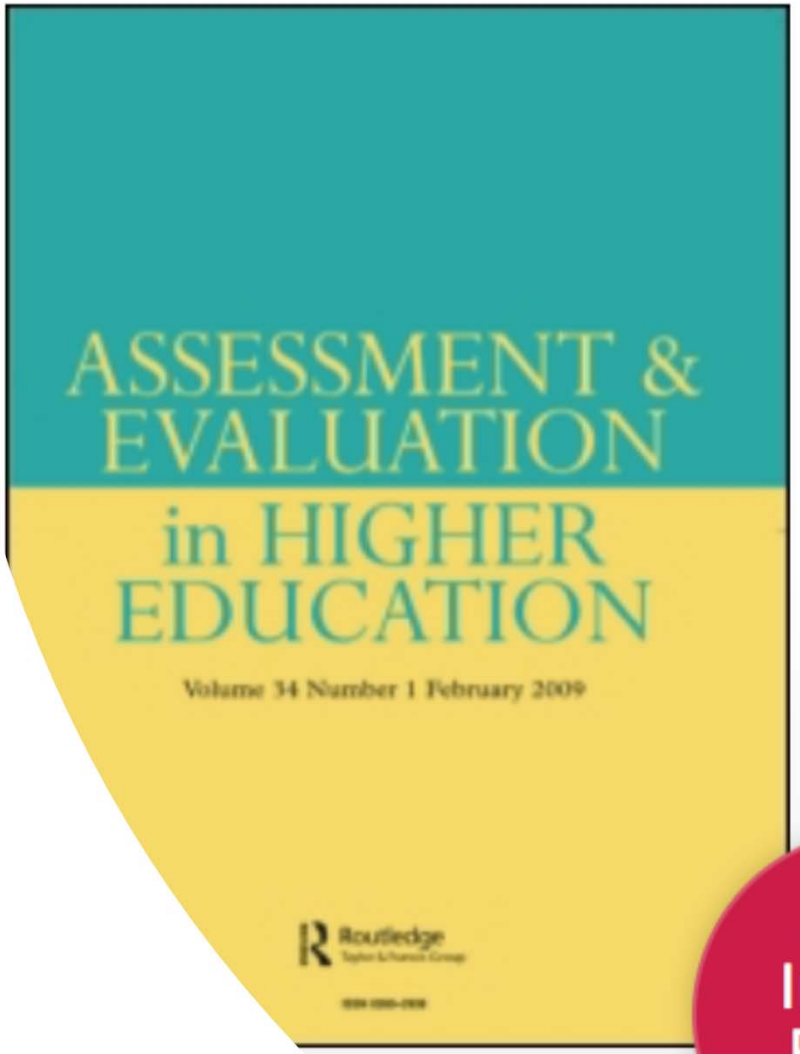
Forthcoming paper

Chong, S. W. (Oct, 2018). The use of exemplars in English writing classrooms: From theory to practice. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*.



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Rundown

- The role of writing exemplars in ESL writing instruction
- Exemplar-based instruction: Evidence from higher education research
- Theoretical underpinnings of exemplar-based instruction
- Progress report of an IELTS writing textbook (TDG project)

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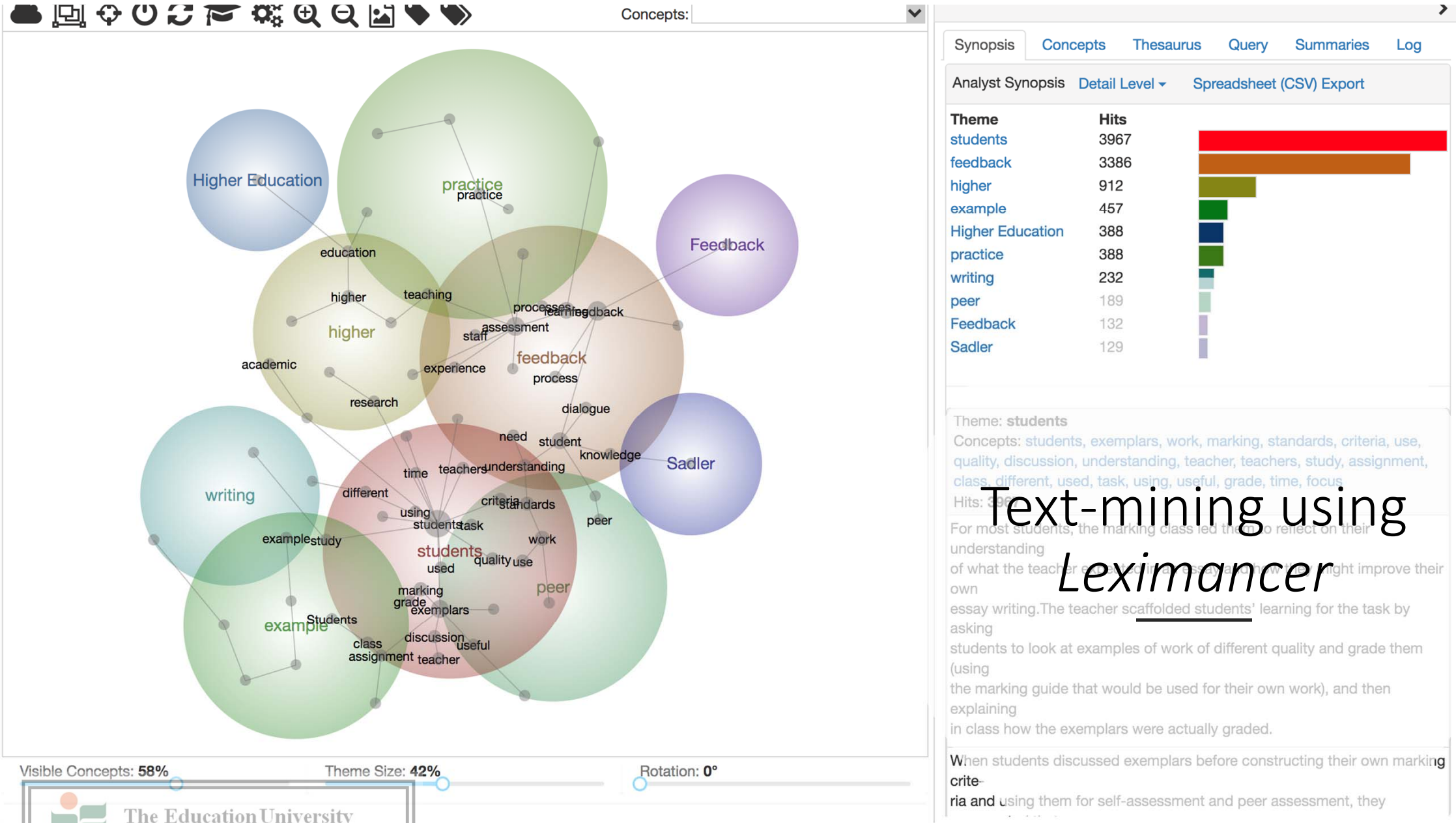

Text-mining using *Leximancer*

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Impetus for this project

While the use of exemplars in ESL writing instruction has been in place for a long time, how writing exemplars can be utilized to develop students' evaluative judgement of the quality of a text and understanding of assessment standards of high-stakes language tests (e.g. IELTS) has not been adequately researched and practiced.

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Definition of ‘exemplars’

- ‘Exemplars’ are defined as samples produced by students (and sometimes teachers) and used to ‘illustrate dimensions of quality’ (Carless, Chan, To, Lo, & Barrett, 2018, p. 108).

- The use of exemplars is regarded as one of the promising ways to develop students’ understanding of the ambiguous criteria of ‘good work’.

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The role of writing exemplars in ESL writing instruction

Product
- Exemplars are provided by the teacher or textbook which serve as sample texts on which students model their writing

Process
- Writing exemplars produced by students are used to facilitate peer review among students

Genre
- Exemplars are carefully chosen by teachers to illustrate the communicative functions of linguistic features in relation to the purpose, context, and target audience of a particular text-type

Hyland (2007); Wray & Lewis (1997); Young (1978)

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Four approaches of exemplar-based instruction		Pre-dialogue activity	Dialogic use of exemplars	Post-dialogue activity
The 'laissez faire' approach	Increase in student-centeredness	**Distribution of exemplars**	Nil (for motivated students, internal dialogue may take place; dialogue happens incidentally and informally)	Nil
The 'explicit' approach		**Inductive use of exemplars** Assessment standards and an exemplar are given to students to evaluate	Teacher-initiated, teacher-led dialogue on given exemplars	Teacher summarizes dialogic outcomes, highlights the diverse viewpoints of students, provides his/her understanding of the assessment standards by referring to the exemplars
The 'social constructivist' approach			Teacher-facilitated, student-led dialogue on given exemplars	
The 'community of practice' approach		**Scaffolded use of exemplars** Students are asked to complete a similar writing task before being given an exemplar	student-facilitated, student-led dialogue on given exemplars	

Carless et al. (2018); Hendry et al. (2016); Hounsell (2008); O'Donovan, Price, & Rust (2008); Sadler (2010)

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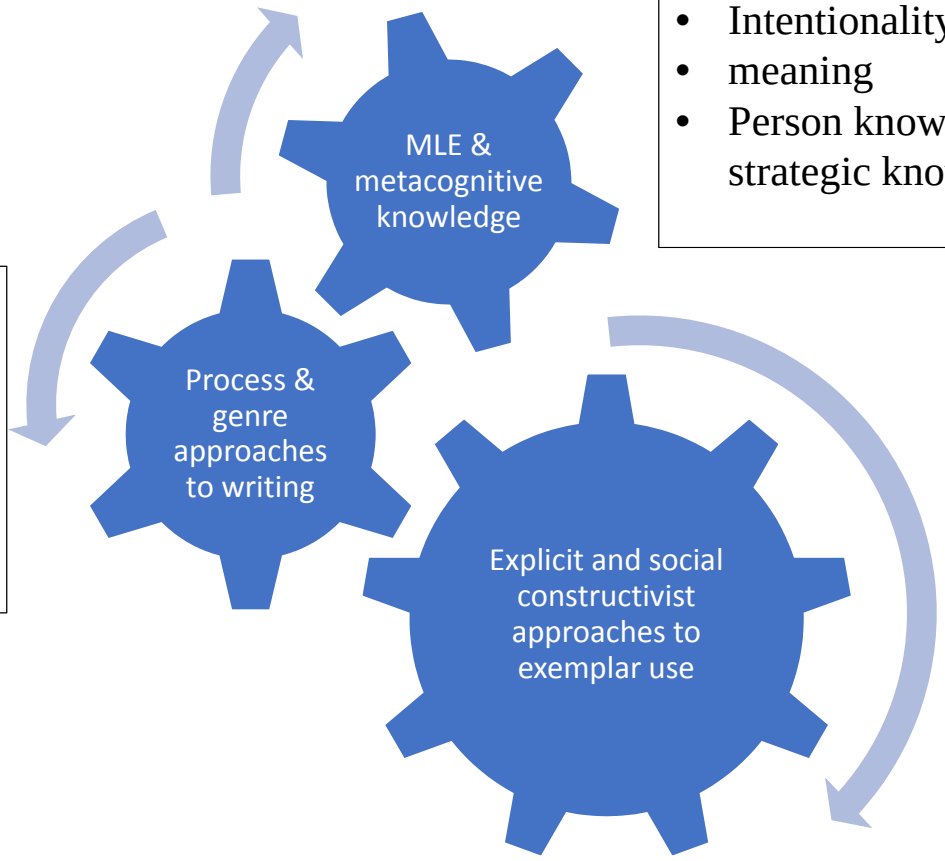
Theoretical underpinnings of the exemplar-based writing instruction textbook for IELTS writing



- Intentionality, reciprocity, transcendence,
- meaning
- Person knowledge, task knowledge, strategic knowledge

A balanced focus on:

- Language features
- Content development
- Organization
- Genre knowledge

- Inductive use of exemplars
- Scaffolded use of exemplars
- Dialogic use of exemplars

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Process & genre approaches to ESL writing instruction

Approach	Goals	Learners' role	Teachers' role	A typical teaching sequence
Process	• Students are exposed to the steps involved in drafting and redrafting of a piece of written work	• Produce, discuss, reflect on, and revise successive drafts of a text	• Facilitate students' discussions and reflections on drafts of a text • Give timely, formative and descriptive feedback for students to improve on their drafts • Focus equally on grammatical accuracy and content	1. Prewriting 2. Drafting (focus on coherence and quality of idea; peer assessment; formative feedback by T) 3. Editing (focus on language accuracy) 4. Publishing
Genre	• Students write in the target language appropriately (with reference to the context, purpose of writing, and audience) and effectively (focusing on communicative functions of specific linguistic features)	• Recognize how language, content, and contexts work hand in hand • Recognize how language is used to shape meaning	• Be explicit about communicative functions of grammar; grammar instruction is integrated into the analysis of texts and contexts rather than taught as a discrete component	1. T provides and explains a model text, focusing on the context, purpose, and audience of the model text 2. T highlights the linguistic features prevalent in the model text, focusing on form and function 3. Ss complete a writing question in the same genre

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Mediated learning experience (MLE)

- According to Vygotsky, 'mediation' entails that human activities and relationships are mediated by material and symbolic tools.
- Originally developed to account for differences in cognitive development of children, MLE suggests that human cognition is not static but can be developed through meaningful interaction and instruction (Presseisen, 1992).
- Recently, MLE has been utilized as 'an intervention approach intended to improve learning' in educational and L2 studies (Lee, 2014, p. 203).

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MLE and feedback

- Feuerstein, Rand, & Rynders (1988) suggest four criteria for interactions to be qualified as mediated learning interaction: (1) *intentionality*, (2) *reciprocity*, (3) *transcendence*, and (4) *meaning*. Lee (2014; 2017) explains these criteria in relation to teacher's feedback:

  - ***Intentionality*:** Feedback should be intentional in directing students' attention to particular areas (e.g. content, coherence, language) rather than giving feedback in an unfocused manner.
  - ***Reciprocity*:** Feedback should be interactional rather than unidirectional in which students play a passive role.
  - ***Transcendence*:** Feedback should facilitate 'feed-up' and 'feed-forward' in which students are able to transfer what they have gained from the feedback to their future writing tasks (Hattie & Timperley, 2007).
  - ***Meaning*:** Feedback should provide students with a clear understanding of their strengths and weaknesses in a piece of writing and actions that can be done to close the feedback loop.

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Metacognitive knowledge

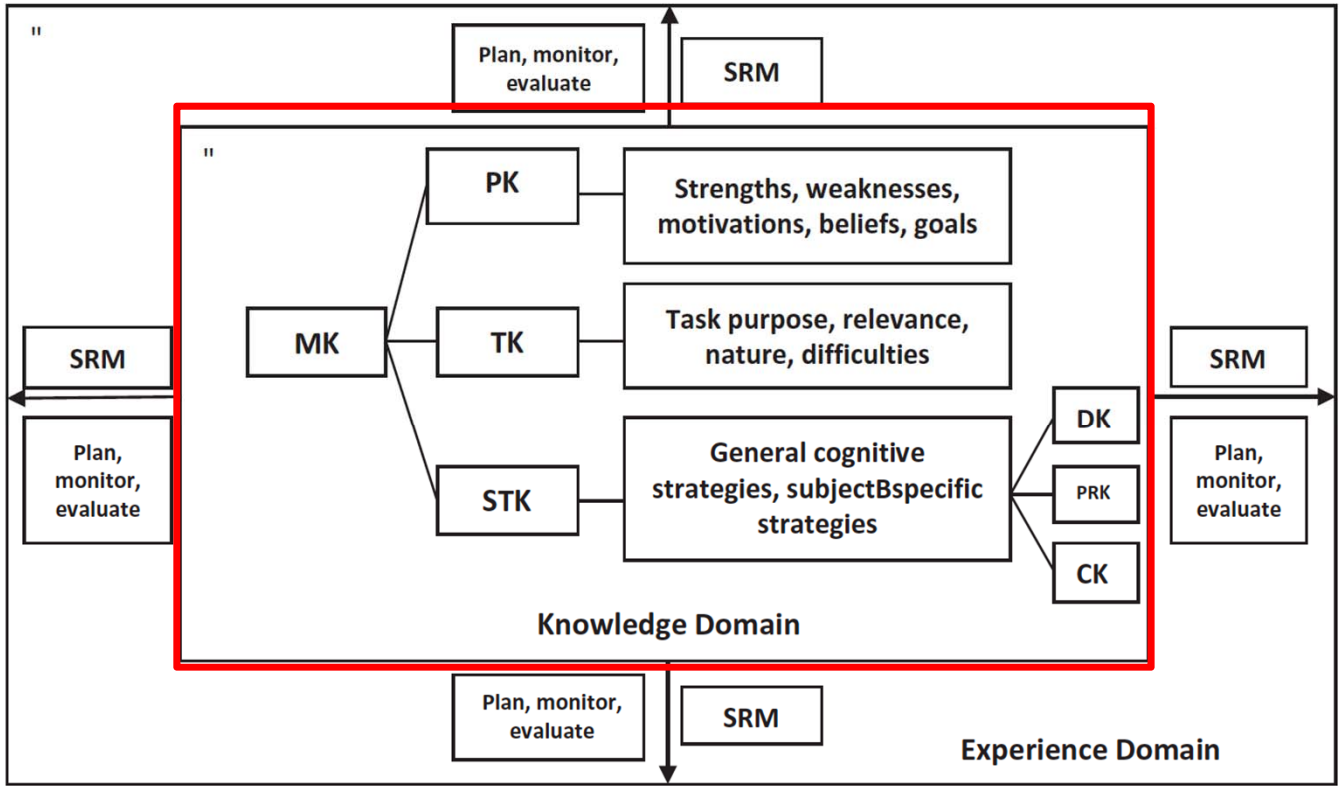

Figure 1. A conceptualization of metacognition.

Chong (2017, p. 6)

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Approaches to exemplar use

Approaches to using exemplars	Description
Inductive use of exemplars	• Students are involved in judging the quality of the exemplars by using a marking rubric provided by the teacher. Teachers then explain the assessment standards in relation to the rubric and the exemplars (Hendry, et al., 2016).
Scaffolded use of exemplars	• Students are involved in a pre-task (e.g. producing a part of a writing task reminiscent of the exemplar) before being introduced to high quality exemplars (Carless et al., 2018).
Dialogic use of exemplars	• Students' opinions are elicited and divergent viewpoints are encouraged (Carless, et al., 2018). • Students are encouraged to discuss their viewpoints with their classmates before teachers explicate the assessment standards (Hendry et al., 2016). • Students are asked to verbalize their judgements and provide suggestions for improving the exemplars (Sadler, 2010). • Students compare exemplars with their own work and reflect on their own performance through self-reflective questioning (Hounsell, 2008).

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Exemplar-based IELTS writing textbook (TDG project)

- With the support of a Teaching Development Grant at The Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK) (HK$327,000), a textbook is being written by the author and his colleague to prepare undergraduate students for the two tasks in IELTS writing examination (academic stream) (Task 1: data report and Task 2: essay).
- Several steps have been taken to ensure the effective adoption of research-informed, exemplar-based writing instruction in the textbook.
- Each content chapter in the textbook introduces students to one of the four assessment domains of IELTS writing (academic module) namely **task achievement**, **coherence and cohesion**, **lexical resource**, and **grammatical range and accuracy**, and facilitate students' understanding of these requirements through engaging them in tasks which analyze authentic exemplars written by university students.

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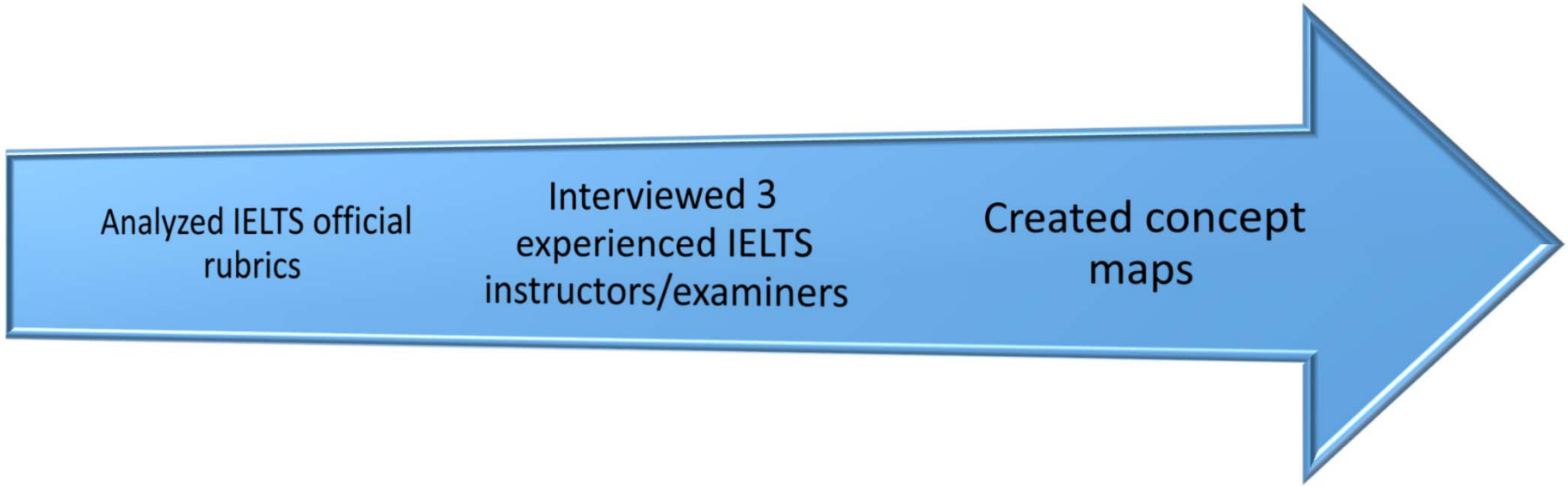
Report of progress (understanding assessment standards)



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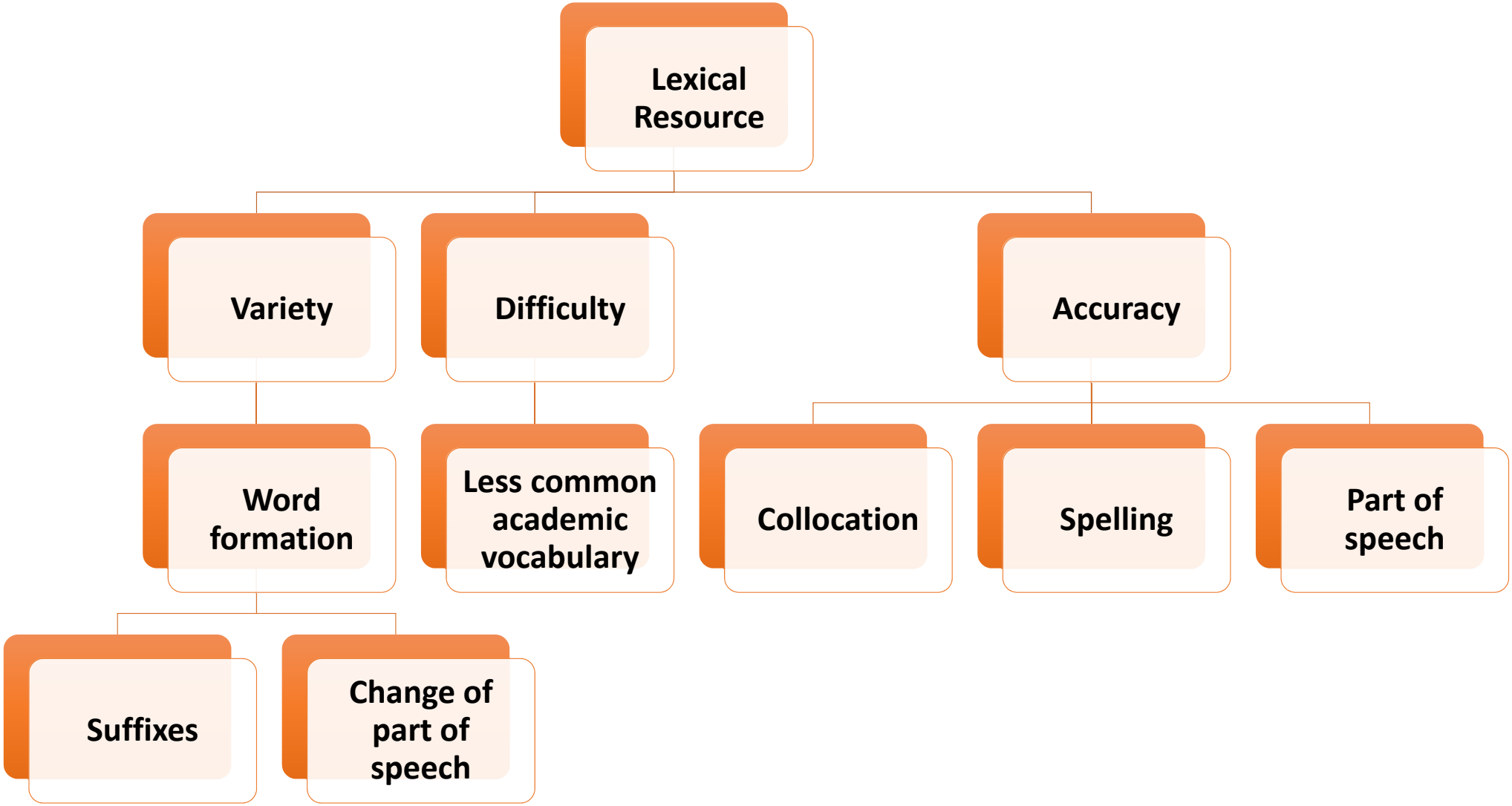

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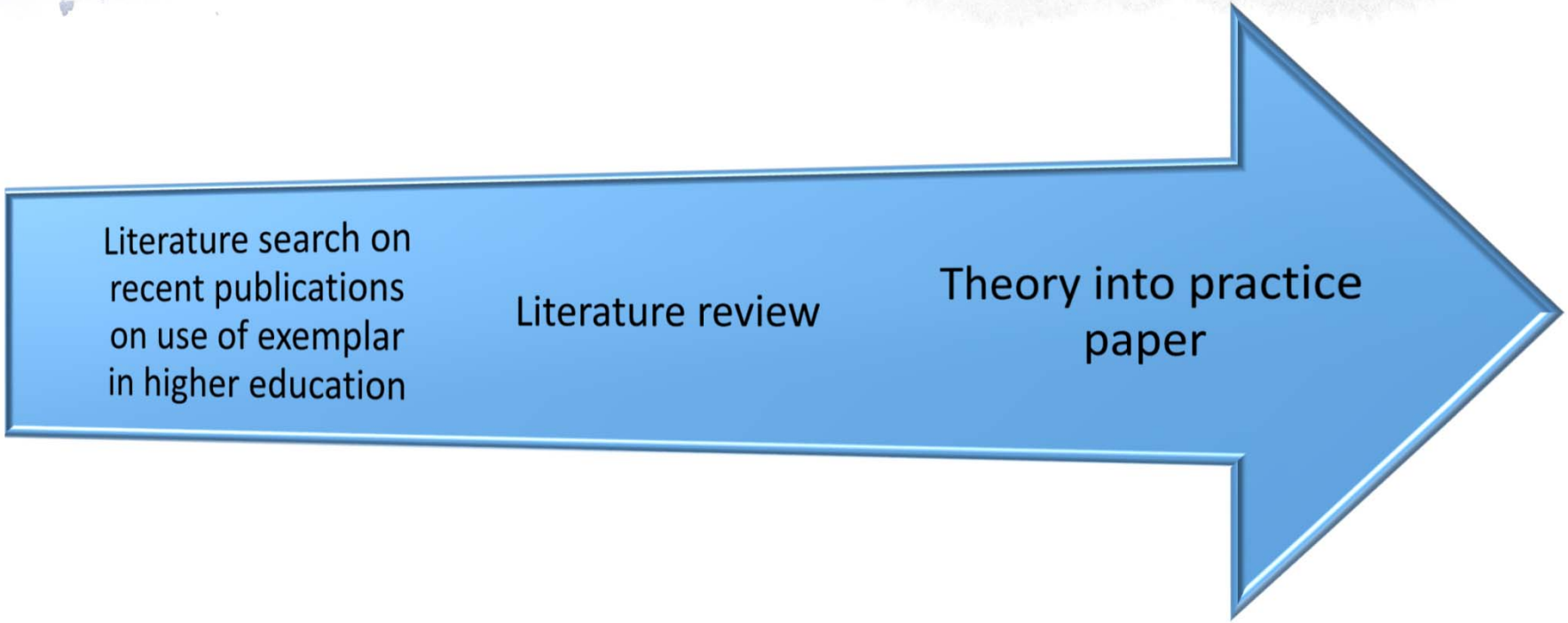
Report of progress (literature review)



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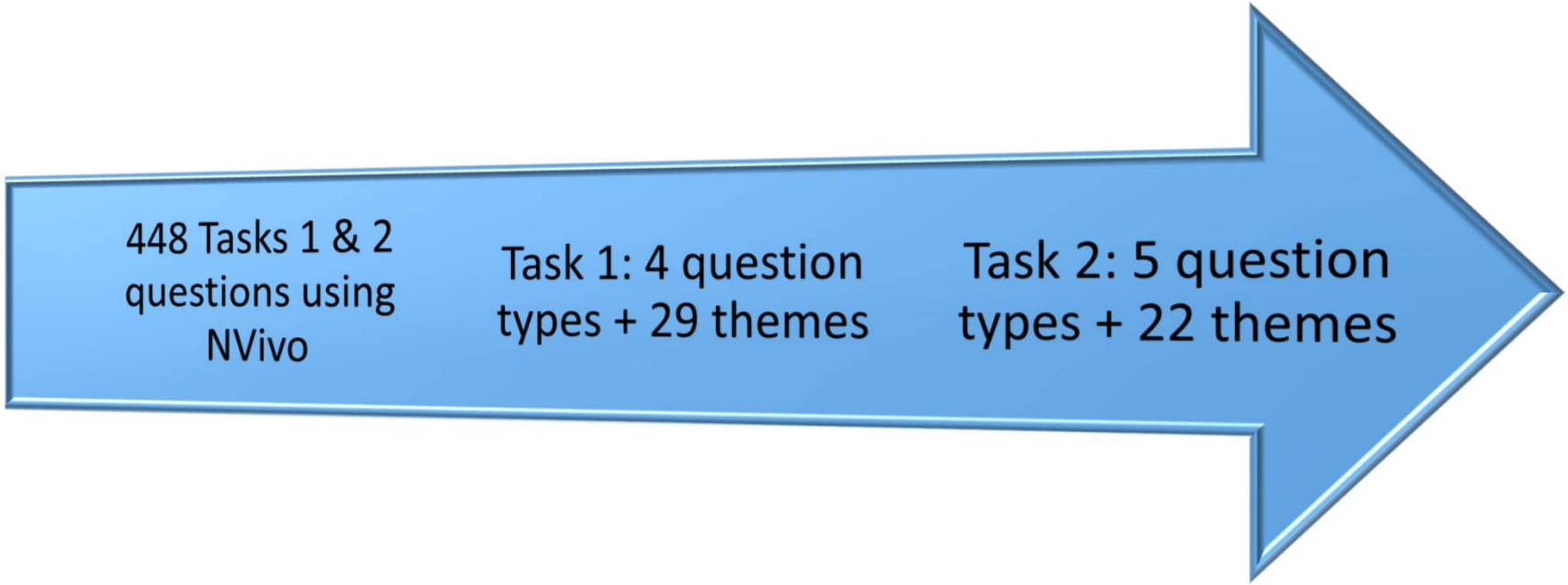
Report of progress (question analysis)



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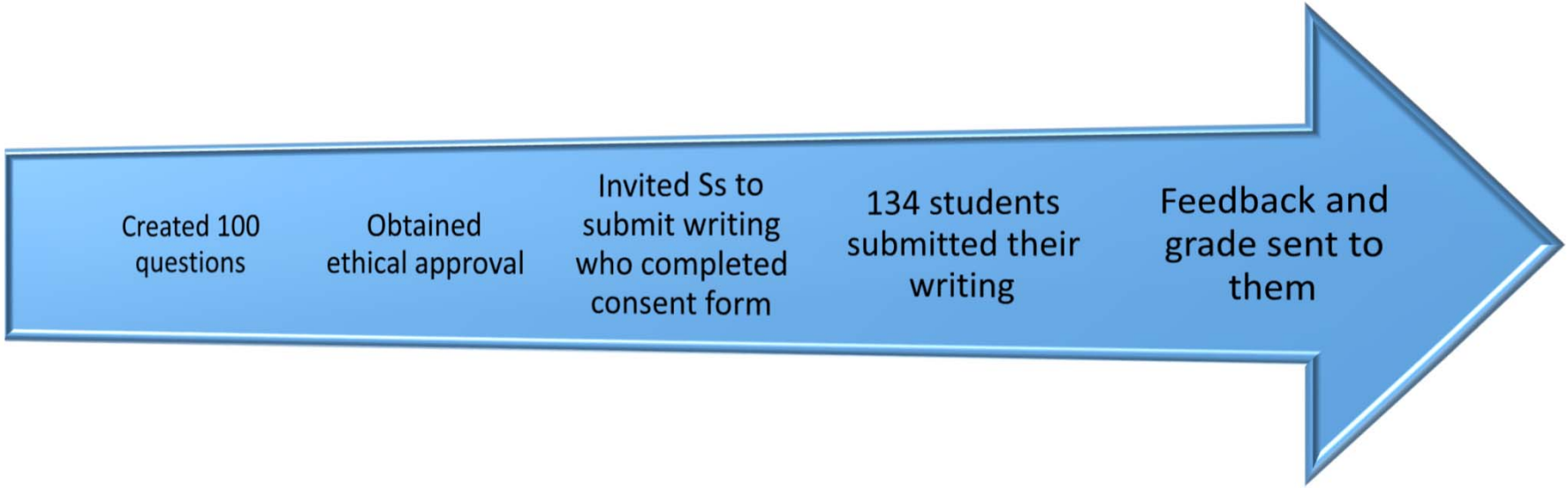
Report of progress (collection of exemplars)



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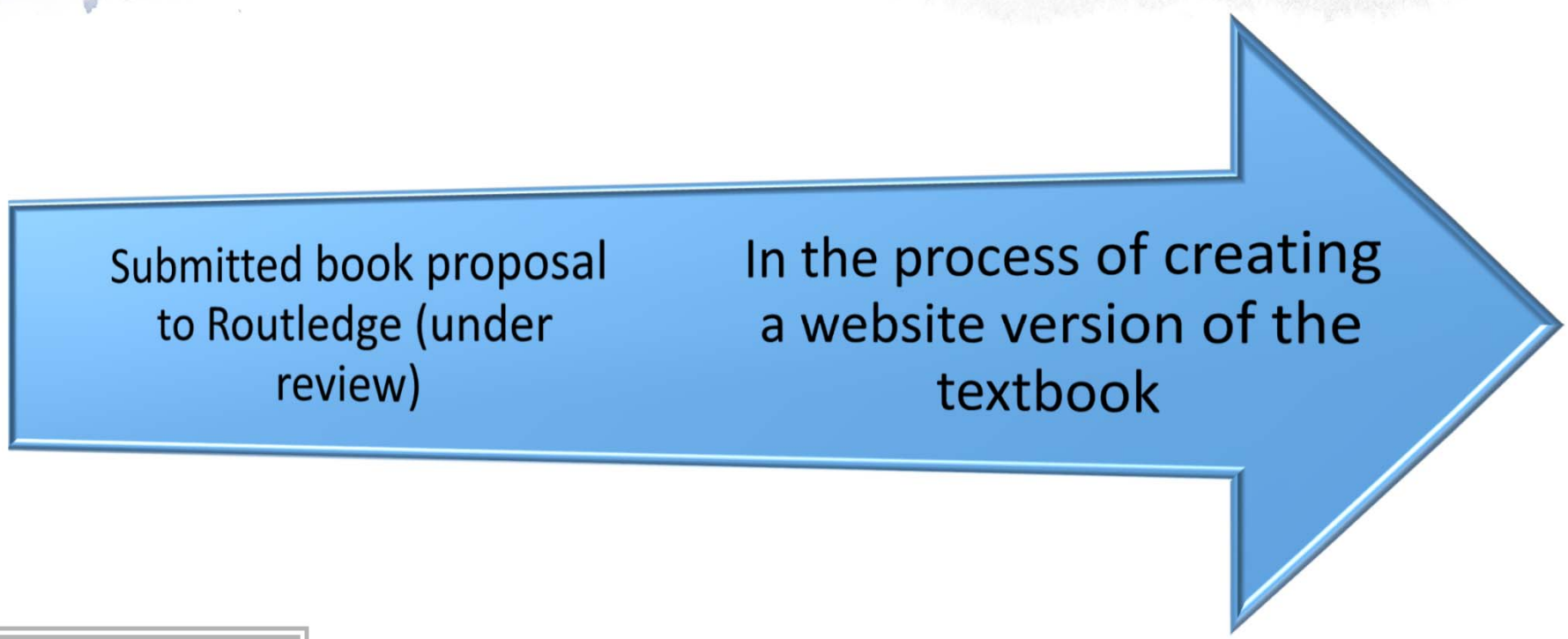
Report of progress (textbook development)



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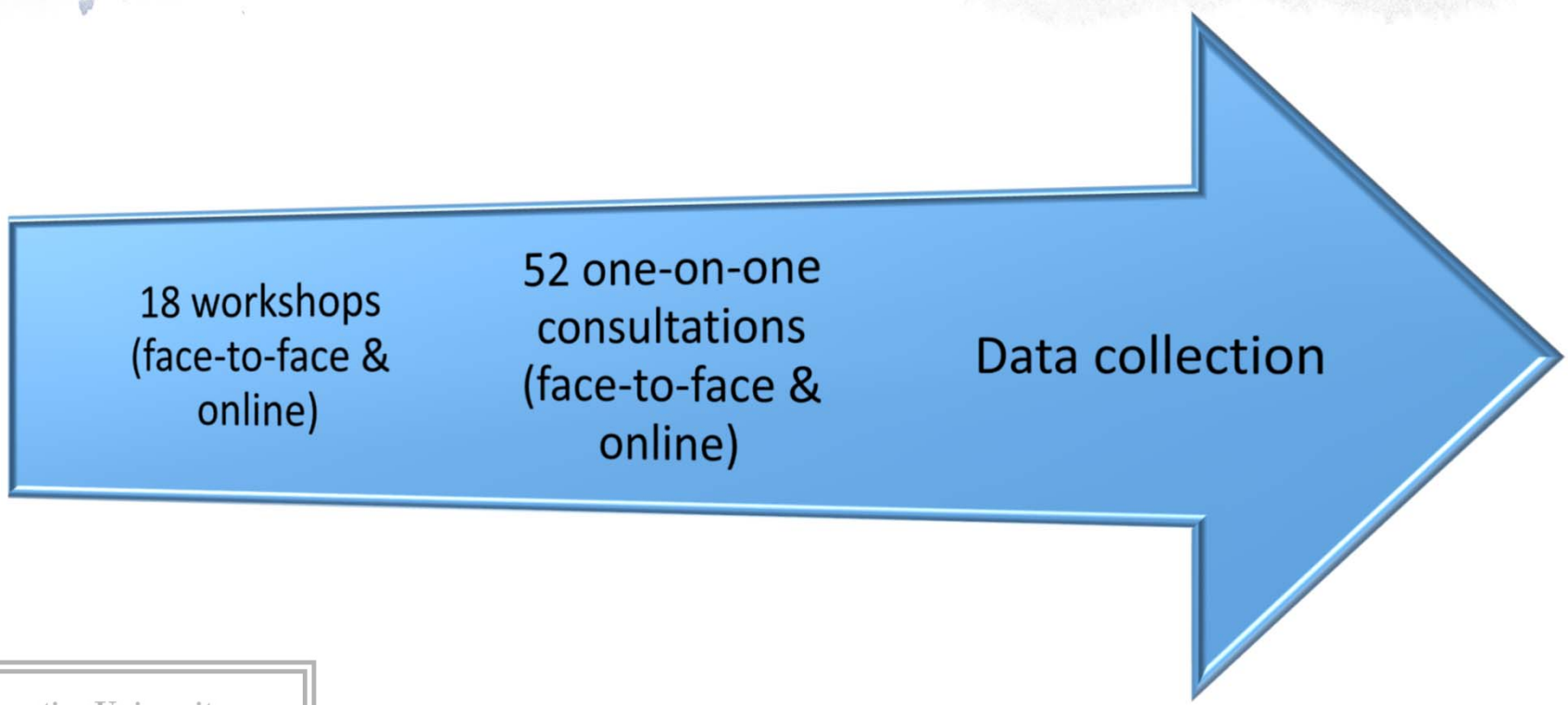
Report of progress (workshops and consultations – Oct & Nov 2018)



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Looking ahead

- Data collection (cont'd) – individual interviews, online open-ended questionnaire, transcription of observation data
- Analysis of data
- Write up another paper on students' perception of and effectiveness of use of exemplars in ESL writing
- Send out workshop participants' writing to an external rater
- Present a 60-minute workshop at Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) conference in December 2018

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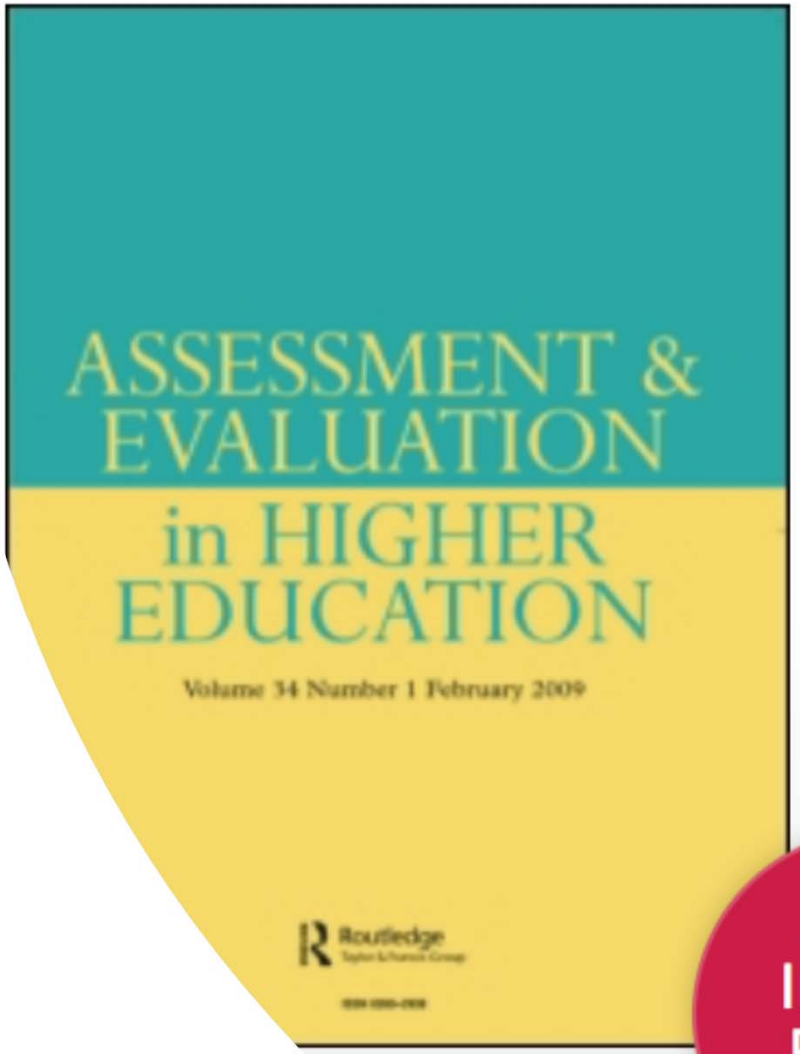

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