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A cross-disciplinary approach to embedding: A pedagogy for developing academic literacies

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Resulting from a major restructure of academic support at one Australian university, the lowering of English language entry requirements and the diversification of the Higher Education sector, there is substantial concern that the needs of students at this university are not adequately met. Existing research now recognizes the critical role that embedding academic literacies into the disciplines plays in addressing the demands of the tertiary environment. This paper reports on the expansion of the Unit Support Program (USP), an embedded, integrated and team taught initiative, from first to second and third years in three units across two disciplines. The focus is particularly on the nature of the collaborative process between discipline and academic language and literacy staff and considers the unique team teaching aspect of this cross-disciplinary approach to embedding as a model of best practice. It examines the methods of negotiating the shared teaching and learning space both in and out of the classroom, models collaborative practices, and identifies the associated benefits these provide to both students and academic staff.

Key Words: academic literacies, embedding, Unit Specific Model, Unit Support Program, team teaching, EALD.

1. Introduction

The implementation of the Australian Government's Higher Education (HE) reform agenda has resulted in a radical shift in the demographics of the student population (Department of Education & Training, 2015). With changes to entry requirements and the emergence of a variety of pathways, demands for access to HE have led to the diversification of the tertiary education sector (Dunworth & Briguglio, 2010). At the same time, international student numbers have risen sharply with close to 600,000 enrolments in Australian universities recorded in 2015 (Deloitte Access Economics & Australia, 2016). Hence, issues relating to English language and academic literacy have become significant matters for concern (Barthel, 2015). Wingate defines academic literacy as "the ability to communicate competently in an academic discourse community" (2015, p. 6), which, along with linguistic proficiency, involves an awareness of the epistemology of a discipline, the socio-cultural context and the norms that govern each discipline. The complexity of such demands explicates the inadequacy of teaching discrete "study skills" assumed to be transferable to any context (Durkin & Main, 2002). More appropriate, as Lea and Street (1998) have argued, is a pluralistic concept of 'literacies' that views the demands of the academic curriculum as involving a range of "communicative practices including genres, fields, and disciplines" (p. 158).

This paper presents a case study in which academic language and literacies development was embedded across the years in an undergraduate degree in two different disciplines, evolving into a wider program of academic socialisation and literacies development across the curriculum. Using a faculty-based approach, the current project adopts the academic literacies perspective

for understanding university practices and developing sound pedagogical approaches to learning. It is based on the premise that *all* students are apprentices in their academic disciplines, and thus require familiarity with the repertoire of literacy practices specific to each discipline. Essentially, the project aimed to make the expectations of academia explicit by embedding teaching and assessment practices within three units across each distinct year of an undergraduate degree program. The paper explores the nature of the collaborative process and argues that the unique team teaching aspect of the project represents sound pedagogy for inter-disciplinary teaching and learning, and is a model of best practice for first year units and beyond. In addition, it considers the methods for negotiating the mutually shared teaching and learning space where cross-disciplinary teams use their expertise to assist students to further their current understandings and knowledge in the discipline. Importantly, it models collaborative practices and demonstrates the related benefits to students and staff.

2. A focus on embedding

In view of the increasing evidence from discourse and genre analysis of the significant differences between disciplines both in writing and speaking (Dudley-Evans, 2001; Lea & Street, 1998, 2006: Wingate, 2006, 2015), it is now well-established that academic language and literacies are most effectively acquired if developmental opportunities for learners are integrated and embedded within specific disciplinary contexts. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR, 2009, p. 9) promotes "contextualisation within disciplines and the integration of …" academic language and literacies development across the curriculum, an approach which reflects the pluralistic nature of academic literacies and acknowledges differences in the epistemologies, purposes and values of various disciplines (Chanock, 2013). Epistemology, or the way knowledge is constructed, forms part of the "social practice" of each discipline (Jones, 2009, p. 93), generating particularly distinct rhetorical features of writing, such as text structures and language choices (Baik & Greig, 2009; Durkin & Main, 2002; Fang 2012). It follows, then, that discipline-specific literacies are most effectively taught when aligned with content within the discipline.

Embedding can be defined as the explicit development of students' academic language and literacies within the specific curriculum of the discipline (Chanock, 2012), where it becomes a crucial part of the unit rather than viewed as 'remedial' support for struggling students (Wingate, 2006). In the last 20 years, research into the benefits of embedding has expanded across the tertiary sector (see for example, Arkoudis, 2014; Baik & Greig, 2009; Barthel, 2008; Briguglio & Watson, 2014; Bury & Sheese, 2016; Maldoni, Kennelly & Davies, 2009; Kennelly, Maldoni & Davies, 2010; Maldoni, in press; McWilliams & Allan, 2014; Thies, 2012; Wingate, 2015), and the multiple benefits are well-documented in the literature. Embedding has shown positive learning outcomes for students in terms of improved participation, as measured by attendance in both literacy workshops and the discipline unit itself (Dunworth & Briguglio, 2010; Frohman, 2012; Kennelly & Tucker, 2012); student engagement and the learning experience (Beatty, Collins, & Buckingham, 2014; Fenton-Smith & Humphreys, 2015; Thies, Wallis, Turner, & Wishart, 2014); and student success, particularly with regard to grade improvements (Baik & Greig, 2009, Kennelly et al., 2010; Mort & Drury, 2012; Thies, 2012) and higher pass rates (Maldoni & Lear, 2016).

Other studies have shown that for international students, in particular, improvements in English language are likely to occur when language support is integrated with discipline-specific content and assessment tasks (Brooman-Jones, Cunningham, Hanna, & Wilson, 2011; Davies & Maldoni, 2004). In one study, Maldoni, Kennelly, and Davies (2009) found that international students who participated in a discipline-based reading program improved their proficiency in reading and writing, and their performance in the discipline in terms of higher academic results and pass rates as compared to the non-participating groups, along with measurable differences in greater understanding of discipline-specific content. Based on a compilation of previous research on embedding, Arkoudis and Kelly (2016) affirm "the literature is unequivocal that high impact student learning occurs when communication skills are integrated within disciplinary learning and assessment" (p. 4).

2.1. Models of embedding

Research has identified a range of effective approaches to embedding academic language and literacies into the curriculum. Models for embedding range on a continuum from adjunct, where workshops are delivered typically outside the unit; and integrated, where discipline-specific workshops are presented by literacy staff in the discipline itself at various points; to embedded, where the emphasis is on the relationship between literacy and academic staff who work in partnership to integrate literacy practices into assessment and curriculum (Jones, Bonnano, & Scouller, 2001). Harris and Ashton (2011) have extended this continuum to create the embedded and integrated model in which literacy staff devise contextualised workshops in collaboration with discipline staff, who may also take an active part in the teaching of the workshops. The Unit Specific Model (Kennelly et al., 2010) builds on the embedded and integrated model of Harris and Ashton (2011) by incorporating a team teaching element from Dudley-Evans' (2001) model of collaboration as a key feature to support the learning of both academic literacies and unit content simultaneously throughout the semester. The Unit Specific Program (USP) at the author's university, which is the focus of this article, is based upon this Unit Specific Model.

Thus, the Unit Specific Model can be described as an inter-disciplinary team-taught initiative where academic literacy staff not only work collaboratively with academics, but are also actively engaged in the teaching of the unit both as part of a regular weekly timetabled class, and outside class in preparing, delivering and reflecting on their own teaching and learning practices (Kennelly et al., 2009). Importantly, literacy and academic staff share mutual responsibility for the support of student learning, both in the discipline and for the development of academic literacies. In contrast to other models, the team teaching pedagogy is fundamental to the Unit Specific Model, which is sustained throughout the semester and is systematically incorporated into each workshop to enhance student learning (Maldoni & Lear, 2016). The milieu in which this collaboration occurs can be likened to Briguglio's (2014) concept of a 'third space', which she defines as "the point of intersection of both specialisations" (p. 27). In other words, it can be viewed as a mutual space where literacy staff and academics from diverse disciplines converge to explore teaching and learning ideas, and integrate expertise from different fields to construct new understandings that would mostly likely be unachievable in their own individual 'space'. As Bury and Sheese (2016) have emphasised, literacies involve mostly "tacit knowledge" (p. 4), which many academics in HE take for granted when teaching. Embedding the Unit Specific Model across disciplines has led to several modifications built into curriculum and assessment practices so as to make explicit the "subtle and partly hidden aspects of HE culture, discourse and practice at the disciplinary level" (Haggis, 2006, p. 11).

3. The current project

3.1. Institutional context

The University of Canberra, like other institutions, has increased its international enrolments at the same time as lowering its IELTS requirement. It has also rationalised support for students, replacing individual consultations and workshops with online study resources, drop-in sessions, Peer Assisted Learning Sessions (PALS) and 'student rovers' (e.g. Copeman & Keightley, 2014). Students are now encouraged to become independent, self-helping learners within the digital age. However, this neoliberal approach which shifts the responsibility for learning onto the individual (Olssen, 2006) underestimates the amount of support required by those most in need. Given the significant changes to the provision of learning support at UC, the current project of embedding is well placed to address the shortfall in academic literacies affecting the university today.

Embedding practices have been in progress at the University of Canberra College (UC College), which offers pathway programs for entry into the university, for the last thirteen years, and at the University of Canberra (UC) over the last decade. The project commenced with an *adjunct* model of support for international students, moving to a subsequent *embedded and integrated* paradigm, and currently, *the embedded, integrated and team taugh*t model, that is, the Unit Spe-

cific Model (see Maldoni & Lear, 2016). The Unit Support Program (USP) was introduced into several units at the UC, with the aim of enhancing the learning experiences of students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), and other students demonstrating insufficient academic language and literacies for success in first year university study. Thus far, the program has been embedded more than fifteen times in both undergraduate and postgraduate programs, with over 3500 students taking part in the project. It has had a significant impact not only on student learning, but also on student success and performance (Maldoni et al., 2009; Kennelly et al., 2010; Maldoni & Lear, 2016). Most recently, it has been expanded to units beyond the first year.

In Semester 2 of 2014, the USP was implemented in three units across two different disciplines: Introduction to Management (ITM), a first year unit with 525* students; Organisational Behaviour (OB), a second year unit with 220* students; and Contemporary Issues in Accounting (CIA), a third year unit with 160* students. The aim of the USP was to improve the academic language and literacies of all students across the years, while academic and literacy staff involved in the project also actively monitored and encouraged at risk students to attend in each of the three units. The following section shares the nature of the collaborative process, the pedagogical philosophy underlying the USP and its crucial role in supporting assessment.

4. The Unit Support Program (USP)

4.1. The process of integrating the Unit Support Program

The USP consisted of a one-hour workshop timetabled immediately after the lecture with the timing of the workshops anticipated to broaden participation in the program over the 12 teaching weeks of the semester. Although the program was in addition to the formal study program, it was nonetheless scheduled as a regular class which appeared on each student's UC online timetable. This was in keeping with findings in the literature which show that compulsory participation in embedded literacies interventions is likely to lead to increased interest in the program (McWilliams & Allan, 2014). The workshops paralleled weekly unit content as presented in each lecture and focused concurrently on imminent assessment tasks since they were immediately relevant to the needs of students and formed a fundamental component of the unit (Maldoni & Lear, 2016). Each workshop was facilitated by two teachers in each of the units: an academic literacies teacher and discipline expert, who was also a tutor in the unit in the same semester. The workshops were enhanced with the use of a weekly worksheet which concentrated on the development and teaching of academic literacies, and improved theoretical and applied understanding in the disciplines of management (1st and 2nd year) and accounting (3rd year).

4.2. Modelling cross-disciplinary collaboration

Cross-disciplinary collaboration was extensive with the project manager, USP staff, unit convenors and tutors involved in the project over the course of the semester. The implementation of the cross-disciplinary process was informed by Dudley-Evans' (2001) model of a collaboration: cooperation, collaboration and team teaching. The first level, cooperation, involves liaison with academic staff regarding information about course content, student and staff expectations, and the implementation of the project. Based on the success of developing the academic language and literacies of business students enrolled in a first year unit over a decade, there was "buy-in" (Thies et al., 2014) from the Faculty of Business, Government and Law (BGL), who acknowledged the USP as a faculty-based program, which formed an integral part of the targeted units. This was evident in the availability of funding assigned to the program and the support of academic staff who volunteered their units at 2nd and 3rd year levels to be included in the study. For the embedding process to develop successfully, the nature of the collaborative process necessitated a team approach and joint responsibility for improving student learning. Accordingly, initial USP team meetings focused on contextualising the program by describing the benefits of past successful embedding projects; the challenges for students in terms of developing content

* Number of students as at commencement of semester.

knowledge and academic literacies at each year level; and the rationale for adopting the Unit Specific Model, which advocates that academic literacies can be developed as part of the curricula. Although staff were generally supportive of the project, it was clear from the outset that many had little understanding of what 'academic literacies' entailed and much less about how to embed them within the curriculum.

The second level of Dudley Evans' (2001) model is collaboration, and consists of discipline and literacy staff working together outside the classroom to plan teaching and learning activities which would support concurrent learning in the unit. The workshop program was developed in partnership with unit convenors, and literacy and discipline tutors, who were responsible for teaching in the USP. Using Harper's (2011) academic literacy development framework as a starting point, discipline and literacy staff identified specific academic literacies relevant to the unit and discussed how students might develop these competencies within the curriculum. This was facilitated by mapping academic literacies primarily to learning outcomes, and subsequently linking them to the assessment tasks of each unit. In order to make the USP workshops transparent, academic literacies were incorporated into the schedule for each unit, so that the focus of each session could be easily identified (see sample of ITM USP program in Appendix 1). The program was made available to all students in the initial weeks of the semester and subsequently placed on each unit's Learning Management System (LMS) for ease of reference.

Given the expansion of the program in units beyond first year and the considerable number of staff participating in the project, another important phase in the collaborative process was the training of tutors involved in the USP. To ensure a consistent and structured approach to the workshops, training sessions explored the types of pedagogical approaches normally employed by tutors in the teaching of an identical task. The objective of the task was to encourage first year management students to identify meaningful connections between contemporary management practices in one reading and classical management theories from another. Interestingly, what emerged from these sessions was that this is not a conventional task in tutorials as it is often assumed that prior to each tutorial, students will have already fulfilled the requirements of the reading and importantly, made their own associations between the theories. While tutors viewed the task as relatively straightforward, it was illustrative of one way in which the USP attempts to incorporate the learning outcomes of the unit, namely to identify principal historical theories and current approaches to the study of management and draw meaningful connections between them, and in turn, make explicit the underlying academic literacies, which academics often take for granted (Bury & Sheese, 2016). In other words, the task laid the foundation upon which to develop students' critical thinking and analytical skills, and introduce them to the academic competencies required in all of their assessable items. Because academics often make incorrect assumptions about the capabilities of students and expect them to be able to employ an array of literacy practices required at any moment (Thies, 2012), the training session emphasised the importance of the explicit teaching of academic literacies, a fundamental role of the USP.

Cross-disciplinary collaboration also extended to the promotion of student participation and engagement in the program. In view of the inclusive and participatory nature of the project, a significant number of high achieving students became regular participants of the program because they wished to improve their performance. Nonetheless, using a whole of course approach (Thies et al., 2014), 'at risk' students, i.e. those considered to be at increased risk of failing the unit, were identified as potential students who might particularly benefit from the program. Identification of at risk students was facilitated by the use of a diagnostic writing task administered in the lecture to all students. These were assessed collaboratively by both discipline and literacy staff using a criterion based rubric focusing on vocabulary, sentence structure, organisation and content (see Maldoni, in press). Difficulties with the first two criteria were seen as pointers to challenges in passing the units. Furthermore, students were identified to attend through a tutor referral system based on poor performance in assessments and lack of engagement in tutorials during the semester. With a view to further integrating the two disciplines and motivating students to attend, unit tutors and convenors were also invited to participate in USP workshops when the focus was on preparation for major assessments. This served two purposes:

students recognized the noteworthy value of the workshops and came to see the USP as an integrated element, almost an extension of the unit, where they could work with their own tutors on a more personal level; and tutors expanded their knowledge of the role of the USP, reconsidered assumptions about their own teaching practices, and furthered their understanding of the curriculum development process.

The third level of Dudley-Evans' model, team teaching, where discipline and literacy staff co-teach in the same classroom, is argued to be the most fundamental aspect of the collaborative process (Maldoni & Lear, 2016). Although team teaching can be carried out in many ways, in this inter-disciplinary context, it is defined as two teachers co-teaching or pair-teaching in the same unit and in the same classroom (Liebel, Burden, & Heidal, 2017). The implementation of a team teaching approach sought to capitalise on the expertise of staff in disparate disciplines to enhance student learning, the development of academic literacies and success. As aforementioned, the team teaching pedagogy was central to the Unit Specific Model, and was a feature of all workshops in each unit throughout the semester. The collaborative relationship between literacy and discipline staff provided a vehicle for the simultaneous development of academic literacies and improved theoretical and applied understanding in the fields of management and accounting (Maldoni, in press). In each USP, although a clear distinction was made between the role of each teacher as *the content expert and the literacies expert*, both equally took responsibility for the teaching and learning process, and in turn supporting students to develop their understandings in the discipline. In terms of the workshops themselves, USP staff worked collaboratively prior to, during and after each session to plan and develop the sequencing of teaching and learning tasks around the weekly content and forthcoming assessments, which are represented in each weekly worksheet (see Appendix 2 for sample worksheet).

Before each workshop, teachers negotiate the shared teaching and learning space in numerous ways. Firstly, teachers decide on the learning objectives for each workshop, establish roles and carefully plan and allocate time and space for the implementation of the task. Although teachers may take distinct roles, both remain in close proximity to each other to establish equal partaking in the USP. By way of illustration, the literacy teacher might take a primary role in demonstrating the deconstruction of essay questions while the discipline teacher might focus on unpacking implicit elements of the question. Take, for example, this essay question:

> According to Warren Bennis, "Managing people is like herding cats and cats won't allow themselves to be herded". Do you think this is a helpful approach to management? Discuss how different management theorists might support or refute Bennis' view.

Here, the implication that students are expected to discuss *Macgregor's Theory X and Theory Y* in their essay is not immediately apparent. Thus, a primary purpose of the literacy teacher's role was to assist the discipline teacher to give more "attention to the nature of taken-for-granted processes in the discipline" (Bury & Sheese, 2016, p. 6), such as articulating implicit expectations in the analysis of an assignment question (Kift & Moody, 2009).

At other times, teachers share the teaching space equally and simultaneously. This is evident particularly when teachers discuss possible answers to questions posed by students, and debate the plausibility of different approaches to the response in the presence of the class. In this interaction, as teachers and students view the process by which disciplinary knowledge and practices are discussed, deliberated, and contested, then new types of understandings can begin to occur (cf. Haggis, 2006). At other times, discipline teachers focus on management or accounting theories with the literacy teacher taking on an "intermediary role" (Dudley-Evans, 2001), whose main function is to interpret, explain and elaborate on concepts on behalf of the content teacher, clarify issues, and make suggestions for further exploration. In this collaborative teaching space, the roles of both teachers are noticeably different and the responsibility for inducting students into the discipline is transferred from subject tutors who design and manage assessment regimes, to "agents" outside the discipline (Dudley-Evans, 2001, p. 227; Hunter & Tse, 2013). Feedback from students in the class in the form of approving facial expressions or the 'ah!' factor provides a strong indication that the literacy teacher has performed a critical mediating role between the discipline teacher and students. In this context, the USP becomes "a transformative

space where the potential for an expanded form of learning and the development of new knowledge are heightened" (Gutierrez, 2008, p. 5).

4.3. Pedagogical Principles of USP

The Unit Specific Model uses as its core foundation the view that learning takes place in social contexts by participation in active construction of discipline knowledge (Biggs & Tang, 2007), which is developed through teaching and learning tasks which are essentially learner-centred (Cassar, Funk, Hutchings, Henderson & Pancini, 2012). As academic literacies were mapped to the learning outcomes and subsequent assessment tasks of each unit, consideration was given as to how students might develop competencies in these as part of a staged process (Thies, 2012), which Harper (2011) categorises as *scaffolded, supported, guided, supervised or independent*.

Scaffolding is associated with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which makes it possible for students to accomplish tasks which are initially beyond their capability. Mariani's high challenge-high support model (1997) provides the basis upon which interactions between students and literacy staff could build students' literacy practices and facilitate the acquisition of disciplinary learning. While 'high-challenge' content was readily provided by academic staff, it was important to identify appropriate scaffolding strategies to facilitate the acquisition and application of theories in each unit. Building on Mariani's model, Hammond and Gibbons (2005) identify two kinds of scaffolding: designed-in and contingent scaffolding, both of which were drawn upon extensively in the USP workshops across all three units. The former occurs through the planned selection and sequencing of tasks within the context of a high-challenge task, whereas the latter is not planned; rather, it involves the "teachers' on-the-spot interactions with students" (Wilson & Devereux, 2014, p. A95).

To develop theoretical and applied understanding of the content in the disciplines, each workshop focused on developing curricula and teaching practices which fostered critical reading practices using a variety of genres as determined by the discipline teacher. Taking into account Wingate's (2011) view that critical-analytical reading is essential if students are to master the craft of academic writing, the USP sought to guide students through the reading of academic texts to ensure the successful completion of written assessment tasks. Academic staff, however, were rather surprised to learn that the USP had a strong focus on weekly readings. According to Haggis (2006), "students do not necessarily respond to the challenge of complex texts and ideas in the ways that it may be natural for academics to assume" (p. 8). In other words, it is not sufficient to presume that students will arrive at university prepared to read academic texts or that a similar approach to reading can be used across a variety of disciplines or genres (Chanock, 2012). Rather, students need to be shown explicitly how to identify theories; critically reflect and evaluate ideas and concepts in the reading; and apply critical analysis to solve real world problems.

In the USP workshops, 'designed-in' scaffolded tasks were organised around set reading in each discipline to help students make sense of the content (surface reading) and then critically apply key theories to case studies or other specified criteria (critical reading). In comparison to a tutorial whose main focus is to scaffold content (which normally leads to critical analysis), the USP teaching team aimed to scaffold literacies using text extracts from the prescribed reading related to the key concepts each week. To facilitate this process, texts are accompanied by specific tasks and instructions that are designed to help students identify main ideas in the text, and then draw out meanings and interpretations normally through group discussion. Below is an excerpt of a task taken from a first year ITM USP workshop in the early weeks of the semester.

> **1. Introduction to management: Quiz Preparation (Personal reflection)**
>
> From your own understanding, in groups discuss the following questions:
>
> 1. What is a manager?
> 2. What do managers do?
> 3. What is management?

> **2. The Contemporary workplace (Chapter 1 of text)**
> You will be given ONE role of management to read (Planning, Leading, Organising, Controlling) on page 21. In the table on the following page, take notes of the tasks performed by a manager under the role you have been assigned (individually). Then, share your notes with your group. Each member must note down the information given by other members in the table provided (group work). Be prepared to report back to the large group (whole class) and relate the tasks of a manager to section 1 above.

In designing this task, staff drew on the Scaffolding Literacy Cycle used by Rose, Lui-Chivizhe, and Smith (2003), which involves a three stage process: preparation through an orientation phase, identification and elaboration. The orientation phase (section 1) which involved familiarisation with the subject matter of the reading was particularly important because it served to prepare students for the weekly quiz, which was also the topic of the pre-diagnostic test administered in the lecture. Once students were acquainted with the content of the reading, they read and identified main ideas in the text, took notes within a given template and shared observations in a group setting similar to a jigsaw reading task which might be used in an EAP class (section 2). Finally, the elaboration stage included a feedback session with the entire class where teachers and students worked together to share notes highlighting discipline-specific language, and compare and interpret meanings which were further discussed. The task proved to be surprisingly more challenging than first expected as students seemed to become inundated with the vocabulary or irrelevant information which might detract from the task at hand. To compensate, using a 'contingent' scaffolded approach, the literacy teacher skillfully directed students to key academic terms used in the text, which in this case happened to be verbs which explained the tasks of a manager (such as *plan, organize, monitor* ...) and thus assisted students to answer the questions in section 1 and develop a more pragmatic appreciation of what a manager's job entails. The process of text deconstruction outlined above involved students interacting with the text through a sequence of stages initially to develop content knowledge, and subsequently to use these newly acquired insights into the discipline to critically analyse the key concepts through discussion, and finally in the pre-diagnostic writing task. This scaffolded approach recognises that basic skills like reading and writing are in essence "contextualized social practices" (Beatty et al., 2014, p. 11), which are essentially overlooked in tutorials because academics assume students already possess the relevant literacies needed to readily complete the task.

Interestingly, it was not only at first year that students needed scaffolded support for reading. One key learning outcome considered essential to have mastered by the end of a Bachelor of Accounting degree is "an awareness of and ability to critically analyse contemporary issues in accounting". Given that Contemporary Issues in Accounting (CIA) is a 3rd year unit, it could be assumed that students would be able to review and "evaluate information using criteria based on experience, expertise and literature" (Harper, 2011), but this did not appear to be the case. In lectures and tutorials, academics are often seen expounding the virtues of critical thinking in evaluating theories. While this expectation is a key learning outcome of units particularly beyond first year, in the USP we adopt "an apprenticeship model" (Bury et al., 2016) for acquiring knowledge of the discipline and understanding the "disciplinary ways of making meaning" (Fang 2012, p. 20). Using excerpts from the required reading as the basis for recording and responding (Harper, 2011) to information, USP students were required to define 'theory', compare historical notions of accounting, and then discuss different criteria for evaluating theory before they could be expected to critique accounting theory themselves (see excerpt from USP worksheet in Appendix 2). As Haggis (2006) puts it, this requires a process-oriented approach, which cannot be "delivered". It must be "described, discussed, compared, modelled and practised" (p. 532). Through observation, modelling, simulation, explanation, practice opportunities and feedback designed by teachers, students take an active role in their learning and in this case, begin to see and use the literacy practices in the field of accounting (Northedge, 2003).

4.4. Supporting assessment

Academic literacies development was also incorporated into all assessment tasks across the three units. These comprised multiple quizzes, a group presentation and critical reflection on the group development process, a research essay, a final exam and in the third year unit, a critical article review. Since a deliberate intention of the USP workshops was to assist students make sense of assessment tasks, a whole-of-unit approach (Kift & Moody, 2009) necessitated the establishment of a collaborative working group. USP staff worked closely with unit convenors to plan assessment tasks; discuss the underlying academic literacies implicit in the questions; access sample essays to gauge the quality of student work expected; and invite discipline lecturers, unit convenors, and tutors to attend and participate regularly in USP workshops. Through this process, it became apparent that the expectations of tutors were not the same, with differences evident in their interpretation of the questions, the content they expected students to include, and further, in the structural and stylistic features of the essay. Differing expectations about the essay were aired in the USP workshops through open forums, with different styles being compared and at times contested by the USP discipline teacher. To ensure information was consistent across all staff members, specific issues were raised in weekly USP staff meetings and clarified by the unit convenor, who either decided upon an agreed outcome or allowed the tutor to have a certain level of autonomy regarding assignment expectations, so long as these were communicated clearly to students before essay submission.

In terms of the academic essay in ITM and OB, scaffolded tasks were incorporated into four stages of the writing process: analysing and deconstructing the essay questions; academic research, particularly the process for selecting and evaluating information sources; synthesising information from multiple sources and incorporating these into students' own writing; and planning and drafting the essay. Each stage also involved a sub-set of tasks to support students in a learner-centred environment in developing academic language and literacy competencies required to successfully complete the assignment. These included navigating through a journal article; identifying relevant ideas from a variety of genres; using appropriate note-taking procedures; paraphrasing and summarising techniques; conventions of citations; preparation of essay outlines; and drafting the essay. Throughout this process, students were provided with guidance at each stage from discipline and literacy teachers, who provided discrete comments, according to their expertise. This feedback was incorporated into the next stage of the assessment. In point of fact, students were invited to bring a draft of their assignment to the workshop during submission week which also assisted to improve student learning (see USP program in Appendix 1).

4.5. Student perceptions of USP

Questionnaires exploring the perceptions and experiences of students in relation to the effectiveness of the Unit Support Program (see Appendix 3) attested to the project's benefits and were collected from a total of 168 students across the targeted units. Students who participated in USP were more likely to remain engaged with the unit all semester, achieve higher pass rates, and in first year, gain on average higher marks than the non-USP cohort (see Maldoni, in press for a more detailed discussion). Student engagement was measured by two means: regular attendance in the USP workshops, and participation outside class, through individual and small group appointments with USP teachers, email communication and via the LMS. For the purposes of this paper, comments on the team-teaching approach are of particular interest.

Feedback from all the units on the efficacy of the USP workshop design, delivery and format was overwhelmingly positive. Indeed, the team teaching aspect of the workshops was fundamental to the pedagogical approach used to engage students in their learning. One student commented that it was *"good having multiple teachers"* because each had *"different ways to approach a topic."* The implementation of the team teaching approach integrated the expertise of two teachers from different fields to construct new understandings and this was reflected in this comment: *"two teachers provided two different professional perspectives on the subjects."* In fact, one student observed the different roles USP teachers assumed in the workshops differentiating between the *content* and *literacies expert* with this comment: *"They work together ex-*

tremely well, one is very good at theory and the other is really good with connected with students," highlighting the strengths each teacher brings to the teaching and learning environment. Others remarked on the intermediary role assumed by the literacies teacher, who intended to clarify and possibly compensate for observed gaps in the communication of content knowledge with *"one teacher does not provide enough points, another teacher can add"* and *"the second teacher was always able to answer questions and help more students."* This resulted in over half of the student cohort (58%) affirming the USP had *always* assisted in understanding content theories and concepts, while close to three quarters (71%) believed the USP had *always* supported them in their development of academic literacies as compared with *sometimes*. Given the discipline-specific context, students also remarked that the USP played a pivotal role in assisting them to acquire a deeper understanding of discipline-specific theories and concepts, and unpack the content of each lecture. For example, students' comments included: *"It is more like a review to what had been studied in the [lecture]"* and *"it help me understand deeply some problems that I do not understand in the lectures" and "to gain a better understand of the management concepts and theories".* Moreover, many students sought specific supports for assessment tasks to *"achieve a better grade"* and succeed in the units. The workshops were thought to be *"a way to improve my grade"* and *"to help pass the unit",* and clarify the requirements of assessment tasks.

4.6. Staff perceptions of USP

Responses were also obtained from academic and literacy staff members involved in the teaching of the USP through written questionnaires and a follow up focus group interview. Staff were given the opportunity to reflect on the impact of the workshops in terms of their own professional development as academics in the new HE environment. Responses revealed that participation in the program resulted in a multitude of perceived benefits for staff. Firstly, tutors increased their understanding of the value of the USP and more importantly, their role in it. One teacher remarked that her *"initial assumptions about the USP were that it was a program directed at non-English speaking students, not dissimilar to a university academic skills centre."* Having taught in the USP program for the last four semesters, her view is vastly different so that she now describes it as *"much more than a supplementary academic skills program. The collaboration of a discipline tutor and an academic skills tutor produce a powerful source of learning for all students, seeking to develop their understanding of the relevant discipline, and approach the unit assessment (and equally, other university tasks) with greater confidence."*

Others had deepened their appreciation of the role and nature of language in disciplinary learning, with one tutor having observed that she *"is much more aware of the difference between [students'] linguistic skills and their actual knowledge."* As a result, she now adjusts her teaching practice for EALD students particularly when introducing *"new content-specific language."* There was also recognition among tutors that the problems EALD students have often relate to language, especially with comprehension, which includes difficulty in understanding assessment tasks along with the broader unit concepts. Consequently, staff gained new insights into the academic language and literacy issues both domestic and international students might experience, and lessened their expectations of what students *should* know. It became apparent to one tutor *"how little students can engage with material. You think someone has read a page and they understand. What USP showed is many students can read the words but [not] have understanding and they are also unwilling to say they don't understand. USP created a safe space (smaller groups) to be able to interrogate the materials and engage with ideas."* Similarly, another USP tutor *"developed an appreciation for the use of clear and structured communication to meaningfully engage students, and … the impact of [investing] time in explaining a concept thoroughly."*

Additionally, regular staff meetings ensured a whole of course approach, and were particularly beneficial in making tacit knowledge about the features of student writing and the discourse features of texts, for example, more explicit (Wingate, 2011). One teacher noted the importance of sharing and establishing *"new ideas and techniques"* among colleagues in a collaborative environment since *"many academics have no professional teacher training"* within universities. In this context, teachers could also reconsider assumptions about their own teaching practices and

not only reflect on how to transform student learning in ways they might not have considered before, but also "interrogate and change [their] own practices," (Harvey, Russell-Mundine, & Hoving, 2016, p. A104). For example, one tutor was so *"impressed"* by a scaffolded task designed to prepare students for the forthcoming group presentation, that she has now *"adopted this presentation activity in [her] own teaching practice."* Others have implemented resources, such as *"sample essay structures"* from the weekly worksheets (see Appendix 2 for a sample) into their own tutorials and elsewhere *"because they are very well designed with many hints on what a good essay should be like"*. Academic staff also reflected on instances when teachers exchanged and discussed discipline-specific ideas and theories in front of learners. As Goetz (2000) found, this has numerous benefits for both students and teachers, including deeper learning for the students, and "raised awareness among faculty-based academic staff" (Purser et al., 2008, p. 6) of how the nature of discourse is transferred into the written ability of students within their discipline. As the ITM USP tutor put it, *"my professional development is undoubtedly enriched. The opportunity to work with, and observe the practices of an academic skills tutor could be characterised as a form of indirect training, whereby university tutors discover tools to improve their own approaches to teaching."* Finally, the CIA lecturer from the third unit, not directly part of the USP teaching team, but very much integrated in the planning, delivery and evaluation of each weekly workshop offered his perspective on the benefits of the program for both staff and students:

> *This is a crucial programme. The basic challenge is to create a learning environment driven by passion for development and betterment. This runs counter to the traditional passivity of accounting students. For me, the fact that students attested to the usefulness of the USP is testament to its success. I credit the USP teaching team for their hard work and enthusiasm. For me, USP is a crucial development initiative that should be at every level from Year 1 to Year 3 … For those passionate about their students, the time commitment and planning that comes from the USP process is an important investment.*

5. Considerations for the future

In planning to extend the USP approach in future, we will need to invest more time both in working with tutors, and in understanding students' needs beyond their first year. While the collaboration developed in the USP is crucial to its success, there is scope for extending this further. The creation of effective partnerships enabled production of adaptable resources which could be embedded in a range of units to support the development of academic literacies; the exchange of ideas around issues or shared problems; and the encapsulation of multiple meanings and perspectives on the nature of language and its role in discipline learning, all of which may result in significant changes in the pedagogy and practices of teachers from different domains. As ALL staff have found in embedding projects elsewhere, there was a sense that, "the faculty academic … now talks as we do, and assumes literacy teaching and resource development as part of their regular work" (Purser et al., 2008, p. 6). Such an endeavour requires additional time for staff consultation and development measures during the program, which could be better facilitated by informing and preparing tutors to better understand the purpose of the USP, the program goals and philosophies, including the role of each participant in the USP workshops.

The USP was an ambitious project as it was the first initiative of its kind that was expanded across second and third year units. The author was aware of the benefits of supporting students in the first year, but had little experience with overseeing the USP for students beyond first year. The fact that a considerable number of students in the third year unit had not by this time grasped higher order academic literacies in relation to critical and analytical reading, research and writing was an unexpected finding that could potentially signal a shortfall in foundation academic and learning support across a range of skills which are normally commensurate with first year support. Although researchers have begun to document the incremental skills needed across the year levels and how they might best be scaffolded across a degree program (Harper,

2011), further research in this area is needed to explore the academic literacy issues in units beyond first year. This research suggests a strong interest and an appeal for embedding practices, such as the USP among 2nd and 3rd year students, which should not be overlooked. Indeed, the willingness of students in this study to go beyond first year to engage ardently in the USP workshops suggests the tertiary sector may need to consider a reconceptualization of the types of support available and to whom that support is directed.

6. Conclusion

Embedding content, literacies and academic skills within disciplinary learning, teaching and assessment demonstrates sound pedagogic shifts in teaching and learning in HE. While there are differing models of embedding, this paper advocates an *embedded, integrated and team taught* approach. The Unit Support Program (USP) described in this study aimed to make the expectations of academia explicit to students by embedding the development of academic literacies into teaching and assessment practices across three units of an undergraduate degree program. The positive perceptions of staff and students demonstrated in the evaluations, as well as their enhanced performance (see Maldoni, in press), suggest the USP was successful in achieving this objective and subsequently appeared to have an impact on student engagement, the development of academic literacies and success in the unit as perceived by students. Although at the outset, team teaching inherently requires more time and necessitates more compromises than other educational approaches (Liebel et al., 2017), the advantages to both educators and students appear to make team teaching a worthwhile endeavour. The collaborative, inter-disciplinary approach to teaching and learning, which was reflected in the design of learning tasks, resources and assessment processes, and based on analysis of contextually-specific literacy demands, offers a model of best practice for improving outcomes for students, and represents a sustainable model which would "ensure incremental building of students' familiarity of discourse communities" (Bury & Sheese, 2016, p. 3) in each discipline throughout a degree program.

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Appendix 1. Sample Unit Support Program (ITM, First year unit)

Week	**Lecture Topic**	**Chapters** *Schermerhorn et al. (Text)*	**USP Workshop Activities**
1	*The new workplace and management*		No USP class
2	*Managing and the manager's role* *Historical foundations of management*	1 & 2	Introduction to USP and teaching staff. Student introductions and shared expectations. Preparation for quiz- *What do you know about management?* Navigating your way around the text book. Introduction to critical reading and concept mapping.
3	*Management Environment: International dimensions of management.*	3 & 4	Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ): Strategies for approaching the '10 in 10' quiz *(Assessment 1)* Reading skills: skimming, scanning, note-taking & applying historical theories of Scientific Management to modern day management.

Week	Lecture Topic	Chapters	USP Workshop Activities
4	*Ethical and Social Responsibility*	5	Understanding the requirements of the group presentation and critical reflection *(Assessment 2)*: Strategies for successful group presentations Practice: *Mini toastmasters using management concepts* Structuring the presentation and critical reflection: suggested structure; analysing a sample answer (sample provided) Familiarisation with the assessment criteria. Strategies for understanding academic sentence structure: complex sentences (main and subordinate ideas)
5	*Information and Decision-Making Theories*	6	Understanding the requirements of the essay *(Assessment 3):* analysing and deconstructing the essay questions. Starting research: *locating references to essay questions using the text book.* Making a preliminary plan Steps to locating a journal article or scholarly text – 3 different strategies *(Library databases, UCan Search or specific journal).* Selecting and evaluating information sources.
6	*Planning and strategic management*	7 & 8	Features of journal articles & navigating your way through your own article (supplied by student): Reading and integrating academic sources into the essay – sample note taking template; using quotations, paraphrasing & summarising techniques Planning & drafting the essay – generating an effective thesis; role of introduction & conclusion; organizing body of the essay; essay template (sample essay outline) Understanding and applying the essay assessment criteria. Analysing poor and high scoring essays – focus on presenting and discussing findings from empirical studies.
7	*Organising*	9	General discussion - Issues on essay preparation and sources of guidance on essay writing Referencing conventions – techniques, academic integrity and plagiarism; analysing in-text references in a paragraph and reference list. Editing your essay: Bring along a current draft of your essay & receive advice on content and structure. Using an essay checklist for proofreading *Essay due 25 September 2014 at 5:00pm uploaded onto Moodle*
8			Class-free period
9	*Controlling*	10	Critical reflection and group problem solving task using management theory Critical reading - integration and application of theory using note-taking template. Responding to questions from specific task – following written instructions and interpreting questions *Essay results due back* – Evaluation of essay feedback
10	*Human Resource Management*	11	Introduction to exam - structure and requirements *(Assessment 4) – what will be assessed?* Case Studies – what are they and why do we use them in the assessment process? Case study analysis (1): Strategies for reading case study - highlighting key words/phrases; identifying relevant management theories, and unpacking theoretical content.

Week	Lecture Topic	Chapters	USP Workshop Activities
11	*Leading, Leading and Managing change*	12 & 15	Case study analysis (2): Process for analysing a case study - applying management theories to the case study and structuring an answer (template provided) Group practice exam task - Writing an answer to the case study question within a given template; sharing ideas and getting feedback.
12	*Motivation and Rewards*	13 & 14	Case study analysis (3): Writing an individual answer to the case study question (sample answer provided). Using the exam assessment criteria to critique and assess a model answer to exam question. Suggested structure for answering exam question (template provided).
13	*Unit review* *Exam information*	Review	** Bring exam case study (from Moodle) annotated and ready for exam preparation**.** Familiarisation with exam case study Case study analysis (4): Group work - application of theories to case related to key content areas; using concept mapping to record and group ideas together; sharing analysis with the class; preparing sample answers for exam. Tips and traps for exam preparation: before the exam; exam checklist; during the exam.

Appendix 2. Sample USP Worksheet (CIA, 3rd year unit).

Session 1 Contemporary Issues in Accounting Unit Support Program

Learning Objectives:

- Define 'theory' and track common theories in financial accounting
- Identify criteria to evaluate accounting theories
- Use paraphrasing and summarising techniques

1. Strategies for paraphrasing and summarising.

Try the following strategies when you use information from other sources and make sufficient changes to the phrasing without changing the meaning of the original text.

- Don't change common nouns.
- Use appropriate synonyms to replace adjectives, verbs, adverbs, transitions (and nouns).
- Change the word form. *For example, advance – advancement*.
- Change the sentence structure. *For example, the length, complexity, word order.*
- Change active to passive or passive to active. *For example, Accountants believe – it is believed*
- Use transitions, signals or signposting to improve coherence.
- Check that the paraphrase matches the original text.
- Maintain academic integrity.

2. Defining 'theory'.

Read pages 3-4 of your textbook, and from your own understanding define what we mean by a 'theory'. (Remember to use the strategies above and include a reference if you paraphrase from the textbook or another source).

3. An overview of theories in accounting.

The table below outlines general classifications of accounting theories. You will be given one session to read pages 8-13. Takes notes and then share your notes with your group to complete the table.

Year(s)	Period	Process	Example
1920-1960			
	Deductive reasoning		
		Deductive reasoning and prescriptions or suggestions for improvement	
1970s			Positive Accounting Theory

4. Group Discussion

In your groups, refer to Figure 1.1 on page 25 of your textbook and discuss the different criteria you might use to evaluate a theory as being suitable to use in research. Take notes below as necessary.

Criterion 1: _____

Criterion 2: _____

Criterion 3: _____

Criterion 4: _____

Criterion 5: _____

Appendix 3. Student Questionnaire (End-of-semester sample)

Your responses are anonymous and will be treated in confidence.

Below is a summary of the responses to the questionnaires across the three units. Note that the data may vary significantly for some questions when the units are analysed individually.

1. Are you a second language student? YES [63%] / NO [37%]
2. Was your involvement with USP ever recommended by your tutor?

   If yes, why? [66%]

   If no, did you come to USP voluntarily? Why? [33%]
3. a. Is this the first USP you have attended? YES [21%] / NO [79%]

   b. If yes, why did you attend only this week?

   Students who attended the workshop for the first time in the final week cited exam preparation as the reason for attendance.

If this is the first USP you have attended, you do NOT need to answer any more questions.

4. How many USP classes did you attend?

   a. 1- 4 [56%] b. 5 - 9 [21%] c. 10 – 12 [23%]
5. Why did you choose to attend the USP workshops?

   SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS 2 AND 5:

   By far the most common motivations for attending the USP workshops were to obtain assistance with assignments, develop a more in-depth understanding of unit content, and even

increase motivation to fulfil the requirements of assessments in the units. From the questionnaire responses, a large proportion identified themselves as at risk students who categorised themselves as needing *"help…to understand more about the subject and improve [their] skills"; or,* second language learners who wished to improve their English skills since they felt these were inadequate to meet the demands of the units. Notwithstanding this categorisation, many of the participating students across all the years were high achievers and mature age students who also wished to maximise their overall performance in the units. In addition, students not only engaged with the USP through workshop participation particularly when the focus was on assessment preparation, but a *regular* cohort of students committed to attend even when this was not the case.

6. Please answer the questions in the following section:

   a. Were the USP sessions **useful**? YES [99%] /NO [1%]

   b. Did the USP sessions assist your **understanding of management theories** and **concepts**?

      ALWAYS [58%] / SOMETIMES [42%] / NEVER [0%]

   c. Did the USP sessions assist your **understanding of academic skills** *(eg. Brainstorming, referencing, paraphrasing & summarising, essay writing, etc)?*

      ALWAYS [71%] / SOMETIMES [29%] / NEVER [0%]

   d. Did the program enable you to **participate more confidently in workshops**?

      ALWAYS [55%] / SOMETIMES [45%] / NEVER [0%]

7. Did the program help you to understand the requirements of your assignments and complete assessment tasks successfully? YES [91%] / NO [9%]

Please tick the relevant columns:

Assessment Task	*Very useful*	*Moderately useful*	*Not at all useful*
Weekly quiz (MCQ)	24%	67%	9%
Group presentation	43%	48%	9%
Critical reflection	63%	37%	0%
Research essay	64%	34%	2%
Exam	68%	32%	0%

8. Please explain HOW the USP sessions have helped you to understand the requirements of your assessment tasks and how to complete them:

Assessment Task	*Comment*
Weekly quiz (MCQ)	
Group presentation	
Critical reflection	
Research essay	
Exam	

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES RELEVANT TO QUESTION 8:

According to the students, within the context of each unit, the workshops enabled academic literacies development particularly in the improvement of writing, and in the support of assign-

ment completion, including useful research strategies, essay topic analysis, paraphrasing and language structuring (paragraph and sentence) as well as the "step by step" process employed in scaffolding assignment questions, and the practical skill of responding to exam type questions. Students also noted the incentive and benefit of attending USP to develop competencies in critical analysis, reflection and the application of theories to practical situations through small group discussions. Given the discipline-specific context, students remarked that the USP played a pivotal role in assisting them to understand discipline-specific theories, ideas and concepts, and unpack the content of each lecture (see 4.5 Student perceptions of USP).

9. Did you like the format of the USP with TWO teachers (discipline tutor and literacy teacher) both present in each workshop? YES [78%] / NO [22%]. Why?

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES RELEVANT TO QUESTION 9:

Students appreciated the team teaching giving them *"different ways to approach a topic" or "two different professional perspectives on the subjects."* The combination of discipline teachers' knowledge of theory with literacies teachers' skill in communicating was remarked upon, as well as the intermediary role assumed by the literacies teacher in clarifying expectations (see 4.5 Student perceptions of USP). Those who disliked the format of the workshops revealed that they preferred more individual attention, and either disliked group work or were not sufficiently confident to participate in group tasks.

10. What activities in the USP did you find most useful to understand the requirements of assignments and complete assessment tasks successfully?

Responses revealed that the participatory nature of the classes contributed to building confidence in other major areas of the unit, such as LearnOnline (Moodle) forums, tutorials, and assessments. Many commented on the *"student friendly"* and *"informal"* nature of the sessions, which offered students a *"one on one relationship"* and *"individual assistance"* where they could clarify their understanding of the theories discussed in the units each week, and apply these to relevant tasks which would, in turn, help them to complete assignments.

11. How could the USP sessions be **improved**?

SUMMARY OF VERBAL RESPONSES TO QUESTION 11:

Most of these concerned logistical problems – timetabling and length of sessions – which need attention in any future iterations of the program.

12. Do you think the USP will help you pass the unit? YES [97%] / NO [3%] Why?

13. Do you think the USP will help you improve your grade? YES [99%] / NO [1%] Why?

SUMMARY OF VERBAL RESPONSES RELEVANT TO QUESTIONS 12 AND 13:

Evaluation responses demonstrated the conviction in students that participation in the USP, whether through engagement in the workshops, support accessed from USP teachers outside class, or via online participation, would likely generate success in the unit. The perception that the USP would assist students to not only pass the units but also improve their grades was a consistent theme present in the evaluations. This was interpreted from the findings of the questionnaires which illustrated that success in the unit was realised in part by the *"just in time"* assistance offered in the USP workshops when individual students were focused on their performance in the specific assessment demands of the unit. Remarks showed that students found the supports for assignment and exam preparation the most beneficial aspects of the program, with 64 and 68 percent respectively finding the workshops 'very useful' in fulfilling these requirements more than support for other assessments, such as the group presentations, which were categorised as 'moderately useful' (see Question 7). Students explained that the assistance helped them to *"achieve a better grade"* and succeed in the units. The workshops were thought to be *"practical and helpful preparation for the exam", "a way to improve my grade", "to help pass the unit", "to get a good result for assignment and essay,"* and clarify the requirements of assessment tasks. Indeed, several students revealed the USP prevented them from *"dropping*

out" as it provided ongoing support to achieve success and learn fundamental aspects of academic literacies throughout the semester.

14. Would you recommend the USP to a friend? YES [99%] / NO [1%]

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