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**INTEGRATING THE TEACHING OF  
ACADEMIC DISCOURSE INTO COURSES  
IN THE DISCIPLINES**

*PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE HELD AT LA TROBE UNIVERSITY  
NOVEMBER 21-22, 1994*

EDITED BY  
KATE CHANOCK  
WITH ASSISTANCE FROM  
VALERIE BURLEY

PUBLISHED AND DISTRIBUTED BY THE LANGUAGE AND ACADEMIC SKILLS UNITS OF  
LA TROBE UNIVERSITY

CORRESPONDENCE TO KATE CHANOCK, HASU, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
LA TROBE UNIVERSITY, BUNDOORA 3083, AUSTRALIA

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We would like to dedicate this volume,  
with warmest wishes,  
to **Sandra Cootes**,  
a valued friend and colleague .

## CONTENTS

<b>Preface and Acknowledgements</b>	7
<b>Conference Papers:</b>	
1. Introduction to the Conference: disciplinary subcultures and the teaching of academic writing <i>Kate Chanock</i>	9
2. The integrative role of the study adviser <i>Brigid Ballard</i>	16
3. Reshaping the Monash BA: knowledge and skills in first year Arts subjects <i>Gordon Taylor</i>	26
4. Critical analysis for undergraduates -- unmasking the process <i>Erst Carmichael, Doug Craigie, Kathy Driscoll, Helen Farrell, Bronwyn James, Michele Schoufis, and Peter Spolc</i>	32
5. Some modest misgivings about disciplinary discourse <i>Ross Phillips</i>	38
6. To integrate or not? Interests, practice, and the dialogic development of graduate students' academic discourse skills <i>Gail Craswell</i>	41
7. Developing thinking skills: some recent approaches (Abstract) <i>Edward Meyricke</i>	63
8. Improving students' academic discourse through training in the skills of active critical inquiry <i>Michael Dix</i>	64
9. Facilitating literacy/academic discourse during the first session of university <i>Jenni Brackenreg</i>	72
10. The University Preparation Program (Nursing) <i>Lesley Ljungdahl and Terri Morley-Warner</i>	86
11. Building on success: writing a research proposal in Medical Radiation Technology <i>Andrea Chan, Ann Poulos and Natalka Suchowerska</i>	90
12. Changing times, changing demography in a South African University: some implications for staff and student development (Abstract) <i>Lorraine Chaskalson</i>	97
13. Critical literacy, language and writing: critical journalling in an enabling program <i>Patricia Cartwright</i>	98

14.	Bringing academic discourse to the disciplines: a faculty based approach <i>Colin Baskin</i>	117
15.	The roles of language and learning staff: insights from collaboration with the subject discourses <i>Carolyn Webb and Helen Bonanno</i>	126
16.	Issues in collaboration between academic skills teachers and subject teachers: two approaches to integrating academic skills teaching with subject tutorials <i>Sandra Cootes</i>	133
17.	Finding the optimal learning context: integration with autonomy <i>Dorothy Spiller</i>	145
18.	Collaborative, discipline-related, English language support. A model for academic and professional development in academic courses <i>Gerry Meister, Catherine da Silva Rosa, and Raymond da Silva Rosa</i>	152
19.	Learning about discipline-specific academic discourse from computer-held collections of text <i>Martin Hewings</i>	156
20.	Constructing a discourse position: quoting, referring and attribution in academic writing <i>Mike Baynham, Dominique Beck, Katherine Gordon, Alison Lee, and Caroline San Miguel</i>	163
21.	Integrating language and learning skills in the social sciences: the advanced ESL course in the B.A. Multicultural Studies at RMIT Coburg (Abstract) <i>Ruth Evans</i>	169
22.	Discourse patterns in the writing of History undergraduates <i>Joanna Buckingham</i>	170
23.	Academic and communication skills taught in science and engineering courses <i>Margaret Hicks, Ed Irons, and Petrus Zeegers</i>	178
24.	A case study of an adjunct program: English for first-year Engineering students <i>Rosemary Clerehan and Glenda Crosling</i>	184
25.	Study skills assistance to first-year Engineering students at James Cook University <i>Archie Johnston and Peter Hanley</i>	189
26.	The discipline specific library orientation tour <i>Jan McLeod</i>	192
27.	"Do you speak academically?" <i>Alex Barthel</i>	195
28.	Adapting Cinema Studies coursework to NESB students <i>Chris Berry</i>	198
29.	Emancipatory discourse in a Law programme <i>Kate Cadman</i>	200

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30.	"English in Use": a second language perspective <i>Lorraine Bullock</i>	202
31.	Developing written communication skills of Bachelor of Medical Record Administration students <i>Dianne Simpson</i>	204
32.	Writing and speaking effectively: teaching Nutritionists to be communicators <i>John Coveney, Pat Kelly, and Kate Cadman</i>	206
33.	An academic skills program for new international students in the faculty of management <i>Linda Thies</i>	207
34.	Information literacy: towards a credit point subject <i>Lynne Wright and Catriona McGurk</i>	211
35.	Multimedia resources and academic discourse (Abstract) <i>Ted Chrisfield</i>	228
36.	Better late than never? Teaching skills of analysis and evaluation to Early Childhood students (Abstract) <i>John Grierson</i>	229
37.	English language support in an international project: a communicative approach in a cross-cultural context (Abstract) <i>Karin Hawkins</i>	230
38.	Integrating content-course tasks into the teaching of writing skills for academic purposes <i>Antonia Chandrasegaran</i>	231
39.	Incorporating academic skills in first semester, first year: an experience in the "Fundamentals of Law" unit in the B. Commerce, University of Ballarat <i>Chris Baker</i>	240
40.	A kind of collaboration with the Faculty of Law: teaching Law students academic writing <i>Kim Draisma</i>	252
41.	Team-teaching through writing: a case study (Abstract) <i>Terri Morley-Warner</i>	258
42.	Tertiary literacy: policy, definition and practice <i>Maria Fiocco</i>	259
43.	Programs aimed at addressing perceived problems of student illiteracy -- a blessing or curse for student support services? <i>John Grierson and Rosalind Martins</i>	269
44.	Cultural literacy support programs for Arts students: recent developments at the Western Metropolitan College of TAFE <i>Dirk den Hartog</i>	274

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45.	Integrating academic discourse -- what can we learn from experience <i>Mark Garner and Helen Edwards</i>	283
46.	Discipline-specific academic skills at post-graduate level: a model <i>Annie Bartlett, Marion May, and Sue Holzknecht</i>	287
47.	Integrating the teaching of academic discourse into postgraduate coursework and research programs: a report on the development of an integrated bridging program for international students <i>Margaret Cargill and Ursula McGowan</i>	292
48.	Postgraduate writing instruction: general versus discipline-specific <i>Colin Beasley and Saily Knowles</i>	298
49.	Teaching academic discourse to international PhD students from the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering <i>Elizabeth Sandeman-Gay</i>	318
	<b>Conference Participants: List of Addresses</b>	322

## PREFACE

On November 21-22, 1994, the Language and Academic Skills Units of La Trobe University hosted a national Conference on "Integrating the Teaching of Academic Discourse into Courses in the Disciplines". The theme was chosen with the aim of exploring the trend, both in Australia and overseas, towards extending instruction in academic skills from adjunct programs run by separate student support services to the subjects in which students are enrolled in their undergraduate courses. We were aware of a number of ways in which academic skills teachers have collaborated with faculty staff to draw students' attention explicitly to the academic discourse of their discipline and to what they must do to become competent in it. We invited colleagues around the country to meet in order to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of such an approach and to share their experiences with it.

The conference attracted 164 participants from all round Australia, as well as colleagues from universities in New Zealand, South Africa, and Brunei. Participants heard forty-two papers and seven shorter contributions, most of which are collected in the present volume. (Where the presentation had been informal, and no written paper was available, we have included the Abstract so that interested readers may contact the presenter if they wish. A list of participants, with addresses and phone numbers, can be found at the end of this volume.)

The conference achieved a number of things. It recognised the concerns which academic skills teachers, ESL teachers, and teachers in the disciplines have in common, and brought them together to discuss these. The conference provided a sympathetic forum for work in progress, reports of research, and reflections on teaching practice. At the same time, participants gained a set of useful contacts around Australia to help them to develop their initiatives further. This sharing, with the large number of participants involved, was particularly important in a field in which isolation can be a problem, as each institution employs only a few academic skills teachers. It was encouraging to discover how many people are engaged in this kind of work, and how many more, in various faculties, are interested in participating in it. The conference heard from lecturers in Philosophy, Law, Engineering, Education, Health Sciences, and Accounting.

The papers, delivered in a series of parallel sessions, clustered around a number of related questions:

- \* In what ways is it/ is it not good for the students/ the academic skills tutors/ the disciplines to integrate teaching of academic discourse into the disciplines?
- \* To what extent is academic discourse discipline-specific?
- \* How can we identify the characteristic features of the discourse of a discipline?
- \* How can we raise students'/ tutors' awareness of these discourses?
- \* How might these issues be different when teaching postgraduate students? Disadvantaged students? Overseas students? Students from non English speaking backgrounds?
- \* How can we initiate/ sustain fruitful collaborations with teachers in the disciplines?
- \* How can we mobilise all the resources of the institution which can help with this effort (e.g. peer tutoring, the library)?

Problems tended to cluster around the issue of the position of skills teaching in the university as a whole: there was much discussion of academics' and students' perceptions of the goals and value of skills teaching (which were generally clarified and enhanced by collaborations of the kinds which participants reported on). Often, academic skills advisers are called upon to supply "literacy" to students, and some papers addressed the question of what this might be, should be, and/or was thought to be by university administrations. Many participants were concerned about the difficulty of getting their work recognised as academic in terms of the employment classifications within their universities. Those whose work was marginalised by the structure of their institution, or hampered by misconceptions that learning skills are a mechanical or remedial area, were able to benefit from the experience of others in similar straits, and to exchange information about the position of learning skills in other institutions around the country.

On the whole, the discussions were very affirmative, with both learning skills teachers and faculty staff emphasising the benefits of collaboration in improving the planning and delivery of courses. As a Law lecturer put it,

I think it was worth the effort to try to incorporate more explicitly academic skills into the unit...It enhanced my own professional development. It made me really think through the connection between lectures/tutorials assessment and objectives/content/skills assessment. I also became far more aware of the support services available to students and how to access them.

The conference was fast-paced and stimulating, with up to four sessions running concurrently, as well as extra meetings to organise greater communication and coordination within the field of teaching and learning. While much remained to be said, we were left with the impetus to meet again soon and explore the themes which emerged from two densely packed days of sharing and questioning.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

While many people helped to bring about the Conference -- and we are very grateful to all concerned -- this seems the place to thank, in particular, those who had a hand in bringing out these Proceedings. Phillipa Barber and Sheila Davies of La Trobe's Assistance with English Unit gave backup support, while Melissa Fisher, the Faculty of Humanities Computer Officer, brought the pieces together and made it all look fine.

## DISCIPLINARY SUBCULTURES AND THE TEACHING OF ACADEMIC WRITING

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### ABSTRACT

This paper traces the background to the conference in terms of the trend, in the 1980s, towards regarding academic support as "initiation, not remediation" (Beasley): initiation into the language and culture of academic study, which are new to NESB and mainstream students alike. The conference will go further, to look at how, and how far, each discipline is a subculture with its own distinctive discourse, and to ask whether students should be taught about these -- and if so, how. My paper argues that students should be aware of discourse variation, and that it should be the responsibility of language specialists and teachers in the disciplines, working together, to help students gain this awareness. While language and academic skills (LAS) teachers lack sufficient knowledge of the disciplines to do this alone, teachers in the disciplines may find it difficult to explain the discourse features of which they are aware, while other features go so deep as to remain unexamined until they are seen in contrast with the practice of another discipline. While the conference will look at a variety of models for collaboration in this area, my paper stresses the importance of the LAS teacher's familiarity with the discourses of a range of disciplines.

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I'd like to start by sketching in the common ground that's brought us together for this conference, because it has -- as we hoped it would -- attracted people from ESL teaching, from academic support programs, and from the disciplines. I think we share a recognition that our students need to be helped towards an explicit awareness of the discourse within which they are studying. To what extent discourse is discipline specific, and what the variations should mean to our teaching, are very much up for debate, and judging from the papers you've sent, they will be debated here. But our common interest in teaching academic discourse seems to show a recognition that, like non English speaking background students, mainstream students too are entering new cultures of knowledge, and that the language needs of both go further than fluency and correctness.

The problems of cultural orientation are more obvious in the case of students who have been educated largely in a foreign culture and/or a foreign language. While their most urgent needs may be in the area of language fluency, there is general recognition that they also need to become aware that traditions of learning, ways of knowing, and forms of expressing knowledge vary from culture to culture, with consequences for their reading and writing in the Australian system.

Increasingly, however, there has developed an awareness that all students are confronting a new kind of learning when they enter university. This is because much of university teaching does not focus only on the acquisition of knowledge. More central to university courses is a focus on learning that knowledge is made, as much as discovered, and how it is made. This is why study takes place in disciplines. And, if the process of making knowledge is the common interest of all the disciplines, the way in which knowledge is made is different in each one, so that a student faces a new culture in each new discipline she studies. The insights of those who teach foreign students have been extended, therefore, to thinking about the needs of native students too, and Ballard and Clanchy have urged us to take an "anthropological approach" to offering academic support at university level, which means making the culture explicit as well as working on skills (1988:8; see also Ballard, 1982, 1984; Bock, 1982; Clyne, 1982; Ballard and Clanchy, 1984 and 1991; Beasley, 1988:47).

This is the background for the issues and experiments which this conference will explore. What we've moved away from is the idea that our students' needs are remedial, although that is still the perception of many lecturers and students, so that some of our efforts have to swim against the current of what our institutions expect of us (Bate, 1990: 161-171; Hobsbaum, 1984). At the other extreme from worrying about students "who don't seem to be able to construct or punctuate a simple sentence" -- the remedial project -- is a faith in the curative properties of epistemology, the idea that "once a student knows how to think about a particular problem in a

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particular discipline, her expression will take care of itself". We are probably scattered across a spectrum in between, and where we stand has implications for what we think should be taught and who we think should teach it -- language specialists, discipline specialists, or the two working together -- and we'll hear debate on that too. I think both should be involved, and preferably together, because each of us has expertise which is essential but, at the same time, partial.

Why not keep the two functions separate? There is a persuasive literature advocating that skills should be taught in the context of assignments that students are writing for their subject courses. It is argued that, since writing is always writing about something, form cannot satisfactorily be taught independently of content (e.g., Martin and Ramsden, 1986; Taylor, West, and Nightingale, 1987; Nightingale, 1988; Beasley, 1988; Parry, 1990; Ljungdahl, 1991). This is because the form and style which are considered appropriate in any essay are a product of the purpose of the task, the nature of the question, the discipline's methods and agreed criteria of evidence, and the nature of the material at hand. These cannot be examined or practised outside of the discipline, for they are not things which the disciplines hold in common (e.g., Becher, 1981; Ballard, 1984:43; MacDonald, 1987). Thus, although we want error-free writing, an approach which addresses errors without giving much attention to epistemology could only meet the needs of students if the problems of epistemology are already being addressed effectively in the subject courses.

Often, of course, they are. There are many teachers who reflect on what students need to know about the approach of their discipline and explain these things explicitly. But there are also teachers who are so immersed in the culture of their discipline that its ways are "transparent" to them, appearing natural or universal (Russell, 1991: 3-34).

There are also teachers who are aware of the character of their discipline but believe that students can and should learn how to participate in it by "osmosis". If the teacher models the practice of the discipline, in this view, the students will enter it by a kind of apprenticeship: they will learn by doing. Some will; but, as those of us who work in academic writing units know, some will not. And, while some tutors may take the view that this ability separates sheep from goats, we also know that goats can turn into sheep if they are helped to examine the disciplines as cultures of knowledge.

In units which offer academic support to students, we see ample evidence that understanding of the cultures of the disciplines is important to a student's success. To give a recent example from my own work: a student had been referred to me for help with her English expression. She showed me an essay full of errors of grammar, punctuation, and organisation, which we could have addressed without reference to her discipline. (She is in an English literature course which examines Black American women's writing.) But I also thought she wasn't clear about the purposes of her course, and however correctly she might write, she wasn't going to go higher than a D. So I asked her to borrow an essay that had done well, for comparison.

She brought back an essay that had got an A, and it had a confidently proposed, well-organised, well-focussed, and coherent argument; as my student said, "It's so much clearer than mine!" But this clarity was not so much a product of familiarity with the mechanics of academic writing, as a product of the writer's understanding of the question. Her argument was well structured because it developed one governing idea, but she had one idea because she knew why the question had been asked - whereas my student had put in everything she knew. Just in dealing with the organisational area of "expression", therefore, we could achieve much more by dealing with the relationship between form, content, and intellectual context than by looking at paragraphing or linking by themselves.

The most interesting thing about this "model" essay for me, however, was that it was full of errors in grammar and punctuation of exactly the kinds my student was making. None of them had been marked by the tutor, who had left none of them unmarked in my student's essay. I think this was simply because the argument had carried the tutor along, undistracted by the errors, whereas, in the poorer essay, there wasn't much to take her mind off the punctuation. It did show, however, that perfect expression was not the key to communicative competence in this situation. We could see what that key was, moreover, as we read through the essay together. While the writer was not fluent in formally correct English, she was fluent in the critical terms in which the approach of the course was encoded. Terms like "hegemonic discourse", "cultural colonisation", and "literary decolonisation" were used smoothly and appropriately, where my student had been a lot more hazy about what these terms stood for -- and I think "stood for" is more accurate here than "meant".

The tutor's comments on her essay, however, did not anywhere address the student's understanding of the question or of the critical concepts surrounding it. They focussed, instead, on her errors of expression.

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I think this example shows that help could most usefully come from the subject tutor, because she is the one who best understands what each particular essay requires. It also shows, however, that such help may not be forthcoming; and I think that this is because the subject tutor is so close to the concerns of the subject that she cannot see what is unfamiliar or difficult about them. She did not see the good essay as one in which the writer was using a foreign dialect with impressive communicative competence, although that was what the mark rewarded. She just saw it as being very well-expressed.

It seems, from this example, that three kinds of expertise are needed to help students to improve their academic writing: expertise in the discipline; expertise in language; and an understanding of how the discipline interacts with language, gained by standing back a little way from both. The subject tutor can make the approach of her course explicit for the students. But it is also helpful to have the expertise of someone who knows how to analyse the use of language and has access to the contributions which the fields of linguistics, second language teaching, and composition studies make to our understanding of varieties of discourse.

Expertise in language is obviously necessary to anyone who is teaching students from non English speaking backgrounds. The literature of second language teaching also offers help, however, to teachers of native English speakers. From this source we get the idea of "interlanguage" -- the language spoken by someone in the process of learning a new language. This helps us to see the competence our students have, by identifying the patterned nature of their errors. As Kutz says (1986:393), "Interlanguage provides a conceptual framework for seeing student writing as a stage in a developmental process, for seeing what is there as opposed to what isn't", and thinking, consequently, in terms of extension rather than remediation.

Linguistics also gives us genre theory, which sees the genres of academic discourse as "linguistic systems constructed in response to particular contexts" (Lee,1990:79). Genre theory is able to shed light on the epistemology of particular disciplines through an examination of the grammatical options and metaphors typically used in them (e.g., Halliday, 1989 and Rubino, 1989). In showing these to students, we are not just adding to their language "skills", but inviting them to think about how their disciplines think.

It may still be felt that a language expert working outside the disciplines is likely to mislead students if she tries to focus on the content of an essay rather than simply on its "expression". Nobody, after all, has sufficient expertise in all the disciplines to advise students about what is wanted in each (e.g., Nightingale, 1988; Tate, 1993). While this may be seen as a weakness, I think it can be a strength. When a student comes to talk to me about an assignment, she is forced to explain it and to make me see how it relates to the other work she is doing for that course, and in the process she often discovers for herself what she must do. It is probably important that I know quite a bit about the subjects my students are enrolled in. But it is also important that the student is placed in the position of teacher -- I may be able to put her assignment in a broader context of knowledge, but she knows more about the particular problem and the relevant material than I do. Obviously, this genuine need to communicate does not arise when she discusses the material with the teacher of the subject; in that situation she is (rightly or wrongly) usually more concerned with performance than communication.

However that may be, I think that a combination of disciplinary and linguistic expertise is desirable. Some familiarity with talking about language is necessary in order to talk to the student about why a piece of writing does not make sense. But this is not enough when the writing is poor because the student doesn't know why the question was asked. Then some familiarity with the discipline is necessary in order to ask questions which will get the student to think about this.

It is possible, however, to be too familiar with the discipline. The third kind of expertise that can help students to understand the requirements of disciplinary writing is most easily gained at some distance from the disciplines: it consists in recognising those assumptions which are so deeply embedded in the disciplines that they are unexamined, and unarticulated, by subject teachers. And yet, these assumptions play an important part in their evaluation of students' work. A student who unwittingly stubs his toe on one of these unconscious ideas will get a comment like "wrong word", or a line drawn through what he has written; but to tell a student that his word is "wrong" is not much help when the wrongness of it is in this tacit cultural realm.

Here, I am not talking about the cultural assumptions of which tutors are aware. These would include the ideas encoded in the jargon of the disciplines, which tutors do explain, and in the words which mean something different in the academic context, like "argument", "opinion", and "criticism" (see Meyer, 1988:80). Similarly, in each discipline there are words which tutors recognise as problematic, because they are used in a different way

from their meaning in the culture at large (e.g. "price", "sign", "gender"). Indeed, a good deal of the business of the discipline consists in problematising these words, so they too are part of the induction into the discipline -- terms like "fact" in History, or "know" in Philosophy, or "meaning" in English. To say that a writer "means" something is to step into a hotly contested area of understanding of the role of intention, or individual consciousness, in writing, and of the difference between the writer's understanding of a text and the reader's reception of it. (Ballard and Clanchy, 1988:18, discussed this in terms of the strictures of the New Criticism; the situation is even more complicated by postmodern ideas about voice.)

For each of the terms I have mentioned, students already have a meaning, and they have to set that meaning to one side in order to participate in the discipline. This in itself is a powerful reason why academic writing should be taught within the disciplines. An outsider may not be aware of these meanings which are peculiar to particular disciplines.

On the other hand, there are assumptions and values in all the disciplines which go so deep that they "go without saying". This is where students cannot find the help they need inside the discipline alone.

In English, as I have explained, the word "means" is recognised as problematic, but the word "uses" is not. If a student writes that an author "uses" an expression or a technique, "uses" is likely to be crossed out or labelled "wrong word". For example, a student wrote "Shakespeare uses this story to express his opposition to the patriarchal system of marriage in Elizabethan times", and his tutor crossed out "uses" and wrote in "develops". The distinction could hardly be clear to the student, but no explanation was offered. As far as the tutor was concerned, none was needed. In fact, "uses" was exactly the right word to express what the student wanted to say, but he wanted to say something that may not be said in the discipline of English. From the frequency with which I see "use" crossed out in English essays it would seem that in the view of English tutors, authors do not use words to make readers feel things, or create stories to persuade them of ideas. Perhaps using is grubby, mechanical, manipulative, simplistic. Thus, another student who thought that Hawthorne used the scene of Hester Prynne's release from prison, with its sympathetic sunshine and roses, to show the cruelty of her culture in condemning her natural affections, was using the wrong word. If he had said that the reader feels the cruelty of her culture's restrictions by contrast with the flourishing freedom of the natural world, he would have been all right.

All this is quite confusing to a student who has been using the word "use" in essays in Media or Cinema Studies, where technique is more respectable. Journalists and film-makers do use words, images, etc, to make audiences respond in ways that are consciously planned. Students are supposed to analyse these uses. A student who does that well, and then does it again when writing about a novel or a poem, is not helped to see the error of his ways when the tutor writes "wrong word". It is not lexically wrong, but culturally inappropriate, and so its wrongness is transparent to the tutors. Nor would I be aware of it if I saw papers in only one of these disciplines. It is because I teach students who are doing very well in one discipline and badly in another that I have come to take an interest in the places where disciplines meet and are incompatible: it is here that the intellectual values which operate in particular disciplines are revealed. (For more examples of this, see Ballard and Clanchy, 1988:18-19.)

It is tempting to think, when a student is doing badly in one thing and well in another, that one subject has standards and the other has not. But in fact the students who run into problems of this kind are not usually the poor students but the ones with a good ear for new and unfamiliar forms or styles of discourse.

A student with a "good ear" is quite likely to notice, for example, that much of what she reads in social science is written in the passive voice. She hears the passive because it is unfamiliar, at least in these concentrations; and she may assume it is the style of academic English. I do not mean that she will be able to label it as passive, but she will "hear" it and imitate it in her writing. But if she does not know why the social sciences show this strong preference for the passive, she is not going to understand why it is unpopular in the humanities.

One student wrote an essay about Janet Frame's autobiographical novel *To the Is-land* very largely in passive sentences. To understand why it earned a low mark, she would need to be told something like the following:

"In the social sciences, the passive is commonly used in imitation of the writing of the sciences. Because social scientists are dealing with data which are hard to "see" but about which they nevertheless wish to offer definitive generalisations, they write in a style which suggests that anybody else looking at the data would have to draw

the same conclusions. This is what passive constructions do for scientific discourse. They remove the personal element, so that the knowledge produced appears to be objective.

"Writing in English is different. We are not trying to offer objective conclusions about a text. We come to insights by a subjective process, examining the effect of the text on each of us as a reader who, although an individual, may be able to enhance others' reading of the text. This approach means that our interpretation does not have to be the only one possible. It also means that we claim ownership of it by using the active voice in our written analyses of literature."

The tutor did not, however, offer any explanation of this kind. What she wrote, instead, was "I think you need to work harder at finding a comfortable critical voice". She found the student's style "wordy" and "pretentious", and so it was. But it is a style which has developed precisely to serve the pretensions of disciplines which want to be right about things, not just interesting.

These differences between the tacit values of the disciplines create problems for students who work in dissimilar disciplines, and more especially for students who enroll in "interdisciplinary" courses which are taught by members of more than one discipline. Recently I was intrigued by a note from a student I had worked with the previous year: "My tutor wants to see more of me. Help!" What was behind this *crie de coeur*, as it turned out, was the tutor's efforts to encourage this student to carry her ideas into the realm of speculation. The student was wary of this suggestion, for, as she put it, "I gave my opinion once last year in History and the tutor jumped all over me". Probably they had different meanings for "opinion". But I knew what she meant, and I could sympathise with her perception that the tutor in this new course was inviting her to take a risk. The course was an interdisciplinary one dealing with the history of Christian thought. The student had written an account of religious philosophers' criticisms of the Church for its disinclination to accept that evil is a part of the spiritual makeup of human beings, attributing it instead to the influence of the devil. Her essay stopped with the most recent criticism she had read. Her tutor praised the essay as a "very good exposition" but said he would like to see more of what she thought. He asked, if Christianity were to embrace evil as part of people's nature, what would happen to its doctrines? What would be the consequences for both theory and practice, "both personal and political/ social/ religious?" And how could this change be achieved? The student agreed that these were interesting questions, but did not see how she could respond to them, for she had learned in History the previous year that speculation on the future was unsound. She was relieved when I explained that these were philosophers' questions, not historians' questions. Perhaps, in her next essay, her tutor will see more of her!

This example raises, I think, yet another problem we should consider if we move the teaching of writing to the disciplines. While helping students to write successfully in each separate discipline, it may be hard to avoid giving the impression that the way of writing in that discipline is the one right way to write (see Tate, 1993:320). I do not think our teaching aims to do this, but perhaps this is partly because it tends to happen outside of the disciplines, from which distance it is easiest to acquire an "anthropological" perspective. Our students need this perspective, as they are writing in more than one discipline, at least during the first two years of their course. But even if they specialise, I think it is good for them to take that critical perspective with them, rather than committing themselves unreflectively to the purposes and values of a single discipline. I agree with Hanne Bock, who has frequently emphasised the importance of teaching skills in the context of assignments in the disciplines, but nonetheless points out that "the meaning which can be made out of any one discipline is partial, not universal". And she is careful to teach her students "a degree of personal detachment". (Bock, 1986:105). I do not think there is any contradiction here. As Peter Elbow says, rather than teaching students "the particular conventions they will need for particular disciplines", we can most usefully teach them "the principle of discourse variation" (1991:152; see also Perelman, 1986:476).

This perspective, then, is one of the things which a writing tutor can contribute to any collaboration with tutors in the disciplines. This collaboration can be achieved in a variety of ways, and we'll be hearing about a number of them today and tomorrow. (For other models, see Russell, 1991: 282-292; Zuber-Skerritt, 1982; Dudley-Evans, 1984; De Escorcia, 1984.) The point I want to stress here is that the learning skills teacher should have a continuing role, at the very least, in discussing with colleagues in the disciplines the ways in which language serves the assumptions and purposes of their discipline. Learning skills teachers are particularly well-placed to examine this territory of the unspoken expectations of the disciplines. One comes to see these expectations not by focussing on one discipline in isolation but by reading essays in a number of different disciplines, some of which hold incompatible assumptions. It is, therefore, the learning skills teacher who can bring this perspective to the work of teaching students, and it is important that the "outsider's" perspective should not get lost in programs which offer writing instruction within the disciplines.

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## THE INTEGRATIVE ROLE OF THE STUDY ADVISER

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### ABSTRACT

Study advisers must be conversant with the theory and practice of a range of disciplines in order to provide an effective service to students. They will start with their own university training within a discipline - in practice often linguistics, literature or psychology - but must also learn to draw on theories of pedagogy, theories of student learning, theories of language and cross-cultural communication, and be aware of variations across a broad spectrum of academic disciplines. The focal point for study advisers should always be the student as a learner across a range of disciplines. Any concentration on the lecturers, the course content, academic discourse, a particular discipline, or even the desired educational outcomes in terms of students' generic skills and knowledge should be seen as merely contributory to that focus.

It is argued that the basis for our practice as study advisers lies in our ability to integrate all these theories, experiences and perspectives in terms of two types of knowledge: attitudes to formal knowledge in an academic setting (how it is established, interrogated and extended), and our local knowledge of the institution in which we work. For this reason we may choose at times to work closely with academic staff in particular disciplines or with language teachers. However our distinctive contribution to student learning, that of interpreting the demands of the academic culture and its especial epistemology, is best achieved through maintaining a professional distance from any single disciplinary focus or methodology while at the same time offering an integrative perspective on the intellectual processes of university study. In elaborating this position, examples will be drawn from our work with a range of undergraduate students, from first year to Honours year and in single or combined degree programmes.

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### 1 . The distinctive focus and role of the study adviser

The theme of this conference - which I take to be 'the context for effective teaching of academic discourse' - raises a central issue for our professional practice as study advisers. It disturbs me because while it focuses our attention on the vital importance of academic context in all our work with students, it runs the danger of taking the part for the whole. As a study adviser at the Australian National University, I am not, myself, a teacher of academic discourse, or rather that is only part of my professional work, and the ways in which I attempt to teach such discourse are significantly different from the ways it might be approached by a disciplinary expert. More importantly, I am a guide to students who are in the process of acculturation into the culture of the university and the sub-cultures of some of its disciplines. With first year students I am an interpreter of the new languages, values, thought systems which inform each discipline, even each unit within the first year syllabus. With later year students I serve as reference point when a new demand arises (such as the demand to write an analytical book review or to take an elective unit in an unfamiliar discipline or Faculty). With Honours students (and their supervisors) I may focus attention away from the specific details of the research project to the departmental structures and epistemologies which shape the production of a thesis, in combination with the personal qualities and self-management skills which the student needs to transform such theory into practice. With graduate students I am most often working in cross-cultural contexts, with international students who may be relatively well-grounded in the discipline but blind to the academic expectations inherent in a foreign university culture. And in my interactions with all students, I am ready to talk with them about all aspects of their academic work, not merely those relating to the rhetorical or discourse demands of one discipline or one course. I also work with lecturing staff and graduate supervisors in academic departments and provide advice to staff in the university administration on matters relating to the academic performance of students, because they all influence and help to set the context for the students' academic work; but this is always an adjunct to my primary work with the students themselves. So in my professional work I am, above all, an adviser, a guide and interpreter, drawing on

both formal knowledge of academic disciplines and local knowledge of the institution in which I work. I am not a teacher of a distinct discipline backed by a distinctive body of theory and characterised by a discourse which, in Becher's terms, defines my tribe and territory (Becher, 1989).

I am also very aware of the ANU context in which this particular style of practice has evolved; just as I am aware that other Centres at other universities have evolved within their own different niches in the jungle of academic life. Yet despite our apparent differences - some of us working with large numbers of students in systematic courses or purpose-designed workshops, some with a primary focus on developing the language skills of LOTE students, some working with distance students or developing new strategies through IT, some working with individual students, some with first years only, some with NESB students only, some with graduate students - I would argue that our primary professional focus is, and must remain, the student rather than academic discourses or academic disciplines. Primarily, but not exclusively, we focus on the needs of the student as a learner and an increasingly sophisticated critical thinker and communicator. And, because this influences the evolution of these qualities, the student as a complex person with individual values, needs and behaviours.

In this paper I want to explore the distinguishing features of our professional practice: what it is we do as study advisers; how it is that we work; and why this work cannot be done as well by other members of the university staff. Although I will be drawing largely on the experience of the Study Skills Centre at ANU, because that is the basis of my own experience, I think that some issues will be either generally relevant to or else adaptable by language and learning advisers in other institutions. It is our common focus on the student as a complex learner that underpins our varied practices, and differentiates us from other teaching, administrative and professional staff within our institutions. What shapes our role is our distinctive (because more comprehensive) experience of the ways students approach learning, together with our familiarity with the distinctive intellectual pursuits of different academic disciplines and our explicit use of our local knowledge about the system and behaviour of our university. It is from this broad base that we can provide an integrative perspective for our students.

## **2. The range and limitations of the study adviser's expertise**

At this conference we probably all share the view that student learning cannot usefully be separated from the contexts in which learning is to take place. We need, therefore, to be sensitive to the broader culture of the Australian university system, especially as it defines and determines the roles and characteristics of undergraduate and postgraduate students. Furthermore, although as individuals we each come to the job with our own academic background and training in a particular discipline, as study advisers we are only useful to students once we have moved beyond this specialised intellectual framework to a more broadly based familiarity with the range of disciplinary knowledges and discourses into which our students are being acculturated. We also, most importantly, need to make explicit to students the generic skills which cut across all disciplinary learning.

So within the broad university territory we need to recognise the tribal and territorial claims of the disciplines, so well analysed by Becher (1989) and further developed by the recent interest in the discourse of disciplinary communities (e.g. Bazerman, 1988; McCloskey, 1994; Myers, 1990; Nelson et al., 1988). Here we require a functional familiarity with the formal knowledge of the significant sub-cultures within the university cultural community; and within each sub-culture we must be able to recognise the further range of distinctive specialisations, the whole taxonomy of the discipline (Geertz, 1983, pp.155-61). The staff of an Anthropology department will recognise their cultural commonalty when faced with outsiders from a Sociology department, as well as when encountering 'aliens' from Nuclear Physics and other visitors from outer space. But within the confines of their own departmental tea room these same Anthropology staff will separate into social anthropologists, biological anthropologists, etc, and then into PNG-based anthropologists, to Southern Highlands anthropologists, and finally to the possessiveness of Huli anthropologists working on pig feast ceremonies in one village. An almost infinite regression is observable within each discipline. While we, as study advisers, do not identify with any one tribe or territory, we need to be on friendly terms with all of them.

As we know well, each of these academic communities is further marked by a distinctive disciplinary discourse, what Bazerman (1988: 320) refers to as the 'decorum [of the discipline] in the most fundamental sense - what stance and attitude is appropriate given the world one is engaged in at that moment'. So, as study advisers, we must certainly make ourselves aware of the different discourses of different disciplines, of the different expectations and demands, of the different approaches to evidence, analysis, criticism and argument. But to be familiar with the discourse of a discipline - and by discourse I mean not merely the structure of written and spoken communication but also the epistemological concerns of the discipline which shape critical analysis and

argument within it - it is not necessary to become a full member of that disciplinary community. That is the proper role of teaching staff within the discipline.

Yet our students do have to find their way through this tricky tribal territory, and therefore we have to make ourselves professionally competent to provide them with the assistance they seek. Our unique contribution is that we can draw on our formal knowledge to provide a sketch map to assist them in understanding the conformation of different disciplines, outlining the paths, drawing attention to significant landmarks, and (given our local knowledge) warning of monsters along the track. Paradoxically, it can be our very distance from any particular discipline that our students value. We are seen as 'objective' and dispassionate. As we all know, it is often professionally tricky to work with a student on an essay within one's own discipline - in my own case, the temptation to 'teach', to encourage the student to understand the 'real' interpretation of a Shakespeare play or a Bronte novel is hard to resist. But that would certainly be encroaching on the domain of the lecturer. My more useful contribution to the development of the student's skills is to sketch out the main features of literary analysis, not to analyse the particular text. I may also draw the student's attention to the contrasting epistemologies of other disciplines - the different ways an historian, a literary critic and a linguist might approach an Anglo-Saxon poem or an Aboriginal account of an ancestral hero. In so doing, I am trying to move the student towards a broader recognition of the significance of the questions which different disciplines bring to content, and the different ways in which it is appropriate to argue and express these concerns within each disciplinary sub-culture. I am working as a study adviser.

Here we can recognize immediately that our contribution as study adviser is most valuable when we can stand aside (or above) the specific discourses of the disciplines and see the whole terrain within which each discipline is merely one component. Then we can enable the student to gain mastery in each discourse and, along the line, a recognition of the meta-cognitive skills inherent across them all. There is probably no other professional staff member within the university in this position: this, I would argue, is the basis of our work and our expertise, and is what marks us out from experts within disciplines, experts on teaching, experts on language teaching and IT manipulation. If we permit this distinctive role to be blurred through a merging with any of these other areas of expertise, we are seriously diminishing the range of academic experience available to students.

### **3. The contribution of formal knowledge and theoretical insights**

I am certainly not arguing that we have no distinctive professional practice, that all we do is react to the contexts in which we work. Quite clearly there are theoretical paradigms which shape, however subconsciously, the ways we each choose to work as study advisers. We probably should be conversant with, though not necessarily disciples of, the current pedagogical theories that bear on tertiary teaching. We need to be aware of the phenomenologists' focus on deep and surface learning, on recent studies of the effects of IT on the classroom, on experiential and action-based teaching, and whatever else is being currently promoted in our institutions by the professional staff properly concerned with teaching issues, those in the centres for improving teaching (see *HERD* v.12, no.1, 1993 for a range of theoretical perspectives currently contending for dominance in the Australian university system).

However, many of these educational perspectives are derived from a limited research base into discrete examples of student learning behaviour and so are only of tangential relevance to our own student-centred practice. For example, as Hanne Bock (1986) has so trenchantly argued, the dichotomy of 'deep' and 'surface' learning is of little relevance to the actual learning behaviours of our students who, as we know from daily contact and from contact over time, adopt different approaches to study according to a range of individual and contextual pressures. The weakness in such attempts to develop a general model of learning styles is a reflection of the static nature of the original research which examined students' learning behaviours at a single point of time on a single task.

The 'developmental' models derived from cognitive psychology, such as the taxonomies proposed by Perry (1970) and by Biggs (1982), have somewhat more relevance to our work as they do recognise that students become more varied and experienced learners through the increasing intellectual demands placed on them over the period of their three year degree. But even here the models are suggestive, rather than diagnostic; they have all the surface elegance and practical fallaciousness of the models of rational economic behaviour so beloved by economists. We need to be aware of such models; and beware of them.

We most certainly do need to be familiar and comfortable with theories and approaches to texts derived from linguistics, language teaching and cross-cultural communication. For example, the work of Clyne (1980), Fairclough (1992), Hinds (1987), Kaplan (1966) and Swales (1990) are, for me, invaluable in informing the

way we work with students. Indeed linguistic analysis (both of course materials written by lecturers and assignments written by students) is the basis from which most study advisers work; but, again, this approach must then be adapted in close relation to the academic discourses in which the student is enmeshed. The relationship between language and thinking is always problematic, both in linguistic/ cognitive theory and in philosophy - and in most of the students' essay and thesis drafts with which we wrestle day by day.

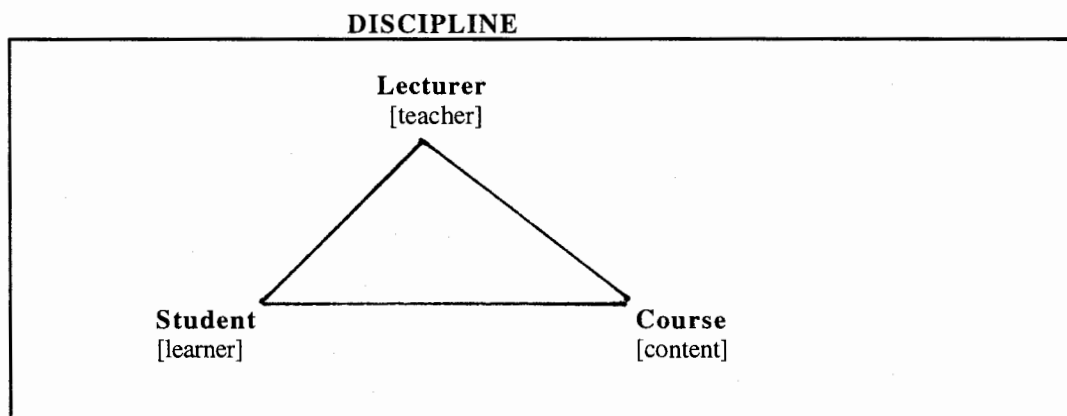
One other theoretical approach to the nexus of teaching and learning, it seems to me, is particularly relevant to the ways in which study advisers do work: the hermeneutical approach which Gordon Taylor (1993) has discussed so persuasively in a 1992 HERDSA symposium, arguing that hermeneutics, particularly as theorised by Gadamer, offers a resolution of the tension between learning and language. It points us both to the essential relationship between practical knowledge, language and the unity of understanding which underpins all advanced learning, and to the 'dialogic' nature of the relationship between study advisers and the students who seek their assistance.

As study advisers we are always working at the crossroads of language and understanding; but we will diminish our usefulness if we emphasise one and neglect the other. Indeed some of the best intentioned but least productive advice comes from 'language specialists' who unwittingly encourage students (and the staff who teach them) to believe that all that needs to be done with a confused piece of writing or thinking is 'to tidy up the language'. Yet we recognise immediately that such advice is ill-conceived: in practical terms it is usually ineffective as the 'poor expression' most often derives from poor thinking rather than poor grammar (Taylor & Nightingale, 1987; Taylor et al., 1988); and in professional terms it is misdirected for it focuses on the product (the text) rather than on the producer (the student as learner).

#### 4. Making the student the focus

We need to acquire this extensive formal knowledge and complex local knowledge because this underpins our work with students. Our practice is determined by the relationships between the student as learner, the academic staff as teacher, the content and skills generic to each particular discipline, and the particular task or problem the student brings to us.

So we work from a model that sets out the relationship between content, teacher and learner, all within the boundaries of a particular discipline. One simple configuration [Fig.1] might be:



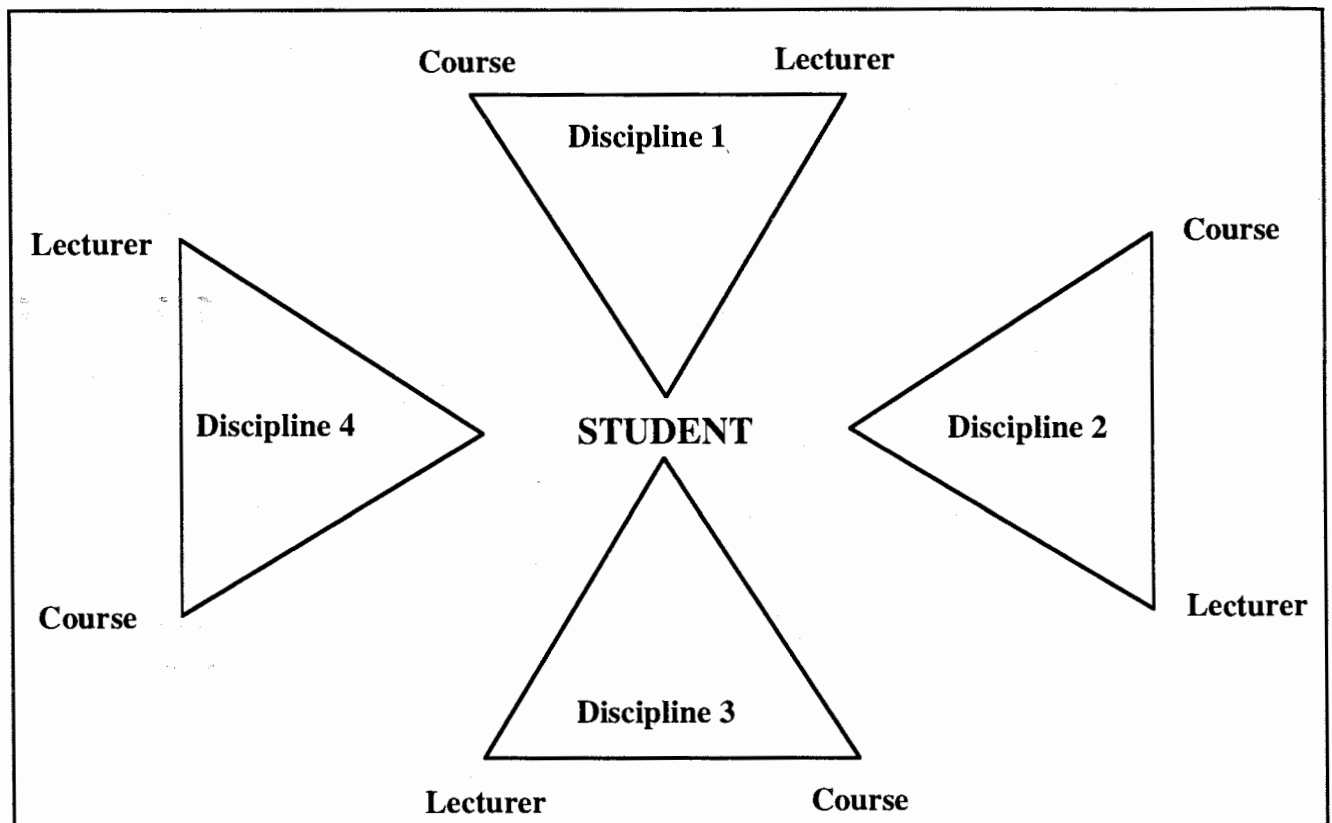
**Fig.1: A simplified model of the teaching-learning relationship in a university course**

This general model sets out the three 'players' and reminds us that at each point in the triangle different sets of criteria for appropriate action are brought to bear, depending on our view of the purpose of university education and of the experts at those points. If, for example, we take an elitist educational perspective, the teacher is the guardian and expert, the course content or curriculum is the valued knowledge, and the student is the apprentice. And although within a specific discipline the curriculum is distinctive, the intellectual and practical skills the apprentice student must acquire may transfer to some extent across disciplinary boundaries; thus the student's acquisition of lab skills, writing skills, analytical and critical skills will extend beyond any particular course

and any particular discipline. On the other hand, if we focus on each point of the relationship in turn, we see that the lecturer will be influenced by the demands of the discipline being practised, the curriculum or course

content will be shaped both by that discipline and by pedagogical preferences, and the student will be examined in terms of theories of learning.

If, however, we move from this simple and equidistant model of the relationship of teacher, content and learner to a model [Fig.2] which places the student as the central focus, we recognise that the actual situation is more complex. For a start, each student in first year may enter up to four different sub-cultures (on the basis of taking four first year courses in different departments) as well as becoming immersed in the broader culture of the university.



**Fig.2: A student-centred model of the teaching-learning relationship**

Here we can recognise the complexity of the actual situation for a first year student juggling four courses in four different disciplines simultaneously. Whereas to the lecturer in the previous model (Fig.1) a student is seen only in the context of one discipline, in the student's reality this discipline occupies only a quarter of his or her attention. Amid such competing tensions, it is no wonder many first year students seem confused, semi-articulate, lacking a sense of their own identity. It is here that the study adviser is uniquely positioned and qualified to assist these students to gain a sense of intellectual balance and control.

### **5. The study adviser as cross-cultural interpreter and mediator**

It is particularly in relation to the acculturation of students into a range of disciplines that the study adviser, rather than a lecturer immersed in an individual discipline, has a role to play. Many students have problems

juggling their work in four different courses because they transpose the different disciplinary discourses. To illustrate this very common problem in working across disciplines, here is an example drawn from the work of one student who was enrolled in courses in English Literature and in Women's Studies. This was her opening paragraph for an essay for the English Department on the topic: "Discuss the representation of women in any three poems by Donne":

I have chosen to look at Donne's representation of women in his three poems: "Elegie: To his Mistris Going to Bed" (p.53); "Song" (p.58); and "The Undertaking" (p.59) from The Metaphysical Poets. The narrative voice in "Song" and "The Undertaking" explicitly attacks women with a misogynist vigour. The narrator in ""Elegie" is certainly less hostile, yet he is still firmly rooted in a phallogentric and patriarchal tradition.

Here we have a fairly typical confounding of the discourses of two separate disciplines, with the 'rhetoric' of Women's Studies contaminating the less ideologically overt approach of literary analysis. The lecturer in the English department would certainly recognise the inappropriateness of this introduction; but would be less likely to recognise that the cause lay in the structure of the student's degree program, and so would be unlikely to provide criticism and feedback which could resolve the real confusion (unconscious boundary-crossing) in the student's mind.

Let me illustrate a more complex situation with the example of another student who came recently for help. She happened to be studying courses in Economics, Statistics, Accounting and Sociology (courses bridging not merely four departments but two Faculties). She came with a Sociology essay topic which she was just starting to research: "Why do markets fail?" (2000 words). She had chosen this question with apparent rationality as she was already familiar with the concept of 'markets' in her Economics course and she hoped this would cut down on her background reading. (At this point, every study adviser can sense the dangers ahead.) Sure enough, the student produced her Economics textbook and showed me the chapter on "Market Structure and Competitive Markets", full of explanations of 'long-run equilibrium', 'short-run average variable costs' and the introductory statement 'The structures of markets differ according to the behaviour of the firms and purchasers in each market'. She had even brought along her Economics course outline in which she had marked the tutorial topic:

'Explain why private markets allocate resources without centralised direction or planning. In particular, explain why many diverse consumption and production choices are so well coordinated in private market economies.'

She hoped this would be the direction of her research for her Sociology essay - but it seemed suspiciously straightforward, and she wanted some reassurance she was on the right track.

To check this uncertainty, we turned to her Sociology course outline and set of readings (which she had largely neglected as she'd already 'had' the Economics lectures, and the relevant Sociology lectures would not come up before the essay was due). Here we found the tutorial topic was 'Money, Markets and Consumption', which did not seem too distant from the Economics approach. However, when we turned to the recommended initial readings we found articles which opened with such sentences as:

It is only in its era of monopoly that the capitalist mode of production takes over the totality of individual, family, and social needs and, in subordinating them to the market, also reshapes them to serve the needs of capital...

Money is found to originate in well socialised objects enjoying particular concentrations of magical spirit...

The student could immediately recognise these readings did not sound like her Economics textbook; but it took much more time and questioning before she began to understand that her Economics 'knowledge' was not necessarily appropriate for her Sociology essay. For her, this recognition may have been a beginning of wisdom.

Yet had she turned to her Sociology lecturer for this initial guidance, she might well have been discouraged if, as is likely, the lecturer had merely told her that her approach was irrelevant and she should concentrate only on the recommended readings. She might also have objected that she was being barred from presenting a well-based viewpoint which was already part of her formal 'knowledge'.

Such cross-disciplinary confusions are not unusual. At the ANU we have many students not merely working across different departments within one Faculty but taking occasional courses in another Faculty. At a guess I would think about 15% of our undergraduates will be taking one or more later year units in departments in which they have not undergone the initiation of first year, because they are taking particular cross-disciplinary programs (such as Women's Studies or Australian Studies) or because their degree includes some unit from other disciplines (such as Introduction to Business Law in the Commerce degree). We also have about 30% of our undergraduates enrolled in combined degrees, that is in degree structures which systematically span two Faculties. So a great many of our students are required to straddle a range of academic discourses at different points in their studies.

One particularly interesting group of cross-disciplinary students are those who have completed their first year in one Faculty (say, Arts) and then gained admission on the basis of their first year results to a combined Arts/Law degree in their second year. These students are, by definition, bright, successful, and highly motivated. And yet they very often run into considerable difficulty when they begin to make the transition between their existing highly successful learning skills developed in the Arts Faculty and the new demands placed on them in the study of Law. As one student commented:

*Now that I'm set in my uni ways, I'm finding it hard to change to a new discipline. Especially because I'm trying to be a 2nd year when in fact I'm a 1st year in Law.*

Another student making a similar transition commented:

*It certainly did affect my study habits. Doing Arts and Law courses has required me to almost split my brain in half, as this was the only way I could handle it... The lecturers warned us at the start of the year that writing in Law would be different from anything we'd done before, but that was only rhetoric. They never showed us what was different or gave us models or advice to follow.*

Here the skilled study adviser can work with such students on analysing the structure, language and underlying logic of a case summary or an exercise in Torts or Contracts, and can help them draw useful comparisons with their writing in their other disciplines. It is the very fact that these combined Law degree students are among the brightest and most able students in the university that means they are most aware of their own uncertainties, and their lecturers are least likely to consider they might need some explicit guidance.

The study adviser, as I have already argued, is uniquely placed to assist students who are working in cross-disciplinary courses - not merely assisting them to work within the discourse and conventions appropriate to the discipline in which they are writing but also to recognise the commonalities across disciplines and the fundamental differences between them. Here the study adviser can draw attention to the broad generic skills that the student is calling on, making visible the intellectual nature of each discipline through comparison and contrast, which go deeper than 'checking each course guide for rules about double-spacing and referencing format' (to quote one student). It is this combination of familiarity with the range of academic discourses, combined with local knowledge about particular Faculties, departments, courses and lecturers, that is of most use to the student caught in the no-person's-land between conflicting academic tribal systems.

When working with Honours and graduate students on problems relating to their research and writing their theses, it is our 'generic' knowledge that is particularly valuable. Here the students are becoming increasingly expert in their own fields and increasingly skilled in their approaches to research and writing. Our role with these students is, more often, extending their options by suggesting alternative strategies by which they can manage the process of research and writing, or pointing to ways their problems have been handled in other departments or graduate programs. We may talk to individual students or join in group seminars about such issues as negotiating a working arrangement with their supervisor, managing the isolation and doubts that arise when engaged in independent research, or the ways in which examiners are likely to examine a thesis in their discipline. As often as not we are enlarging the view of both students and their supervisors by bringing news of the customs of the other academic tribes within the University - for there is remarkably little communication across these territories, and much amazement at 'what goes on' elsewhere.

## **6. Implications: the non-territorial, non-tribal study adviser**

The theme of this Conference is "Integrating teaching of academic discourse into courses in the disciplines" and there is a range of ways in which this theme can be interpreted and our practice as study advisers implemented.

One interpretation might be that our most effective role, as study advisers, is to sensitise academic staff to the specific nature of their disciplinary discourses so that they can, themselves, assist their students more effectively in entering into their cultural community. I have great difficulty with this concept, if only because it is our experience that most academic staff are 'culture-blind' to their own discourses; indeed it is inherent in a cultural community that many values and behaviours are taken for granted as being 'common knowledge' and so remain unexplained, implicit and 'common sense'. It is also our experience that when staff from different disciplines come together in, for example, a staff development workshop on improving supervision or on teaching in large classes, they will spend much time being amazed at (and critical of) the ways in which their colleagues in other departments work. Thus they may have great difficulty, and relatively little interest, in working with the generic and cross-disciplinary skills underlying their teaching. For example, Ramsden et al (1986) report that their attempt to introduce a 'metacognitively oriented course in study skills' into first year courses in various Faculties at Melbourne University was counter-productive, at least in part because it was taught ineffectively by the academic staff in each department. In our own experience we consistently find students to be more willing and flexible learners than staff.

A somewhat broader interpretation of the Conference theme might suggest that study advisers should be 'outposted' to different Faculties or departments where they can serve as a resource for both staff and students. This is initially a more attractive proposal as it allows for professional specialisation and also for more input by the study adviser to the curriculum and teaching practices of departments. However, there are risks here too. Whereas the adviser in this context may have more direct impact on a smaller sphere, the danger of too close an identification with a discipline, or grouping of cognate disciplines, is the loss of the overview which enables us to recognise the problems of students working across disciplines. Also, from a student perspective, an adviser located within a department is very easily seen as a member of that hierarchy, rather than as an independent and impartial source of assistance. Inevitably, too, an outposted adviser goes 'native' and is socialised, through the departmental meetings and coffee hours, into the departmental system until full assimilation as a 'colleague' takes place. In such a situation the study adviser may too easily become isolated from the professional and collegial expertise of other advisers, and the students will be the eventual losers.

There is also the flexible strategy of study advisers grouped in an independent Centre but working at times within the structure of a course or department, usually at the invitation of a lecturer. Here the adviser is brought in by the lecturer or coordinator as an 'expert', but the actual session is run cooperatively, with the lecturer providing the knowledge of disciplinary content and the study adviser drawing attention to the heuristics. There are many other ways in which study advisers can cooperate with lecturing staff and thesis supervisors without losing their own identity and objectivity. They can assist in wording of assignments, in the production of course guides, in running special sessions for international students or transfer students from other institutions - but always in cooperation with the lecturer in charge of the course. Whether working with small groups or individual students, study advisers must always ground their advice within the disciplines in which the students are working; but, unlike the course lecturers whose concern is primarily with disciplinary content and methodology, their focus must first be on the students themselves and then more broadly across disciplinary boundaries.

In all the contexts in which we work I suggest that it is our cross-disciplinary expertise that is most useful to our students, as well as our recognition that university education is a process of intellectual development which takes place over three or more years. So we recognise that students need different types and degrees of assistance at different stages. For example, it is not useful to discuss macro learning skills or cross-disciplinary differences in discourse at the start of first year, as students are then only stepping into the university culture and have no experience of the significant but often subtle differences we might wish to discuss. But by the later years students often need only a nudge to recognise the special demands of a particular assignment; or else they seek us out with the appropriate questions relating to shifts in disciplinary discourses (and we can judge how well we have assisted such students in their first year by the appropriacy of questions they now know how to ask). Our practice is based on regarding each student as the focus and agent of an individual integration of a particular range of disciplines and intellectual skills.

## **7. Conclusion: our rationale**

I argue, therefore, that study advisers must take as their central focus the student as a complex learner. Our function is to provide professional advice and support to students by drawing on an array of theories, including hermeneutics and linguistic theory, and on our knowledge of a range of disciplinary discourses as well as our local knowledge of our own universities. Yet at all times we are professionally most effective when we maintain our distance from any one theoretical approach, any particular Faculty or discipline, so that, as totally independent players, we can offer and draw on an overview of the whole academic territory. I believe that we can best develop our expertise by continual reflection on our daily encounters with students and through collegiality, both among study advisers within our universities and across universities at conferences such as this. We do not have membership of a professional association as a job qualification, as do counsellors; and we do not require specialised training, as do teachers in language centres. Yet we do have a clear role, a clear constituency, and we do make a recognisable contribution to the academic enterprise of the university. We are necessary, so we exist.

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## RESHAPING THE MONASH BA: KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN FIRST YEAR ARTS SUBJECTS

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### ABSTRACT

The Faculty of Arts at Monash University has begun a major rethinking and reshaping of its teaching programs within the broad framework of a new Education Policy being developed by the University. Among the proposals for Arts is that all students should graduate with a clearer sense of the nature of knowledge and its limitations, with a more critical self-awareness of their own and other cultures, and with 'a high level of research, advocacy and reporting skills'. With respect to first year, an initial proposal to mount a separate, compulsory learning skills course for credit was given the thumbs down by the faculty, clearing the way for so-called 'skills' to be seen as an integral part of helping students towards 'an explicit understanding of how knowledge in [each] discipline is acquired, practised and communicated'. One of the major challenges has been negotiating the language which articulates what we seek in a manner that gives principled guidelines to departments, while leaving them as free as possible to put their stamp of 'ownership' on the courses to be developed. What we hope to avoid is a simple grafting on of 'skills' to the courses as they already stand. This paper provides a progress report (the revisions to first year subjects will not be completed until May, 1995, for introduction in 1996); and muses on the practical and intellectual challenges of the exercise.

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In May, 1994, Monash University appointed a new Dean of the Faculty of Arts, one of whose objects was to make the Monash Arts degree more 'distinctive'. This was to be done within the framework of a developing University Education Policy, which has quite a lot in common with the recommendations of the recent Higher Education Council report *Seeking Quality* (1992).<sup>1</sup> The Dean proposed that all students should graduate with a clearer sense of the nature of knowledge and its limitations, with a more critical awareness of their own and others' cultures, and with 'a high level of research, advocacy and reporting skills'. It is perfectly plain that a certain polity had to be in place to make such aspirations possible. But polities, even in the managerial climate that now obtains in Australian universities, constitute no more than a necessary condition for change to take place. They are not in themselves sufficient - as indeed should be the case where vestiges of collegiality (or 'ownership' as we now say) still exist. The intellectual climate which produced the HEC report is not necessarily one which is either understood or endorsed by many academic staff. In describing what has happened recently in our faculty (this is an early progress report) I shall try to say something of wider significance about the interaction of system and intellect in curriculum change.

With respect to the first year of the BA, the question the faculty had to face at the outset was *whether* indeed a sense of the nature of knowledge, intellectual capabilities, skills and attitudes could and should be taught as a separate, compulsory, one-semester subject, or whether they should be taught within the context of the disciplines. The naming of this present conference suggests that this question has already been settled in favour of integration. Certainly, this is the orthodoxy that has come to prevail in our profession over the last ten years or so, and it is something a number of us at this conference have been assiduously working towards since the early 1980s. But as we see from the title of one of the sessions, the matter is still quite rightly being contested. Some of the things I have to say both now and at the end of this paper will, I hope, nudge the argument on a trifle.

I have just referred to four dimensions of learning and understanding that have played a significant part in our thinking: a sense of the nature of knowledge, intellectual capabilities, skills and attitudes. I shall come back to various of them later; but first I want to make it clear that I see an important distinction between what I have

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This is no coincidence. The University's now Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Ian Chubb, was ultimately responsible for the writing of *Seeking Quality* as the then Chair of the Higher Education Council.

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recently come to call 'capabilities' and so-called 'skills', which bears on the question of whether these things should be integrated or whether they should be taught in a stand-alone course. What I call capabilities are those aspects of understanding which, though they might be 'generic' in some sense, can best be learned and practised in particular disciplinary (or defined cross-disciplinary) contexts. I do not wish to deny that there might be some idealised norms of academic writing and scholarship; but it is in the close engagement with a variety of disciplines and the particular subject-matters that happen to interest different people that these idealised capabilities are realised in a concrete and useful fashion. So things like writing (most of the significant aspects of it), reading, the interpretation of evidence, critical thinking, even in many cases referencing are on this definition capabilities rather than skills. Capabilities are part and parcel of that elusive thing we call understanding, which is for ever open-ended and subject to change and modification.

Skills, by contrast, can be mastered, can be applied in any appropriate context, have a habit of dropping away quickly if we don't practise them, but when practised can be, probably must be, put into action automatically ('without thinking'), and are always means to a predetermined end.<sup>1</sup> On this definition, skills are really a matter of mastering certain technologies predefined by others - such as in the laboratory, the studio, the library, in front of the computer screen and so on. Some of these skills are of course tied closely to certain subjects, as in surgery, painting or music, while others (for example, mastering MS-DOS or some other program) are for most of us a means to very generalised ends.

It therefore seemed to me that the faculty could be responsible for providing stand-alone courses in those skills such as basic computing and statistics that might be agreed to be general to an arts education, while the individual departments should shoulder responsibility for teaching capabilities and, of course, those skills so important to the discipline that some practitioners at its forefront might even regard them not as skills but as capabilities to be newly understood. But, as might have been expected, my own finely drawn and articulated line between capabilities and skills, has so far been somewhat lost on some departments, whose support is crucial. It was not, however, lost on one large and influential department, which commented that

"skills" is an unsuitable (exceptionally instrumentalist) term for covering what first year students need to learn. Basics of reading, researching and writing in the discipline, including conventions for referencing and bibliographies, reflect [this discipline's] broad, complex internal form, and are much of a piece with those of other social/cultural sciences.

I doubt that I could have put it as well myself. It seems just now that the broad thrust of the proposal to integrate the teaching of capabilities into the disciplines will go ahead. But the arguments in favour of this course of action are not entirely on the transcendental level of the one I have just quoted.

Heads of departments in the faculty were almost unanimously against the idea of a stand-alone course in academic skills and capabilities for three main reasons. The first is that they feared a compulsory course for credit might mean that good students would abandon Monash Arts for other universities which did not force them through this hoop. Secondly, setting aside six points from the BA could well mean that some departments would lose students (or more accurately the financial benefits of student enrolments) to the faculty course: this was particularly true of some smaller departments who depend upon convincing undecided students to take the first year subject they offer to make up the points required. Finally, it was feared that a stand-alone subject would drain resources from departments to the faculty (including, I suppose, the Language and Learning Unit), which would prosper at their expense. Those with experience of large American freshman programs were especially vocal on this last point.

Another option was tried. Following a practice pioneered, I believe, at Princeton, and since adopted by a number of American universities, it was suggested that certain first year subjects be 'tagged' or 'designated' as writing and academic skills courses. Departments would be invited to offer such designated courses, and first year students would be required to take at least one of these. Since it was likely that all the large departments would so designate at least one of their subjects, and that the smaller departments would follow suit in order to protect their interests, this alternative ran for some time. This solution would achieve the main substance of what I wished to achieve: in practice, all students would receive some exposure to those things I see to be central from a variety of disciplinary viewpoints. And the courses would be designed and taught by those who had a significant commitment to this way of doing things. But this proposal foundered on the argument that it might take enrolments away from those subjects that were not so designated.

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<sup>1</sup> I have dwelled on the nature of skills and understanding elsewhere: G. Taylor (1990; 1993).

The faculty's Academic Policy Committee therefore decided to recommend:

the recasting of all first year subjects (with the possible exception of pure language subjects) in such a way that students are led to an explicit understanding of how knowledge in that particular discipline is acquired, practised and communicated. Thus explicit attention should be given both to the 'approaches' or 'methods' or 'discourse' of the discipline, and to the means, the skills, by which these are put into effect.

As I write, there seems to be broad support for this approach.<sup>1</sup> Only one department (out of fourteen) is holding out for a stand-alone course, on the oft-quoted grounds that the department's curriculum is too tight to allow the time for these 'extras'. One modern language department says an essay is an essay, and sees no reason why how to write one should be taught repeatedly across the faculty; but this has been neutralised by setting up a working party on the teaching of modern languages and 'studies' which asks these departments to come to some general consensus on how to integrate the teaching of 'pure language' and 'cultural studies' components of their subjects.

The broadest political issues seem in large measure to have been resolved by this approach. The questions remain how best to put the recommendation into practice, how to ensure that its spirit is preserved, and how to start answering the questions about its intellectual and pedagogical substance that are now being asked.

As part of the whole exercise, the Dean's research assistant, Jennifer Bell, conducted an analysis of all 1994 first year course guides in order to see what capabilities and skills the various subjects claimed to be teaching. As she points out in her report, 'In such an examination there are a number of difficulties. Skills that are claimed in the course guide may not be taught in practice, [and] the reverse may also be true'. My own experience tells me that this is probably true: certain expectations about, for example plagiarism, referencing and bibliographical conventions are stated, but not actually taught. On the other hand, aspects of essay writing may be taught in passing - for example in the marking of the essays and in general comments on them in lectures or tutorials - but are nowhere made very explicit. What does emerge in Bell's summary is that critical analysis of arguments and texts is well covered and that those capabilities and skills that are 'not readily apparent' are note-taking, essay construction, how to use the library and oral/tutorial presentation.

In seeking to redress some of these deficiencies we have generally taken what might be called the high ground. That is to say, rather than spell out what is needed in terms of behavioural 'skills' (except where necessary), we have produced a list of questions couched in fairly broad terms which departments are asked to address when they restructure first year subjects. (This list has gone through about four revisions, and may yet go through more.)<sup>2</sup> As we have seen in the quotation from the policy document above, we begin by trying to articulate what is needed for students to be led to 'an explicit understanding of how knowledge ... is acquired practised and communicated'. The means or skills follow from this; they are not in general the central focus of attention.

To illustrate what I mean, I shall say a few words about just a few of these sets of questions:

What kinds of questions do students of the discipline have to learn to ask? Besides questions about what constitutes 'knowledge' in the discipline, which ethical, aesthetic and linguistic questions arise?

First, this question tries to encourage course developers to go beyond a description of content, even beyond consideration of the most obvious questions of epistemic knowledge ('How can we know') to the two other Kantian concerns: with practical reason ('attitudes' or values) and aesthetic judgement. And it also raises the twentieth century preoccupation with the role of language in knowledge and understanding. (Most students outside literature classes - and many academic staff - assume that language is a more or less transparent window onto the content of what they are studying, and do not know what kinds of questions can be asked of texts.) Secondly, by directing attention to learning to ask questions, we would hope to develop more explicit attention to things like how to analyse essay topics, how to ask those kinds of questions that make it possible to get an essay going, and, in due course, how to come up with one's own essay or research paper topics.

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1 Each department was given money from the University's allocation to the faculty from 'Quality' funds to go into retreat to consider their response to the proposals. At the time of writing not all responses have been received.

2 The complete list of questions is reproduced as an appendix to this paper.

The fourth set of questions in the list takes up some of the issues in the third (on reading) by focusing on what underlies interpretative or analytical writing:

How are coherent and persuasive arguments in the discipline constructed, and how is evidence of various kinds (verbal, visual, statistical etc.) selected and interpreted? How in academic dialogue do we try to deal with differences in the interpretations of evidence?

Rather than dwell in the first instance on the purely formal structuring of an essay or its parts, these questions look to the nature of argument and the use of evidence in a discipline as, so to speak, the fundamental unit of thought. In emphasising coherence we can tackle both the rhetoric of the discipline and its realisation in the language students use; in drawing attention to persuasion we are tackling some of those oversimplified beliefs about 'objectivity' (and, it must be said, opinion and 'bias') that many students bring with them from school. In drawing attention to various kinds of evidence, we are asking all course developers to think about teaching students to use them: sociologists, in my experience, rarely teach first year students how to mount a statistical argument even while requiring them to use tables and figures in their essays. (Students commonly just photocopy them from books and they are left to speak for themselves.) Similarly, learning how to interpret and write about visual images and linguistic artefacts should not have to depend solely on a student's including visual arts or literature subjects in his or her degree. And finally, in emphasising the dialogic nature of academic discourse (that most of what we learn is filtered through what has been said about it by others, with whom we have to engage in a conversation), the faculty is asking academic staff to help students constructively to confront that common question 'How can I decide when the experts disagree?'

So when we do come to deal with things that look a bit more obviously like what we have traditionally called 'skills', we should be able to do so rather more in a spirit of discussion and enquiry than is commonly the case. One of our sets of questions is very practical:

How are research and writing actually practised by academics, and how can the department's teaching methods and assessment regimes encourage students to develop their own good practices?

There is, as we know, an often considerable gulf between the kinds of nostrums about writing peddled in course handbooks and the actual practices of academic staff. The standard advice that says we first engage in reading and research, followed by thinking and planning topped off by 'writing up' and revising is not actually what most people do most of the time, though it is what many of us do some of the time. What seems to be the case is that almost any combination of these activities will be used under different circumstances by any individual academic. I did not, for example, start out with an outline of the present paper; though I do at other times. A colleague tells me he works and works at his Introductions until they are pretty well perfect before allowing himself to write another word, but when pushed admits there are circumstances in which he breaks his self-imposed rule. By encouraging staff to be a bit more open about these things (many are very diffident about discussing imperfect drafts of their own work with students) we would hope that attention to some so-called 'skills' can be interesting and challenging when set in the wider contexts of 'method' and constructing disciplinary discourses.

Two fairly routine objections to raising these kinds of matters in first year are that they are too complex and subtle, and that the student has actually to have acquired some 'disciplinary knowledge' before they can be tackled. To the first objection, I would say that it is part of the art of teaching to make decisions about 'pacing' these things, and that issues of knowledge and understanding introduced gently at a level of *practical* sophistication appropriate to first year can be gradually taken up in more complex ways in later years. This seems infinitely preferable to the common present practice of hitting third year students with highly abstract and decontextualised courses in the method and philosophy of the discipline; and our proposal certainly does not encourage the shifting down of this kind of approach to first year.

The argument about having to know something before you learn about how to know it is, needless to say, a logical as well as a pedagogical furphy - a misty-eyed rumour about some doctrines of nineteenth century empiricism. Learning something always involves some set of assumptions about how best to learn it, however unconscious or implicit. And the same goes for the flip side of the process - how teachers present their material. Many first year history courses at Monash have been teaching students explicitly how to do history for years, even including attention to *why* historians footnote and reference in the way they do. And with the plethora of alternative 'readings' of texts now in the intellectual market place, few teachers of literature or cultural studies under the age of 50 still believe that students must first somehow learn how to read (which usually means read in the manner of post-war New Criticism) before they learn to read 'differently'. We recognise, nevertheless, that

there are many academic staff who are plainly uncomfortable about these things, so that when we write our documents we try to keep these doubts steadily in view.

The avenue we have sought, as I have said, is to try to make all teachers of first year subjects more reflective about their teaching and their students' learning in terms consonant with how knowledge is developed, practised and communicated in their own disciplines. One has to concede that not many academics are interested in student learning as an object for study in itself. We must also concede that quite a few academics are not particularly interested in standing back and taking a broader look at the practice of their disciplines, on which our battery of questions has trained its sights. Even so, this path certainly would appear to be the more promising. If, as early indications suggest, we do succeed in tapping academics' interest in how concepts, ideas, attitudes, discourse structures and so on in their discipline come to be as they are, we can be fairly sure from what we know about student learning that this will be more effective than grafting 'skills' onto 'content'.

Most academics have a great fear that, when those outside the discipline step in to set up a general 'system' or approach to teaching and learning, the inevitable result will be simultaneous obfuscation and over-simplification. Hence their morbid suspicion of educationists. Our list of questions to be addressed is of course such a generalised system, and I would be less than candid were I to pretend that behind it lies no broad philosophical position.<sup>1</sup> But that is nothing new. All developments in higher education have owed a lot to broad positions (in such grand nineteenth century cases as those of von Humboldt's or Cardinal Newman's, still very much with us) which have earned wider political and institutional, as well as intellectual, support.

Indeed, it is quite necessary to have some people who can stand outside the everyday concerns of the disciplines, acting to a degree like sympathetic anthropologists, but who also have earned a certain authority and who have access to such power as makes action possible. The art lies in finding ways of getting authority and power (they are not the same) to articulate in broad terms the more intimate and detailed 'lifeworld' (as Habermas calls it) of those who write and teach the courses. It is my own hope that our list of questions has struck the right balance, and that for many departments it will open up novel and interesting ways for them to think about the teaching of their subjects. But one must accept that this does not necessarily happen of its own accord. It does need the initiative of someone like the Dean of whom I spoke at the outset.

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This position is spelled out in the two papers mentioned earlier.

### **APPENDIX**

What kinds of question do students of the discipline have to learn to ask? Besides questions about what constitutes 'knowledge' in the discipline, which ethical, aesthetic and linguistic questions arise?

What traditions, assumptions, theories or other such underlying structures in the history of the discipline influence present understandings of major concepts, ideas and approaches examined in the subject? What in our current situation influences them?

How, with respect to the questions the discipline asks, do we read and take notes critically from differing kinds or genres of source material (including non-verbal materials such as visual images, statistics and other symbol systems)? How is a paper and a monograph to be read and reviewed?

How are coherent and persuasive arguments in the discipline constructed, and how is evidence of various kinds (verbal, visual, statistical etc.) selected and interpreted? How in academic dialogue do we try to deal with differences in interpretations of evidence?

How are research and writing in the discipline actually practised by academics, and how can the department's teaching methods and assessment regimes encourage students to develop their own good practices?

Which conventions of presentation and communication, particularly but not only in referencing systems and bibliographies, are important to the discipline; and why?

How does recent technology - in particular word-processing, spreadsheets, task-specific software, databases and networking - assist in research, writing and communication?

How can the oral communication of academic work be performed effectively, making discriminating use of audio-visual and other recent technology where possible?

The faculty will supply advice and assistance to departments as required, particularly on ways of developing computer assisted learning materials for teaching those skills that lend themselves to this kind of treatment. The Language and Learning Unit is available to help departments integrate the teaching of capabilities and skills into the revised subjects.

## CRITICAL ANALYSIS FOR UNDERGRADUATES - UNMASKING THE PROCESS

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### ABSTRACT

"Critical Analysis for Undergraduates -- Unmasking the Process" is a collaborative project that is seeking to assist first year undergraduate students at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean, to develop critical practice skills. Team members include staff from the Learning Assistance Centre and academics from a number of faculties. The project team became aware that students experienced difficulty in understanding what was expected of them in terms of critical practice. Many of our students were the first generation university students and a significant number were "Learning Background Other than English". Research and experience led the group to formulate the aims of the project.

A research grant was sought initially to generate a comprehensive summary and profile of the process of critical practice within the University, to analyse the ways in which different faculties approach critical practice and to initiate debate and discussion within the university community about the teaching and learning of critical practice.

In order to achieve these aims, examples of student assignments that demonstrate critical thinking were obtained from academics across faculties. Lecturers were asked to highlight how critical practice was demonstrated in the work and students were asked to annotate their assignments to show their process of critical analysis. These annotated assignments will be incorporated into a booklet which will seek to highlight the nature and expectations of critical practice across faculties. Academics will be involved throughout the process so that the booklet becomes integral to their teaching practices.

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The purpose of this paper is to share information about an action research project entitled "Critical Analysis for Undergraduates - Unmasking the Process". The project is still in progress, but in terms of its aims and outcomes so far, it has much to offer those who are interested in the collaborative efforts of Faculty and Academic Support staff on the issue of Critical Practice for undergraduates. The project was initiated, in July 1993, by the Learning Assistance Centre at UWS (Nepean) in response to student demand. While many faculties at the university require students to "critically analyse and/or evaluate", few offer information about how to do this. A number of students are confused with regard to what is expected of them by lecturers/markers, as is evidenced by requests for consultations at the LAC.

Attempts by LAC staff to provide short courses/workshops have proved difficult and resulted in a decision to invite more input from faculty staff concerning their expectations of student assignments. The problem for faculty staff, as well as LAC staff, is that Critical Thinking has been the subject of much debate over the last several decades.

What is Critical Thinking? Is it a generic skill or is it subject specific? Is it possible to teach critical thinking or does the expression of critical thinking skills only become apparent after a student has acquired an in-depth understanding of the subject or field that is being studied? Are critical thinking skills transferable? Do critical thinking skills vary according to culture or learning style? How difficult is it for someone to think critically in a foreign language? How closely related are thinking and language? How can students learn to think critically, or critically analyse an essay question? How do students express critical practice in the visual and performing arts?

These were some of the types of questions raised at the first meeting of the Writing and Thinking Network (formerly the Critical Thinking Network) at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean, in July, 1993. Three members of the Network had attended the **Fifth International Conference on Thinking** in Townsville in 1992, at which there was considerable debate about what constitutes critical thinking and how this affects teaching practice (for example, Bailey, UTS; Noordink, University of Southern Queensland).

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Within the context of the debate there is polarisation around the issue of whether or not critical thinking can be taught independently of the content of the disciplines. Perhaps one of the most well known proponents of the subject specific side is McPeck (1981), with a more recent and local supporter being Hager (1992). The supporters of the generalisability of critical thinking skills include such authors as Seigel (1989), De Bono (1985) and Swartz and Perkins (1990). The former believe that "how" a discipline is taught either encourages or discourages critical thinking. For example, if student assessment does not require critical thinking then it is less likely to occur. The latter teach critical thinking skills through courses in logic, argumentation or problem solving, independently of the traditional disciplines.

Despite this long standing debate being an important issue, it was decided at the first Network meeting that our primary interests were: How is critical thinking expressed at UWS, Nepean? Does the expectation of critical analysis in assignments vary from faculty to faculty, and even within one faculty? How do students critically analyse a given topic? What is the process they go through to produce an assignment which demonstrates critical thought? Finally, how can we pass on this information to both students and staff in a practical way?

This decision precipitated a realisation that it was neither appropriate, nor necessary, to align ourselves with either faction of the debate but that it was better to assume an exploratory approach, which may or may not lend support to one or the other argument. In keeping with an exploratory approach, it was decided that the Action Research paradigm was a suitable research methodology. This will be discussed in more detail later.

For the purposes of the project, the term "Critical Practice" is used for various forms of critical thinking and critical analysis, to account for the diversity of expression between faculties.

## **THE THINKING AND WRITING NETWORK**

Initially the Thinking and Writing Network consisted of four LAC staff and four faculty representatives. The faculty staff represented those of Commerce, Visual & Performing Arts, Education and Humanities. Although the Humanities representative is no longer able to be involved in the project, the composition of the research team is significant in that it is a cross faculty network. This is significant not only for the project but also for the institution. As has been noted by Hodge (1993), there is a need for universities to develop a true collegiate atmosphere where the sharing of ideas, both within and between faculties, is encouraged. The project has already enabled this to happen, albeit to a minor extent so far; however through its process it will encourage a far greater sharing of ideas throughout the wider university community.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT**

In support of our observations, other studies (for example Chubb, 1992; tenHarmsel et al, 1993) have demonstrated the importance of critical practice in university courses. However, there is also considerable research which indicates that critical practice is a significant problem for undergraduates (for example Iwamoto, 1992). There is a recognition in the literature of the need for students to develop deep processing approaches to learning, in contrast to superficial ones. (Beasley, 1984; Boud et al, 1985; Entwistle, 1990). Researchers are in agreement that critical practice can only be implemented at the deep, analytical or holistic level of learning.

Such expectations are difficult enough for students who have graduated to university straight from high school, where assignments rarely demand critical analysis. They are even more problematic for students who are educationally disadvantaged in any way. According to a Nepean survey (1993), a significant proportion of commencing students at UWS Nepean (34.4%) come from language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE), where there are cultural norms which may not support the criticism of authorities, or encourage critical reflection (Kress, 1985). Furthermore, there is also a high proportion (54.77%) of students who are first generation university students and thus do not have the benefit of a family tradition of university study to draw upon (Nepean survey 1993). These students often have difficulty understanding what is required of them when they are asked to "**critically** analyse, discuss, evaluate..."

## RESEARCH PARIDIGM

To improve the LAC short course on "Critical Analysis" it appeared necessary to embark on a long term project involving faculty staff and, ultimately, students in the processes of the project. Thus the most appropriate method for doing this was considered to be **Action Research**. Implicit in the concept of Action Research methodology is the collaboration of group members for the mutual benefit of improving their approach to teaching and learning. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988: 189), Action Research can assist teachers to "gain greater autonomy in their situation by systematically reflecting on their own actions and then modifying them in the light of an awareness of their consequences."

McTaggart refers to recent Australian action research which was "constituted in a series of cycles of planning, action, observation, reflection "(1993: 31). These cycles can be demonstrated to be similar to those of the present project.

### AIMS:

The aims of this project can be summarised as follows:

- \* To generate a summary and profile of the process of critical analysis/practice as evidenced in student assignments within the University of Western Sydney, Nepean.
- \* To analyse and describe the ways in which different faculties approach critical practice.
- \* To initiate discussion and debate within the university about the teaching and learning of critical practice.
- \* To evaluate the effectiveness of using student assignments to analyse undergraduate critical practice.

## METHOD

### *PHASE 1: PLANNING*

This phase has involved over twelve months of meetings and other forms of communication, culminating in a functioning collaborative team. During this period the Writing and Thinking Network decided to produce a booklet of "model" assignments (see Kalantzis & Wignell, 1991), consisting of a number of student assignments demonstrating effective critical practice. This booklet is to be produced in collaboration with staff and students and be representative of all faculties. The process of producing the booklet was seen to be as important as the end product as it includes colloquia with faculties for staff feedback. Introductory explanations of the purpose of the booklet and analysis of cross faculty expectations for critical practice will be written by the Network. Each faculty entry will be prefaced by faculty specific comments regarding expectations of student critical practice. The Network was granted internal funding to cover the costs of producing a sample of booklets, for evaluation purposes, and a research assistant.

### *PHASE 2: INITIAL CONTACT WITH FACULTIES.*

Contact was made with each of the seven Faculties at UWS, Nepean (Humanities, Commerce, Visual and Performing Arts, Education, Health Sciences, Science and Technology and Engineering). Initially the aim was to attend Faculty Management meetings to inform faculty staff about the project, in order to acquire as many undergraduate assignments demonstrating successful use of critical practice as possible. After several attempts to attend such meetings, without much success, Deans of Faculties were contacted by mail and finally all staff were sent e-mail requests for assignments. All members of the Network have been involved in this process, each being responsible for one faculty.

Thirty-nine assignments, from five faculties out of seven, have been received..

Continued follow-up has been maintained by the research assistant.

### *PHASE 3: ANNOTATION OF "MODEL" ASSIGNMENTS*

With students' and lecturers' consent, selected assignments are being annotated. Lecturers are commenting on how and where critical practice is evident in the assignment and students are being asked to comment on the process of developing critical practice in their work. In order to annotate the assignments lecturers and students are being interviewed, separately, and the interviews recorded. The transcripts of taped interviews will be analysed for suitable comments for annotations. The transcripts will also provide further information which could be useful for this project (for example NUDIST analysis and discourse analysis) and possibly further research.

The process of arriving at the questions for the taped interviews was very much a product of the Action Research paradigm. Interview questions were compiled by each researcher and then organised into a suitable format for "*Focus Interviews*". Four "focus interviews" were conducted by the Research Assistant which yielded further information for discussion. For example, one lecturer who had been interviewed was adamant that the assignment under question did not demonstrate Critical Thinking but rather the ability to apply theory to practice in an industrial setting.

Is this equivalent to critical thinking or is it a different skill?

After much discussion by the Network a new set of questions was compiled. In the spirit of "true" collaboration we met on a Saturday and achieved an acceptable set of questions in three hours!

At present each Network member is interviewing one lecturer and one student, and analysing the transcripts by December 5th.

### *PHASE 4: COLLOQUIA ON FACULTY EXPECTATIONS OF CRITICAL PRACTICE IN STUDENT ASSIGNMENTS.*

Annotated assignments will be discussed and combined with faculty introductions regarding expectations of critical practice at a preliminary colloquium, scheduled for early 1995. It is expected that there will be a further colloquium before the booklet is produced to enable staff to comment on representation of faculty opinions on critical practice.

### *PHASE 5: EVALUATION OF BOOKLET*

The booklet will be used in coursework in a number of courses as well as made available to all students at Nepean. It is hoped that those booklets funded by the Seed Grant will be circulated amongst staff and students, both those involved in the project and others, for feedback.

### **DISSEMINATION OF MATERIAL AFTER THE BOOKLET IS PRODUCED:**

- \* Staff colloquia to review faculty expectations of critical practice.
- \* Workshop/discussion groups on critical practice for interested academics will be held. This may be done in conjunction with Staff Development.
- \* Student workshops conducted by the Learning Assistance Centre to encourage students to explore individually how they might go about critical practice.
- \* The cross faculty critical practice booklet will be incorporated into a significant number of undergraduate courses.

**TIMELINE**

The following is the original timeline proposed for the Seed Grant application. Due to complications with allocation of the funds an extension of time was requested and approved.

DATE	STAGE	ACTION PLAN	ACTION TAKEN BY	
SEMESTER 1 (1994) Weeks 1 - 6	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submit for ethics clearance</li> <li>• Commence literature review                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- collecting</li> <li>- accessing</li> <li>- photocopying</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Make initial contact with faculties to notify about project (eg. FMAC)</li> </ul>	Research Team	Research Assistant
Weeks 7 - 16	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make individual contacts with lecturers to collect annotated samples of students' work</li> <li>• Contact students for permission to use their work and to be interviewed for the project.</li> <li>• Conduct interviews with students to gather student annotations for their texts.</li> </ul>	Research Team (faculty members)	Research Assistant
SEMESTER BREAK				

SEMESTER 2 Weeks 1 - 8	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyse collected materials</li> <li>Analyse student interviews</li> </ul>	Research Team (faculty members) Research Team (LAC members)	Research Assistant
Weeks 8 - 10		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete literature review</li> <li>Hold colloquia to review materials &amp; project progress</li> </ul>	Research Team	
Weeks 10 - 13	4	MID SEMESTER BREAK <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Write General Introduction to Materials Collection</li> <li>Write Introduction to each faculty entry</li> </ul>	Research Team (LAC) Research Team (faculty members)	
Weeks 14 - 16	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hold colloquia to review introductions &amp; project progress</li> <li>Collate &amp; layout materials collection</li> <li>Print materials collection</li> </ul>	Research Team	Research Assistant Research Assistant
SEMESTER 1 (1995) Weeks 1 - 9	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faculty staff to mobilise materials collection to sample groups of students across faculties</li> </ul>	Research Team	
Weeks 10 - 16		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluate project in relation to its aims via data collection from interviews with students/staff who have used material</li> <li>Analyse data</li> </ul>	Research Team Research Team	
SEMESTER 2 (1995) Weeks 1 - 16	8	SEMESTER BREAK <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Write up results</li> <li>Hold colloquia</li> <li>Deliver conference papers</li> </ul>	Research Team Research Team Research Team	

## CONCLUSION

This project appears to be the first interdisciplinary, collaborative piece of research into critical practice in an Australian university. It does not aim to define critical practice but rather seeks to demonstrate the range of practices which are presently occurring within Nepean. The booklet of annotated "model" assignments is perceived as a useful tool, for both students and staff, which should provide opportunity for further knowledge and debate about the expression of critical practice at Nepean. It is hoped that with evaluation and further funding the booklet will be regularly updated.

free or incautious use of the *rhetoric* of disciplinary discourses and their differences in the context of study skills advice. The risk, I think, is of producing or confirming a kind of intellectual debilitation in certain students. And I think that this risk ought to be taken seriously whether or not one happens to hold a philosophically anti-realist position.

One of the saddest and most frustrating students to encounter — at least in a discipline such as mine — is the student who is a vulgar or naive relativist. One for whom collective intellectual inquiry is almost impossible because, as they say, we all have our own opinions. These students are not rare and they worry me. There are many others who have pronounced tendencies of this kind. Quite often they are rather weak students.

My concern is that in a study skills regime in which there is too much bland talk of features of the discourse of disciplines students may pick up messages such as those I list below. Note that I say, 'pick up messages', and not, 'learn about these doctrines'. Studying philosophy of language, metaphysics and epistemology is an entirely different matter.

1. The disciplines differ — they have different discourses — but these differences are essentially arbitrary. They are different language games, and if you want a good mark you have to learn the rules and play along.
2. The disciplines are sealed off from each other. They have, after all, different discourses with different rules. To the extent that there are any shared ideas or ways of arguing or epistemic standards this is as much contingent historical accident as the differences are.
3. I, the student, need not strive to integrate into a world view the various new things I am learning in my various subjects, for there is no possibility of an integrated world view, however partial.
4. It would not be appropriate to bring to the criticism of an idea I have come across in Philosophy this new idea from Sociology, because that would be a case of trying to mix the discourses. That would be like claiming check in a game of bridge, or trying to take a knight with a queen of clubs.
5. There is no distinction to be drawn between shallow academic conventions, for example the acceptability or otherwise of the use of the first person in essays, and something intellectually serious such as the preference for argument over flat assertion or threats. These are all just equally features of academic discourse, or the discourse of this discipline but not of that.
6. There is no need to engage seriously in discussion and debate in tutorials because everyone has their own opinion and anyway it is just a kind of game.

I take it that even for someone who thought that in the end some kind of anti-realist position is correct, there is a world of difference between holding such views as the result of hard study and thought, on the one hand, and becoming, on the other, a naive relativist. This kind of thoughtless relativism is debilitating, often not far from cynicism.

I am aware that these remarks may sound a bit excessive, but let me remind you what a powerful position an academic skills adviser is in. The student who consults them is typically anxious and perplexed. They are doing their best (there may be a bit of self-deception there, but let it pass) ... they are doing their best, but somehow they are just not catching on. Now here is someone who seems to know the score. Not some wretched historian or philosopher making unintelligible demands, but someone whose gaze takes in all the disciplines and who will explain the strange ways of the natives. And if such a person seems to speak of the disciplines as isolated communities, each with their own distinctive discourse with rules one has to recognize so as to avoid gaffes, ... well, perhaps that's just the way it is. Just conventions jealously guarded.

**TO INTEGRATE OR NOT? INTERESTS, PRACTICE, AND THE DIALOGIC  
DEVELOPMENT OF GRADUATE STUDENTS' DISCOURSE SKILLS**

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**ABSTRACT**

The literature has provided a necessary corrective to any notion that generic skills can be taught in ignorance of discipline-specific practices, but this does not mean that integration is the best way to proceed in all situations. In graduate studies, the writing culture is far more complex than in undergraduate work. It is difficult to see that there *is* a disciplinary discourse when graduate students have to produce different discourses in their disciplines. Discourse practices are as variable as the writing culture is complex, any definition of which needs to be multi-layered not single, inclusive rather than exclusive. At the same time, teaching practices and approaches to teaching discourses are governed by the 'interests' of language and learning staff, which are conditioned by various factors discussed in the paper. As these conditions constrain and open up possibilities for teaching, it is inevitable that teaching practices and approaches remain variable. One practice discussed in detail in this paper is the dialogic development of discourse skills. While the practice is not suited to all situations of teaching, it is particularly useful in helping research students gain control of text construction in a way that increases their understanding of the constructedness of all academic texts, as well as other texts.

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The literature has provided a necessary corrective to any notion that academic writing skills can be taught in ignorance of discipline-specific practices. Here it is possible to indicate only briefly the type and range of faculty and discipline specific studies that have been produced.

Revillard (1993) has published general guidelines for the PhD degree in immunology; Perry's paper (1994) outlines and discusses a five chapter structure for a PhD thesis in management or a related field; Lewins' book (1988) models the sociology thesis (see also Hockey, 1991). More generally, the composing processes of research students in the sciences have been examined (Shaw, 1991) as have the developmental stages through which students are said to progress as scientists and writers of laboratory reports (Scriven & Andreson, 1987). The structure of paragraphs in science textbooks has been modelled by Harris (1990). Kellogg (1986) has investigated the correlation between writing method and productivity of science and engineering faculty; and Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988) have identified cyclical organisation (three cycles roughly repeating) in the discussion sections in research focused articles and dissertations from the biological sciences. MacDonald (1989) has examined the function of problem definition with a view to setting up a continuum (literature<----->psychology) that isolates distinguishing features of composition processes in humanities and social science disciplines.

Swales (1990) has developed the CARS (creating a research space) model from research undertaken mainly on introductions in published science articles. This model is a useful stimulus to thinking about what might go into an article introduction or for that matter a thesis introduction, which is how I use it (along with other materials) when discussing introductions in my thesis writing seminar for students in cognate sciences (app. A). But no model can be applied rigidly as a systematic guide to the writing of any thesis, or any part of the thesis. In noting the impact of discipline on style, Taylor and Chen caution that

... whereas geologists treat the 1-2-3-4 paradigm [alternative Swales version] in a very cavalier fashion, irrespective of the language in which the papers are written or their source, scientists in both metallurgy and mineral processing and in materials science are much more devoted to this structure. (1991: 332)

This observation highlights yet again the shaping influence of discipline practices on academic discourses, and confirms the need to examine further 'the contexts of discourse in a wider range of disciplines,' as Prior advocates (1991: 269).

Given the high emphasis on discipline in the literature, it is understandable that we now have a conference focussing on 'integrating teaching of academic discourse into courses in the disciplines'. The directional comments in the 'Call for papers' seem to carry a normative assumption of the *universal* applicability of integration:

We would be interested in papers which address any aspect of this move to integrate writing and study skills into the disciplines. You may wish to comment on the benefits and/or problems associated with such efforts. You may like to share an account of a program of this kind in which you have been involved. Perhaps you have found that some subjects, or some kinds of arrangements, lend themselves to collaborative teaching more effectively than others. Perhaps you know of materials which would be useful to others embarking upon such a program.

What I would like to address in the first part of this paper is the subject of integration. There is no question of the value of fully integrating the teaching of academic discourses into courses in the disciplines in certain situations of graduate study. This occurs in the National Centre for Developmental Studies (NCDS) and in Forestry at ANU. Given the relative homogeneity of their student populations, with many being second-language students who will return to their home countries as practising Demographers, Foresters and so forth, locating specialist language and learning staff in the disciplines to assist students is obviously a sound practice. But it is not self-evident (at least not to me) that the discipline context is both necessary and self-sufficient for the development of academic discourse skills in all situations. Discipline orientation will always be an important consideration, but not all discourse skills are discipline-bound. Discourse practices are as complex as the academic writing culture itself, any definition of which needs to be multi-layered not single, inclusive rather than exclusive. This definition should at least encompass across-cultural discourse practices, those of the wider academic community (to isolate cross-influences), discipline and genre practices.

#### **The governance of 'interests' in approaching discourse teaching**

We are all interested in helping students with their textual difficulties and in determining the best ways to go about this, but clearly we do not all share the same interests. Many of us come from different academic backgrounds; our student populations can be variable; our institutions are at different developmental stages (eg 'old' & 'new' universities); some of us work in centres, others in faculties or disciplines; I work solely with graduate students whereas others might not. In short, we may have different terms of employment, briefs and work circumstances as study skills advisers, language and learning staff or what other names we go under, that both constrain and open up choices in teaching academic discourses.

My role in the ANU Study Skills Centre is an integrative role as discussed by Brigid in her paper; one that includes working with and for graduate students (both coursework and research), across the disciplines, on four levels: the institutional, graduate program (at ANU all graduates are enrolled in programs in the Graduate School), discipline and individual. My interests will therefore not coincide completely with those of an adviser attached to a particular faculty or discipline, though they may appear to align closely in some areas as, for example, working extensively on the level of individual consultations. But even there the intra-discipline versus cross-discipline interests affect the approach one adopts. A discipline attached adviser will have more detailed knowledge than a centre adviser of a specific discipline's discourse practices, the opportunity to monitor closely each student's development over time (and lengthy duration of contact), but will have less experience of cross-discipline practices and less opportunity to work for students in cross-discipline (or cross-program) contexts, all of which will influence the nature of the advice and assistance given. It is also true that the interests of advisers located in centres may not be complementary, where, for example, one adviser has working conditions which allow for extensive individual consultations and the other does not.

This fact of diverging interests and structures of work surely affects perceptions of advantages and disadvantages of approaches to assisting students academically. 'Interest' attaches to my concern with the push towards integration. But the reasons for this concern, as set out below, may also bolster the recognition that there is not just one right way to go or one best practice, and that there can be advantages for graduate students in having discourses taught outside the discipline.

#### **Complexity of the graduate writing culture**

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In considering integration, the first point I want to take up is the complex nature of the academic writing culture. It may be appropriate to speak of a disciplinary language. But to speak of a disciplinary discourse is dubious when graduate students have to produce many different discourses within their disciplines. Research students will be expected to master distinctive genres or discourse types (eg the research proposal, the departmental seminar paper, the conference paper, the journal article, the thesis); they may also have to produce applications for grants or post-doctoral fellowships, CVs, job applications and so forth. In order to produce these genres, these students will need to become proficient in using a range of academic discourse conventions suited to the different genres: in particular a large range of conventions on the different levels of the thesis text; conventions to do with structure, focus, achieving coherence, content schema in argument, intertext citations, use of graphs and tables, referencing, social identity in writing, linguistic conventions and so forth. Coursework students may have fewer genres to produce, but still they will need to become competent in more than one academic discourse type (eg the essay, report, book review or exam genres).

Understandably, then, students are often uncertain about *how* to proceed in text construction. This is particularly true of those who come from non-English speaking backgrounds and have done their undergraduate studies in non-Western tertiary institutions where the codes of academic writing can be different from those that prevail in Australian institutions. But it may also be true of students from an Australian tertiary background who have done their undergraduate work in Australian institutions, either coming through honours or from some other point of entry to the PhD course. This is to be expected. Academic socialisation into a discipline, which includes expertise in discourses, is an on-going process. While there will be some transfer of skills, the PhD level of study requires a very sophisticated range of research and writing skills in different genres. This will involve learning entirely new skills, not the least of which are strategies for organising huge amounts of research material (thesis writing) in ways acceptable within a discipline. We may expect that there will be textual occurrences that fall outside these students' systems of knowledge about language, content, and purpose and that they will therefore need to make additions and modifications to their individual stores of knowledge (de Beaugrande & Dressler, 1981: 36).

How then are students to build up their individual stores of knowledge? We cannot assume that supervisors are always best placed to do this, though many provide extensive help with discourses. Some supervisors have said that while they can usually 'fix up' a text, they do not always find it easy to explain to students what exactly is wrong, or how best to proceed with re-working the text. One reason for this may be that supervisors have themselves osmosed the conventions, are not altogether conscious of their own writing strategies and so do not find it easy to convey to students what they themselves are doing. This can reflect in unclear (or useless) communication about textual problems that leaves students unable to progress. Comments made by one supervisor in the Parry and Hayden study (1994: 67) illustrate the degree of uncommunicativeness that can prevail:

'I tend to be very blunt and say, 'no this doesn't make sense, this isn't a sentence'. and 'rephrase all of this'. And also where there are repeated grammatical errors I will say 'go through the whole thesis and make sure that this is consistently correct throughout'.

There can also be a variety of writing problems occurring on the different levels of a thesis text (or any other), which are not easy to separate out and may require specialist knowledge.

Fixing up the text is not likely to advance student learning, but the position of supervisors is difficult and not altogether enviable. We can expect supervisors to be specialists in the content of their discipline fields. But we cannot expect they will be discourse specialists in terms of identifying and distinguishing writing problems clearly, attributing causes of problems, and knowing the most effective procedures for addressing them, regardless of their obvious familiarity with discipline writings and ability to produce their own texts. This is a challenging task even for specialists. Discourse analysis 'is not a simple enterprise':

In its full richness it involves all the levels and methods of analysis of language, cognition, interaction, society, and culture. . . . This means that integral discourse analysis is necessarily an interdisciplinary task and also that its complexity forces us to make specific choices among the many available methods, depending on the goals and functions of our analysis. (van Dijk, 1985: 10-11)

In short, discourse analysis is a complex field of study, and the academic discourse of the thesis a complex example of discourse. Communication, of which discourse analysis is a field of study, is now a discipline in itself.

Nor, I think, can we assume that integrating the teaching of discourses into courses in the disciplines is necessarily the most efficient way to proceed with research students. The discourse interests of students from cognate disciplines working on the same genre (eg the thesis) may coincide more readily than those of two students from the same discipline working on different genres (eg the conference paper and thesis). These interests can be addressed outside the discipline context, as long as the person taking the seminar has an understanding of different discipline practices, can orient the seminar program towards the audience's specific discourse interests, and alert students to make discipline modifications, where necessary, to the seminar content. This is how I proceed in my seminar on thesis writing (2 hrs) for individual or group programs (app. A), a part of which will be discussed in detail later.

### **Graduate students' destinations**

Destination is a second issue in analysis of the pros and cons of integration. The 1994 Adelaide conference, 'Quality in postgraduate research: making it happen', had an 'issues of concern' session, in which Mary O'Kane (DVC (Research) UA) drew attention to the urgent need to redefine the nature and function of the PhD given that only a percentage of research students proceed after graduation to post-doctoral studies, with an academic career in mind. Research graduates are increasingly moving into the public and private spheres: to industry, research agencies, bureaucracy, the business sector, outside professions, and even, as O'Kane remarked, unemployment. Similarly, the bulk of coursework graduates move away from academia, with many already in employment, taking time out for a 'top-up' degree.

At the same time we hear frequent complaints from industry and business that graduates do not have the oral and written communication skills expected of them, that is the so-called 'generic' skills. No mention is made of one likely reason for this: that the *new* oral and written discourses they find themselves participating in once they leave tertiary institutions may require *new* discourse skills. I was struck by this again recently. At the 1994 orientation meeting of the new ANU MBA program, it was pointed out that 'reports' were to be short, crisp, to the point, not 'long-winded' argument. Academic argument as such was not required. Students were to analyse the 'situation' in terms of 'problem,' 'symptoms,' 'causes,' 'solutions,' on both surface and deep levels. These instructions seem to fit reasonably a scientific or, more precisely, medical discourse model: diagnosis, prognosis and cure. A marketing PhD graduate entering business might have developed the generic writing skill of sustained critical argument, yet this would not be transferable if the business discourse environment required text construction skills akin to those advocated for reports in the MBA program.

The destination picture for graduate students suggests that there is a need not only to develop discipline discourse skills (necessary to pass courses), but also to ensure skills are more portable. This requires thinking carefully about the extent of effort directed towards teaching students specific discipline discourse skills; or, at least, including the objective of assisting development of students' general understanding of the 'constructedness' of texts, any texts, in teaching academic discourses. A content focus is so ingrained at all levels of education, that few students give any thought to 'reading' text construction. But if students do develop basic skills to decode academic genres in their courses, to identify something of the different underlying purposes in the different discourse types, to work out what is generally going on in terms of style and structure, they should be better able to cope with text construction in outside contexts. The dialogic method I discuss later can help students become more aware, confident and self-reliant in making decisions about text construction, and so more adaptable in different situations of writing.

### **The heterogeneous make-up of the student body**

A third consideration as regards integration is the heterogeneous make-up of the graduate student body, which is particularly relevant in the case of graduate coursework students. These students may have been out of tertiary study for a long time, and so have lost the academic writing skills they developed as undergraduates. Academic writing skills atrophy if not used and, in some cases, are replaced by different discourse skills (eg those of Public Service report writing), to which students have become habituated. Coursework students may be transferring between disciplines (eg moving from an undergraduate degree in science or economics to a graduate coursework degree in international law), in which case they will not have operational knowledge of the new academic discourses. And, again, they may be second-language students who come from cultures where the academic codes of writing are different from those that prevail in Australian institutions. All types of students might appear in the same course; all will have deficiencies in discourse skills; all will need to acquire these skills quickly given the short duration of their courses. But not all will have identical interests in terms of either text construction skills or academic skills generally.

This difference in interests becomes apparent in considering the difficulties many second-language coursework students experience, all of which may impact on their writing:

- Graduate coursework students usually have only one year to complete their course (Graduate Diploma) or 15-18 months (Masters Coursework). This means that the international students have time constraints that do not allow for a more leisurely acquisition of skills in making the transition to a new learning environment. And there are high pressure spots in the context of this cross-cultural transition, some of which are pointed out below.
- A number of these students hope to take out a Master coursework degree. But they are initially enrolled in a Graduate Diploma to monitor their suitability or have a proviso placed on them (as do Australian students) that they cannot proceed to the Master degree unless they maintain a high grade point average throughout the first year's work. This grade varies across disciplines, tending to be in the high credit-distinction range. Consequently, students have to do well on their papers and in their exams right from the very beginning. They cannot afford to wait until submission of their first set of assignments to find they have problems, that they are not producing the 'right' sort of writing, which usually means too that they are not doing the 'right' sort of reading.
- These students often have to work at more sophisticated and demanding levels of enquiry than their undergraduate counterparts. They are, for example, likely to have higher levels of theoretical, philosophical or methodological content in their readings and writing, which put a great strain on their language and critical capacities in the contexts of both reading and writing.
- They often have to read beyond an already extensive reading program to fill gaps in their knowledge. They may find that their undergraduate education at home has not prepared them adequately for the level of knowledge expected of graduate work in Australia. As well, many need instruction on how to read material in the style of the new academic culture to which they have come, bearing in mind that reading styles complement writing practices. Learning how to read and write differently is essential in making that transition from the reproductive to the analytical/speculative modes of producing knowledge identified and discussed by Ballard and Clanchy (1991).
- It may be too that the international students who come on course are moving across disciplines, as are some Australian students. Such students may have had little undergraduate experience in setting up and developing a thesis or in producing rigorous, sustained argument for assignments and exam papers that have essay-type questions.
- For many of these students there is also the added pressure of holding senior government and academic positions at home. Such students feel the stress of having to 'do well.' One student I saw was very distressed at getting a low distinction in a subject she teaches at senior lecturer level in her own country. She felt she had brought great shame on her department which was paying her fees and she was also concerned about how her department might view this 'failure' as she put it. A reading of her semester papers showed that these were overly descriptive, had little critical analysis in them and insufficient argument. It did not soothe her to be told that her failure was less a reflection on her intellectual ability and more a matter of different cultural writing practices.
- Other students have talked about somewhat different problems, one mentioning that he would be expected to be the 'English' expert when he returned to his government department. This worried him greatly not only because his English was not perfect (which it was not), but because he did not feel confident about doing 'the different sorts of English writing,' as he put it. He was particularly concerned about having to write articles for publication in English language journals when he returned home, without having practised here.
- There are of course too personal and financial pressures. These students are often in an age bracket where they have left behind husbands, wives, children. It is likely too that their course fees have been paid by their places of employment at home or by their extended families. They feel a heavy responsibility to justify this faith in their ability and the money and hope invested in them by others.

Australian students experience some of these difficulties too, but they are unlikely to confront all of them as so many second-language students do. It follows then that the discourse interests of students in the same course or discipline may vary considerably. Where there are only a few second-language students and a large number of first language students, integrating the teaching of discourses into courses in the disciplines can lead to problems of inequity in course design and teaching. I have found it useful in my own courses on essay writing for graduate students to teach separately second-language students who come from cultures where the attitudes to knowledge, learning approaches, and teaching and learning strategies are distinct from ours (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991: 13). This allows me to address cross-cultural issues in academic writing, to expand on topics such as critical reading and analysis, plagiarism, arguing from sources, referencing and so forth, to allow second-language students to divert attention to issues on which they want to spend more time. Conversely, students uninterested in these issues are not held back.

### **Context variability in teaching discourses**

Staff in our centre have various avenues for teaching discourses, with varying degrees of formality, as my own case illustrates. I have been invited into specific disciplines to address groups of coursework students on discourse topics (eg book review writing, exam discourses). I also take courses in the Study Skills Centre on essay writing for students in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Most of my discourse work with students is done, however, in the context of individual consultations, which is perhaps the most demanding context in which to teach, yet one that is particularly helpful.

With the Graduate School has come another avenue for teaching. At ANU, individual programs or groups of cognate programs hold 'practical' seminars for graduate students' further academic and professional development (see example app. B). The Study Skills Centre has taken the initiative in identifying these seminar topics as being of interest to graduate students. We have encouraged program convenors to hold seminars on the topics, and advised on their organization as well as participated in them. The example provided shows that, in some cases, I am solely responsible for conducting the seminar (thesis writing); in others my efforts are more collaborative--as a member of a discussion panel including academics and perhaps graduate students or post-docs. In other situations, I might act as chair or facilitator of seminar discussions. The more collaborative efforts involve academic, professional support staff and general staff to ensure the expertise of the university is being fully utilized for students' benefit.

In appendix B, the topic of 'thesis writing' obviously focuses on discourse, but most other seminar discussions also contribute to developing students' understanding of discourse practices and text production (eg 'computer resources,' 'writing and formatting on Macs & PCs', 'book & journal publication,' 'conference & seminar presentations,' 'putting last things first'). All seminars allow ample time for students' questions and open discussion with the panel. One advantage of my being involved in these program seminars is that students with specific textual difficulties may feel more comfortable (having met me) about seeking an individual consultation at a later date. The feedback from research students on these seminars has been very positive. What this suggests to me is that the two poles of thinking about learning skills--the generic and discipline-specific -- should not be thought of as an either/or choice but rather as complementary knowledges.

Students from cognate disciplines can clearly benefit from group seminars and general discussion of the purposes and practices of the writings they have to produce. For many, this is enough to topple the bulk of anxiety that often accompanies writing, if not the hard work of academic writing. This anxiety is, as I have argued elsewhere, linked to the problem of 'agency,'--the capability or know-how of text construction (Craswell, 1994). Not only do research students like to know *how*, to take control, to be autonomous and self-reliant in writing, they are intelligent enough to do so, often with marginal assistance. Many are content with a rough map of text construction on which they can then plot the individual paths and by-ways of their own research journeys, but the discourse journey can be very difficult without that rough map. The remainder of this paper focuses on practice, mainly the dialogic practice as a way to sketch the map.

### **Practice and the dialogic development of discourse skills**

My practice in teaching academic discourses is not uniform. In one situation, I might resort to a standard pedagogic practice: that is, this is what is wrong with your text; this is why it is wrong; and this is how you can go about improving it. While this 'transfer of knowledge' approach is rightly discredited in many contexts of learning, it can still be a most effective way of helping some students develop writing skills. It is particularly useful with students undertaking short graduate courses such as the Graduate Diploma (1 year), where there is much time-pressure to acquire skills quickly. It is often, but not always, a useful approach with second-language

students who are struggling with both English language and new cultural discourse practices. Working with students on the individual level requires the ability to respond to a shifting range of variables impacting on students' discourse interests and adjust practice accordingly. Like Bock, who has criticised strongly the phenomenographic approach and the deep-surface model of learning, my need is 'not for a model abstracted to a level where it is universally applicable but for a set of analytical tools sensitive enough to allow me to apply "selective measures"' (1986: 112).

The practice I want to draw attention to in this paper is what I call the dialogic development of discourse skills. Here I have modified and transplanted the suggestion that 'to be a good reader means to know which are the right questions to ask of a particular text in a particular situation' (Bock, 1986: 107) into the context of text construction. To produce writings judged to be appropriate it is necessary to know which questions to ask of a particular text construction in a particular situation. The catch is: knowing which questions to ask requires some prior knowledge of discourse conventions as well as the different communicative *purposes* of different pieces of writing.

The communicative purposes of the PhD genre (discussed below) are, for example, quite different from those of a research proposal. Here I mean to distinguish the purposes or objectives of the research itself from the purposes or functions of a particular discourse type. With a proposal, a reader's concerns may be to assess whether the topic as outlined is suited to a PhD level of study, whether the research scope is acceptable given the time available for completion, whether there is likely to be difficulty accessing sources to fulfil topic objectives, what technologies might need to be learnt and so forth. In this type of discourse, we are, in a sense, marketing or selling the research as 'a good bet', and this purpose is instrumental in shaping the discourse conventions used. But again, context variables (eg. discipline and the stage of the degree in which the proposal is produced) will affect choice of conventions. One science supervisor passed to me a handout on writing a research proposal given by him to his students, which has a different focus on purposes:

The purposes of preparing a proposal are to plan your investigation and to seek helpful comments and suggestions from other people in [the department] and elsewhere. Most importantly it provides a point to check whether the investigation you propose to conduct will provide you with the evidence you need to prove your thesis.

It is because of this possibility of different perspectives on genre purposes that any discussion of text construction does need to take account of discipline practices.

The dialogic development of skills involves then my formulating for students questions of text construction which need to be tested against discipline constraints, individual research needs and other relevant variables. An underlying objective is to teach students how to think critically about text construction, to improve their know-how, to increase their control over text production and to assist understanding of the complexity of discourse. With this dialogic method, I can provide a path into text construction for individuals or groups of students. However, to refine the nature of the questions asked of a specific text construction in a context of individual consultation, to arrive at the 'right' questions, is a demanding two-way exchange. The relationship between myself and the student is thoroughly interdependent: we need each other's knowledges. We can only progress by way of dialogue, with students being responsible for final decision-making about discourse conventions. This approach is in line with Taylor's emphasis on the dialogic nature of understanding, but Taylor also argues that

it takes longer to engage in dialogue, it requires more effort, and because this time and effort competes with the time and effort needed under new 'productivity' agreements to make ourselves accountable, this kind of conversation necessarily dries up first. (1993: 69)

This I think is true. But talking through text construction *before* writing begins can be a time and effort saver for both students and supervisors. Less re-drafting and re-writing by the student mean a supervisor has reduced reading and commentary to produce.

### **Discourse conventions and development of the dialogic method**

A fundamental assumption behind the development of the dialogic method is that discourse conventions are actual, where convention is to be thought of not as a *thing* outside the writing process, but as an *activity or practice* of thesis writing itself. Critical theorists, and others, have challenged the conventionalized textual practices of academic discourses on the basis of the gender biases and adverse power relations they embody, their more pernicious political and socializing functions. Institutionalized practices (conventions) should be

challenged, but the issues of this debate are complex and not a subject for this paper. I mention the debate only because of the tendency to see practices as 'reified realities' (Prior, 1991: 305), 'imaginary representations' or 'theoretical fictions' ( Threadgold, 1994: 24), which seems to me a fallacious attempt to undermine existing conventions by asserting their unreality.

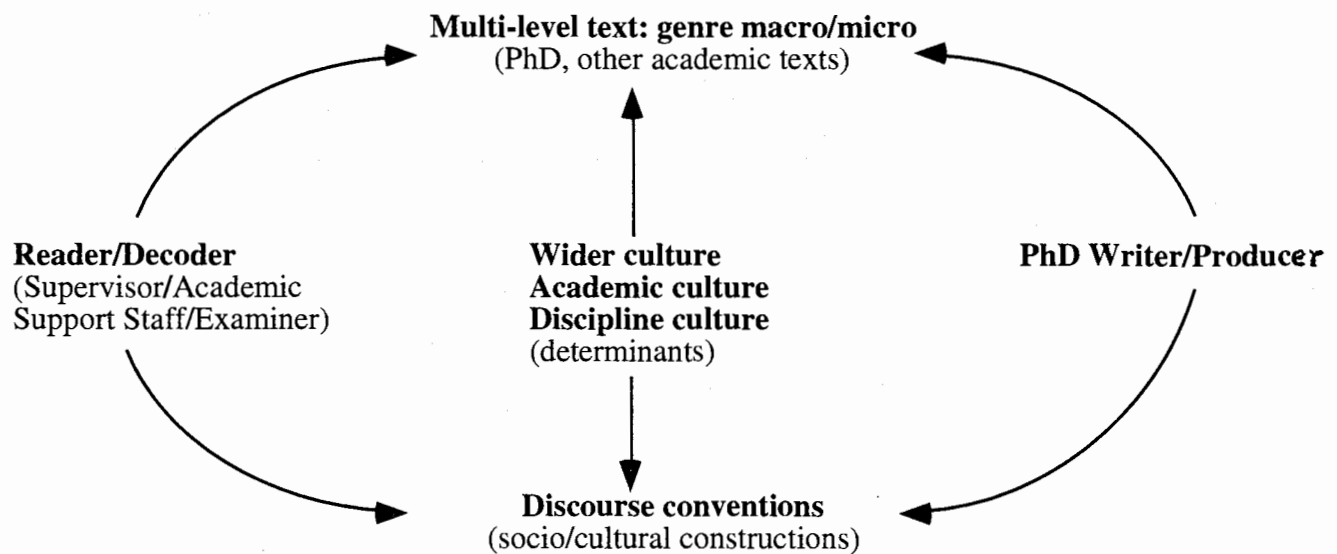
There *are* institutionalized and conventionalized practices of academic writing, including thesis writing. These academic codes of thesis writing are not characterised by stasis but are dynamic and changing under personal, social and historical influences. Dissertation discourse conventions may be shared across genres and among disciplines; they may be shared by some disciplines and not others; and some will be discipline specific. There is a great range of these conventions from which student writers can select according to their individual research situations. Indeed, no two theses look alike. One has only to compare the structures and styles of dissertations from such different disciplines as physics, mathematics, biological sciences, sociology, economics, law, visual arts and linguistics to appreciate how extremely marked the variations can be.

Even within disciplines, no two theses look exactly alike. Behind every thesis there is an unique rhetorical sub-text that emerges from the specific research needs of the individual writer. In this sense genre is not pre-given and each thesis (passed) renews the genre. Yet all thesis writers are constrained by institutionalised conventions of thesis writing. Because of these dominant conventions, the encoding of intertextual features will be marked within a specific discipline and, at times, evidenced across disciplines, as might be the case with disciplines sharing, for example,

aspects of meaning: types of logical sequencing that are recognised as valid, even interpersonal features such as whether a question is intended to be answered or is being used as a step in the development of an argument. There are also likely to be 'coded' expressions that are carried on from one text to another, more or less formulaic sequences that may signal what is happening, or what is going to happen. (Halliday & Hasan, 1985: 47).

It is not the specificity of discourse conventions that interests me presently but the fact that they do exist to shape knowledge in all disciplines. Harland, in discussing Husserl's view of language, notes that 'Husserl often sees the forms of language as helping to reveal the forms of thought, but he rarely sees the forms of language as actually determining the forms of thought' (1993: 67). Similarly, there is a need to recognise the determinant effects of the codes of academic discourse on the forms of academic knowledge produced and, more to the point here, students' difficulties with the manipulation of these codes.

An interdisciplinary model of textual analysis developed in an earlier paper foregrounds the seminal role of discourse conventions in text production, which underpins development of the dialogic method (Craswell, 1994):



This model is not comprehensive in that it will not prove useful for addressing all writing problems. It will not help with those caused by inadequate subject knowledge. More generally, there can also be a difficulty in attributing cause of writing problems, as is the case in the second-language text below:

*Student's text:*

Brown's theory, as well as the subjugated knowledges he advocates,"cannot validate for their knowledge any superiority according to the standards of truth claims". Their claims "count no more and no less than those of the discourses in power--they, too, are nothing else than the effects of power they unleash."

*Original source:*

Those [like Brown] who conquer the theoretical avant-garde of today...themselves become the theoretical avant-garde of tomorrow. In any case, they cannot validate for their knowledge. . . .

The question here is: is the semantic confusion in the extract due to unfamiliarity with the conventions of written English, lack of control of the discipline language, inadequate subject knowledge, or a combination of these? In returning to the original source of the student's quotation, we see that she has omitted the subject-actor in transcribing the quoted material in her own work and, in so doing, completely destroyed the sense of the passage. While this student's English was near perfect in the more empirical sections of her thesis, she had many problems in writing up theory. Reading, interpreting, understanding, transcribing and re-shaping theory in one's own text requires a very sophisticated knowledge of both English and the discipline language. This task is difficult even for students for whom English is the first language. It may be that what could be construed as inadequate subject knowledge in the above example (ie poor understanding of the theory) is more a case of insufficient understanding of the conventions of written English as shaped by discipline practice in writing theory.

What the model does show is the interconnection between reader, writer and text through the discourse conventions. An obvious point of contact is the text itself. Another point of contact is discourse conventions embodied in metalingual commentary before, during and after text construction. Broadly speaking, the reader's responses to, comments on and discussion of the text are filtered through complex sets of academic discourse conventions, which are instrumental in the construction of different discipline knowledges reproduced in texts. Major determinants of genre and macro/micro level conventions are located in the wider academic and discipline cultures which shape the discourse conventions. Unfamiliarity with thesis writing conventions is a main cause of student anxiety, writing difficulties and blocks, and of excessive re-writing as opposed to necessary re-writing in order to improve texts. Disciplines may have different views on which conventions are acceptable, but this does not invalidate the interdisciplinary value of either the model or the dialogic method.

### **Applying the dialogic method in teaching practice**

To illustrate the dialogic method, I will discuss only topics under 'How to get going' in my thesis writer seminar handout (app. A): the literature review, abstract, macro-structuring, introductions and conclusions. The method can also be used for micro-structuring: the successively smaller units of text such as material within chapters, sections marked off by sub-headings, paragraphs, grammatical and linguistic structures.

Familiarising oneself with the criteria for grading theses given by institutions to examiners can help initially in thinking about the multi-purposes of the PhD genre. These criteria will be different for different institutions and usually they are written up in fairly general terms. While not all theses contain a formal review of literature, the literature review (a sub-genre within the PhD genre) is a useful place to begin to consider further the communicative purposes of the PhD genre. This is a piece of writing that often invites criticism from supervisors because it is 'so poorly done.' Bruce (1994) has shown that research students have different ways of thinking about/experiencing the literature review and that few think about the writing process in the early stages of their research. She concludes that students' 'experiences of the literature review are somewhat impoverished' and their 'conceptions may not always be the most productive in the early stages of their research' (1994: 228). Yet, how we are to write up our research should affect our methods of research. This being so, it is sound practice to think about the form the literature review is to take within a discipline at the outset of research.

What then are students supposed to be doing when they write up a literature review, that is what are the aims or purposes of this discourse? There is of course no simple answer to this question. Nor is there any formula for

writing 'good' literature reviews, or any other part of the thesis. But it is possible to clarify for students a range of choices open to them in producing this type of discourse. Appendix C contains a handout I use as a basis for discussion with students to get them thinking about genre conventions of a literature review. It is important to stress that this dialogic approach is not meant as a formulaic cure-all, but rather as a way of stimulating discussion about specific text construction. Students are at liberty to reject questions they consider inappropriate for their research situations and to add others, and are encouraged to do so.

Of course discipline practices are likely to constrain or open up further the set of meanings possible for a literature review, which in turn will affect the writing conventions brought into play. In one thesis ready for submission, a 60 page literature review (the major part of an introductory chapter) fulfilled the final prescription above. But the initial third of this review provided an historical survey of a sub-set of literature in the field that was purely descriptive, not evaluative. The student saw this as a way to provide background information (often a function of introductions) to an important area of his study. In the contexts of his research and discipline, twenty pages of non-evaluative material under the chapter heading 'Literature Review' was acceptable, whereas the early comments in my handout close off this possibility. Yet, despite there being a discipline subtext, and behind that an individual subtext, there do appear to be generic conventions of literature review writing that cross disciplines.

Bhatia argues similarly for abstracts of research articles:

The research article abstract is a recognizable genre and has emerged as a result of a well-defined and mutually-understood communicative purpose that most abstracts fulfil, irrespective of the subject-discipline they serve. (1993: 77-78)

This may be true of the research article abstract but the textual practices of the PhD or Master research abstract seem not to be as well-defined as those of the literature review, though I have not undertaken systematic study of this. Perhaps one reason for this is that the abstract is often left to dash off at the last minute, although it is instrumental in whether or not a researcher chooses to read an unpublished PhD or some part of it. Appendix D contains the handout I use to initiate dialogue, with a set of questions reminiscent of Bhatia's focus on

- 1 What the author did
- 2 How the author did it
- 3 What the author found
- 4 What the author concluded. (1993: 78)

In considering the handout questions, students are again advised to reject what is irrelevant to their particular research situations and to review abstracts in theses that have passed in their disciplines. My handout is useful in many contexts of construction but not others, where the conventions vary greatly. In maths, for example, the tendency is towards very short PhD abstracts which focus solely on main findings, as typified in the following abstract:

There are two main results contained in this dissertation. The first result is a description of an algorithm for the computation of polycyclic presentations for nilpotent factor groups of a given finitely presented group. This algorithm is a generalization of the methods employed in the  $p$ -quotient algorithm (Havas & Newman, 1980) to possibly infinite nilpotent groups. The second is a method for the computation of the Schur multiplier of a group given by a polycyclic presentation and a method for the classification of the isomorphism types of Schur covering groups for finite soluble groups. Both Algorithms can be treated in a similar context, namely forming central downward extensions of polycyclic groups.

Students can also have trouble structuring in the macro-domain: the level of architectural structure or spatio-semantic division, which is a type of 'overall design coherence' (Atkinson, 1991: 65). Achieving design coherence can be easier for science writers because of the frequently used institutionalised paradigm of higher level structuring: *Introduction, Materials and Methods, Results, Discussion*. Not all science theses evidence this macro-structural schema (or variations on it) and even those students who do use it can experience micro-level difficulties. The two examples used to illustrate this point confirm the controlling power of discourse conventions and point to the usefulness of the dialogic method in the micro-domain.

In the example below, the student includes information in a results section that belongs elsewhere:

Focal injections of Di were made into periphery of each of four retinal quadrants: temporal (n=16, nasal (n=19), dorsal (n=10	method
and ventral (n=11), in different age group of animals: 8, 12, 22, 28, 41, 52, 65 and 95 days. . . . In the rat, there is a possibility that axons from central retina probably reach the SC before those from peripheral retina and may differ from peripheral axons in their targeting behavior . . . .therefore, a few injections in 6 cases aged 28, 45, 65 and 95 days were made into more central retina. . . .	discussion
the retrograde labelling of axons that pass through the injection site and arise from retinal ganglion cells peripheral to the injection did not occur in this study.	method
	discussion

Apart from problems with English itself and the discipline language, the above text shows confusion about conventional expectations of content schema in the different divisions of a science thesis (see Stapleton, 1987). There is another type of problem in the text below which does not follow the conventions for using source material in the discussion section of a science thesis:

The surface beneath the paint film of tested pre-weathered earlywood bands was also much rougher than that of latewood bands. As explained before, it appeared reasonable that the degradation of the earlywood occurred to a greater depth as compared with latewood (ref). . . .Defiberization, or loss of surface wood cells, occurs most rapidly in the thin-walled fibres of earlywood, and at a slower rate, in the more dense latewood (refs). Pre-weathering weakened the surface of the early wood thus decreasing the paint bond strength, or in other words, paint formed a stronger bond in less weathered latewood (refs).

Here the student focuses on others' findings for their own sake as might be done in a literature review instead of discussing the implications and significance of *his* results in relation to other scholars' findings. Had these students been helped to critically examine text construction in samples of results and discussion sections in theses already passed in their disciplines, they might have avoided the extent of writing problems they had.

As there is no equivalent schema for the humanities and social sciences to the science macro-structural schema mentioned above, research students in the disciplines of these areas (and sometimes in the sciences too) often find structuring at the architectural level very difficult. Thinking through higher level structure is demanding because it requires the ability to see the thesis as a whole, to see the interaction of the various parts, their functional coherence as a vehicle for research objectives. In working with students experiencing difficulties structuring on the macro-level, I have found it useful to have them focus initially on the question: 'what is your thesis?' with a view to gaining a set of coherent chapter headings (theses such as historical biography may not have a thesis). Not only do students find it difficult to complete concisely the sentence--'My thesis is *that . . .*'--they often have little idea of what a thesis (as in argument as opposed to product) is and how useful identifying even a rough working thesis can be in macro-structuring. Consequently, the question usually undergoes several restatements ie 'what is the controlling idea, the big message you want to get across to readers?' 'what is the overall point you are trying to make?' 'why would I read your study and not another in your field--what is distinctive about what you have to say on the subject?' and so forth.

To help students further to gain control of macro-structuring, I use the following basic set of questions which, with slight modification, is also suited to stimulating discussion about structuring a specific chapter.

*What?* (what is your actual subject matter (to be clearly identified)? can you break this down into manageable topics suited to chapters?)

*Why?* (purpose: what are your aims in dealing with this subject matter ie why did you decide to investigate this (different purposes in different chapters?) what is it that you want to show ie what is the big message you want to put across (thesis if there is one)?)

*How?* (method: how are you going to approach/deal with the subject matter (different approaches in different chapters?) what are you going to do and in what order?)

Even though there are no established schema, the nature of these questions will constrain choice of writing conventions suited to fulfilling institutionalised expectations of a PhD in the humanities and social sciences while allowing considerable freedom of choice. Basic as the three questions are, using them inevitably leads to more specific questions of the text under construction. Students might also want to take up Phillips and Pugh's recommended approach to 'every piece of writing,' though the advice does not answer the questions: what is an 'acceptable structure?' and *how* do you construct paragraphs as recommended?

- *generate* the main points (in any order if you're a holist, and sequentially if you're a serialist), putting down everything that comes into your mind:
- *organize* them into an acceptable structure; and only then attempt to
- *construct* the points into grammatical paragraphs made up of well balanced sentences. (1987: 61)

Strategies such as those above can help students stand back from the mass of research data swamping their minds and so begin the work of macro-level design. As well, ideas about how to structure can be generated by viewing recently passed theses in the discipline, though no structure will be exactly suited to a particular student's research needs. There are preferred generic meanings in specific text construction regardless of alternative meanings generated by individual researchers, and it is useful for students to compare and contrast texts, to ask questions of text construction, in an effort to isolate what might be generic. As well, whatever the discipline, students benefit from drafting a rough chapter by chapter structural outline before they begin to write. This is one way to gain some sense of the thesis as a whole and so avoid the problem of the 'unconnectedness' of the different parts.

To reiterate, many of the more serious writing problems can be traced to not knowing *how* to write up material. For example, students may not know what is an appropriate structure of a general introduction for a PhD in their discipline: whether or not to use sub-headings; how to order their material and the implications of different choices; what sorts of things they might cover (focus), the acceptable level of detail, or the purpose of the introduction in the overall thesis context; and few I see recognise just how important this piece of writing is, that its basic function is to 'introduce' the body of the thesis, to provide whatever is necessary for clear passage through the thesis.

Again there can be no formulaic solution because introductions vary. In comparing eleven PhD theses from four different science disciplines at ANU, I noted that the length of the introductions ranged from 6 to 83 pages. A 6 page introduction (evolution and systematics) provided a chapter by chapter outline and brief discussion of the research carried out; another 59 page introduction (visual sciences) provided background to the research (which included topic generalisations establishing the worth of the study), moved to a full literature review and concluded with a discussion, under 'The Aim of Present Research,' of specific objectives and procedures. Despite such differences in composition, only a small range of conventions was being drawn on in all introductions reviewed, as illustrated by the general breakdown of textual moves listed in appendix E. Also, of the eleven theses, ten used some variation of the institutionalised, science macro-structural schema mentioned above to carve up the text. The exception had a unique macro-structure suited to the specific research needs of setting up a model for a new experimental procedure.

Individual supervisors may also have definite ideas about how an introduction should be structured in their discipline. One supervisor rejected a student's lengthy draft introduction (30+ pgs) saying an introduction should be about 'eight pages and should cover context, issues and method in that order'. The re-worked introduction of about eight pages was acceptable in being a conventional chapter by chapter description, after initially establishing context (background information), and identifying issues concisely in the process of defining study objectives.

Students may begin thesis writing with the introduction so as to gain a sense of the whole study, even though this will eventually need to be re-written. Some, however, prefer to write the introduction after the body of the thesis is complete. Regardless, extensive re-writing can often be avoided by talking with students about the introduction before writing begins. This dialogue can take the form of probing questions that point towards the discourse conventions: what is your thesis, the main message you are trying to get across here? why did you undertake this research? how is it different from other studies done in your field? what do you think your research contributes to the field? do you need to provide some background information to the study ie context? if yes, why, and how much is needed? what might you include here, why? what specific questions are you asking or what are your hypotheses or objectives or aims? can you formulate these clearly? why might you list these in a

particular order? how do they relate to your overall thesis? should there be a literature review in the introduction? do you need to explain your methodology or experimental procedure, or provide a discussion of the theoretical framework? should you include a chapter by chapter outline of your thesis? if not, what other method might you use to indicate the procedure of your thesis? While some of these writing acts might be performed elsewhere in the thesis or not all, students usually respond well to a set of questions such as these which empowers them to make decisions of text construction that should at least generate first drafts reasonably in line with institutionalised expectations of the genre, including discipline expectations.

Conclusions appear less demanding in terms of construction than introductions. But it is difficult to write a strong and striking conclusion to a PhD, at an end-point in the writing when many writers have become bored and simply want to finish, or they are anxious about an imminent submission date, money and getting a job. Conclusions may be long or short; or there may not be one, at least not a formal conclusion, the final chapter serving this function because of macro-structure design. Some useful questions to pose for conclusions are: what are the significant findings of your thesis? can you draw these together coherently, without simply repeating conclusions of various chapters? what are the implications of your findings--can you leave the reader with something to think about? what about possible avenues for further research, future investigations, work to be done etc?

Drawing out the implications of findings can be very exciting, as occurred in a recent session I had with a humanities PhD student. While she had a few 'ideas,' she had not thought that these might be addressed, even tentatively, in the conclusion. During the course of our dialogue she identified a coherent theme behind the implications of her findings. This was 'variables': certain sets of variables had been privileged over others in all previous interpretations of land settlement in Australia (her thesis topic); some variables (eg the factor of 'personality'; owner/manager differentiation) had been excluded consistently; others had been given insufficient attention; others excessive attention. Her findings implied that the nature and range of variables included in a study affected significantly interpretation and, consequently, conclusions. As all previous studies (except one) had been done by men, she suspected the operation of a strong gender bias. She also recognized that, as her study had been a single case study, further detailed case studies would need to be undertaken to confirm or deny these implications. Although these insights are worth airing in a conclusion, they might have remained buried except for the fact that the student had access to individual consultation outside the discipline.

### **Concluding comments**

The nature of graduate students' discourse interests and the extent of their individual needs vary enormously, within and across disciplines, even within the same courses. This is because the graduate writing culture is far more complex than in undergraduate studies. Caution is therefore needed when considering whether or not to integrate the teaching of discourses into courses in the discipline. The greater complexity also highlights the importance of retaining students' access to individual consultations outside the disciplines. Supervisors very often provide the help with discourses students need, but some don't; even the most supportive supervisor can experience difficulty and frustration in working with students on their texts and so advise consultation with language and learning staff. Some research students need on-going assistance. With others, many writing problems can be sorted out in just one or a few visits to a centre. Without this opportunity for careful scrutiny of their specific discourse problem(s), however, some students may not progress easily, regardless of group teaching.

A second implication of this discussion is that it seems erroneous to think of there being a disciplinary discourse when graduate students have to produce *different* discourses within their disciplines, and will have to continue to produce different discourses if they move to outside areas of work. This invites careful consideration of how they are to be helped to become proficient in producing texts in any situation. As I see it, there is a need to develop self-sufficiency in analysis of text construction as much as possible in the process of teaching academic discourses. An underlying assumption of mine here is that one of the best resources graduate students have is their own ability, though some made need encouragement to recognize this. Students can learn confidence and self-sufficiency in text production in different ways in different contexts. The indirect dialogic method discussed in this paper is one approach I have found useful, but I would not see this as suited to all contexts of learning and teaching discourses. Flexibility of approach, the ability to respond and adapt practice to the diverse and shifting discourse interests of varied student populations seems to me the essence of *best practice*.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Thesis writing: outline of discussion**

- **The psychology of the research writer**

Students experience different degrees of difficulty; highs and lows common--anxiety, frustration, feelings of inadequacy (awareness that writing is not up to standard); thesis writing complex demanding task; necessity of rewriting; boredom can be a problem in late stages of writing.

- **Approaches to writing**

Not just one *right* approach; serialists (planners and sequentialists); holists (sort out ideas in first draft--then structure); possibly other approaches.

- **What sort of writing are you attempting to produce?**

What is driving the analysis undertaken in your thesis? data-driven and conceptually driven discourse--can affect structural organization.

- **How to get going**

Where to begin; the drafts you produce: strategies for beginning: literature reviews, abstracts, macro-structuring, introductions, conclusions.  
COMPLETE THIS SENTENCE (if there is one): My thesis is *that* . . .

- **Some possible hitches**

Writing can take longer than anticipated; checking in final stages time-consuming; time lost through incomplete documentation of reference material details and inconsistent referencing and typography practices (keep record from early days); over-writing (as opposed to necessary rewriting); time-constraints on supervisor (check movements, commitments); skills can atrophy if writing postponed to final year.

- **Self-organization**

Time-flow chart up to date of submission useful to gauge progress.

- **Final comment**

Thesis is a piece of communication; at all stages of writing keep in mind the reader.

## Appendix B

### THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

The anthropology, History, Literature and Art, Philosophy, Political Science, Prehistory and Archaeology, Sociology and Women's Studies Programs

#### RESEARCH MET HODS SEMINARS: SEMESTER 1

All seminars are in the reading room of the Humanities Research Centre (top floor, A.D. Hope Building) Tuesdays 12-2pm. Bring your lunch. Tea and coffee will be provided.

- 22 March      Roles and mutual responsibilities of supervisors and students  
This seminar will raise such issues as what sorts of guidance students should (and should not) expect from supervisors, especially early in their course, and what can be done if the student/supervisor relationship deteriorates.
- Professor John Warhurst (Political Science, Arts)  
Ms Helen Keane (Women's Studies Program, Arts)  
Ms Judy Woodrow (Counselling Centre)  
Dr. David Parker (Convener, Literature and Art Program, chair)
- 5 April      The first 6-18 months of a research degree  
How different is a research degree from undergraduate work?  
How do you move from a field of interest to a manageable topic?  
How do you outwit the demon Procrastination?
- Ms Alison Smith (Political Science, RSSS)  
Professor Iain McCalman (HRC)  
Mr. Geoff Mortimore (Counselling Centre)  
Dr. John Merritt (Convener, History Program, chair)
- 3 May      Computer resources for research in the humanities and social sciences  
How do you access the catalogues of libraries in Australia or the US?  
How do you use internet? Gopher? First Search? or find the ANU library's CD-Rom menu?
- Mr. Mark Nearhos (Chifley, Library)  
Dr. John Ballard (Convener, Political Science Program)  
Dr. Andrew Hopkins (Convener, Sociology Program, chair)
- 10 May      Writing and formatting an ANU thesis on Macintoshes and PCs  
What programs are available to help with bibliographies and notes/footnotes? What resources are available for enhancing word-processing capacities and computer skills?
- A Computer Services Centre representative  
Mr. Paul Rutherford (Political Science, Arts)  
Ms Rosanne Kennedy (Convener, Women's Studies Program, chair)
- 24 May      Writing a thesis  
Who are you writing for? What sorts of expectations will your readers have? What sorts of help are available?
- Dr. Gail Craswell (Study Skills Adviser, Graduate School)  
Dr. Andrew Hopkins (Convener, Sociology Program, chair)
-

- 7 June            How a thesis is examined  
How are examiners selected? How do examiners go about reading a thesis? What are they looking for? How is a result arrived at? What proportion of theses fail?
- Dr. Margaret Jolly (Gender Relations Project, RSPacS)  
Mr. Frank Buongiorno (History, Arts)  
Dr. Hank Nelson (RSPacS, TBC)  
Dr. Colin Groves (Convener, Prehistory and Archaeology Program, chair)

## **RESEARCH METHODS SEMINARS: SEMESTER 2**

- 19 July            Book and journal publication  
This session will raise such questions as: What are the advantages and disadvantages of publishing as a postgraduate? How can you improve your chances of having an article accepted? How do you turn your thesis into a book?
- Dr. Marian Simms (Political Science, Arts) and former editor of *The Australian Journal of Political Science*  
Dr. Jon Mee (English, Arts) has recently published a book on his thesis.  
Dr. P. Roeper (Convener, Philosophy Program, chair)
- 2 August            Conference and seminar presentations  
What are the benefits of giving conference papers as a postgraduate? How do you prepare for a conference presentation, or for the writing and delivery of a seminar paper? Some hints for giving a paper.
- Mr. Geoff Mortimore (Counselling Centre)  
Dr. Gail Craswell (Study Skills Adviser, Graduate School)  
Dr. Paul Rutherford (Political Science, Arts)  
Mr. Ian Farrington (Convener, Archaeology and Anthropology Program, chair)
- 16 August            Applying for academic jobs  
How do you prepare an application? A *curriculum vitae*? How to prepare for, and manage an interview. Assessing opportunities in your discipline.
- Professor Beryl Rawson (Classics, Arts) and ex-Dean of Arts.  
Ms Val Parr (Careers and Appointments Service) will speak on preparing an application and *cv*.  
Dr. Graham Cullum (Convener, Literature and Arts Program, chair)
- 30 August            Putting last things first  
Preparing your bibliography, refining the scholarly apparatus, and final preparation of a thesis.
- Dr. Ra Foxton (English, Arts)  
Dr. Tim Tenbenschel (Political Science, RSSS)  
Dr. Peter Roeper (Convener, Philosophy Program, chair)
- 13 September            The nature and benefits of fieldwork  
Why go on fieldwork, or make use of resources overseas? What might you hope to achieve?
- Dr. Larry Saha (Sociology, Arts)
-

Ms. Belinda Lee (PhD student in English, Arts)  
Ms Alison Murray (PhD student in Human Geography)  
Dr. Darryl Tryon (Convener, Linguistics Program, chair)

## Appendix C

### Literature Review

All researchers owe much to their predecessors and contemporaries at work in their particular fields of interest. While in a Literature Review it is possible to acknowledge this debt, a competent Review goes far beyond such acknowledgment. It is inadequate merely to **describe** the studies you have read; this is not the overall purpose of a Literature Review.

As with any other piece of writing, you need to consider carefully this purpose before you type that first word. Ask yourself the following: why am I reviewing this particular body of research literature? ie why have I selected these particular studies?

Presumably your answer will be that these are studies **relevant** to your own research. If these studies are relevant, then you need to make clear in your literature review **how** they are relevant and **why** they are relevant, which will require **evaluation**. The overall purpose then is to establish the nature of other scholars' contributions and the relevance of the literature read to your own research. At the same time you need to demonstrate that you have read **all** relevant literature.

Below are some questions you might consider:

- **What has been done in your field of research? What do you need to cover? Why are you covering this (ie individual purposes)?**
- **How are you going to structure the review? ie how are you going to order the material in your discussion?**

Some writers take a chronological approach, reviewing the various studies (groups of studies) in order of their appearance in time. There are other possibilities, however. For example, a thematic or conceptual approach or even a methodological approach. Let the interests of your own research determine the most appropriate approach for you.

- **How do the various studies (or groups of studies) relate to each other?**

Again let the aims of your thesis determine your focus. What you choose to comment on in your critical evaluation of the literature will be influenced by the problems you are grappling with and the objectives of your own research. Try to draw out what is significant about the studies you are reviewing and to point out their strengths and weaknesses.

Some questions you might ask yourself here: what has been done? what does a particular study do that others don't? how do the studies relate to each other? what is useful about these studies-why? can you identify any limitations (eg scope)--what are these? are there any problems--with procedure, method, data gathering and analyses, the theory or methodology being applied, etc?

- **How does your own research fit into all of this?**

As you proceed with your review, try to show at appropriate points along the way how what you are doing in your thesis ties in with what has already been done.

**By the end of the Literature Review, readers usually want to know what research has been undertaken in your area of investigation, what is useful about it, what is less useful or problematic, and how your own study fits into this overall body of research. In short, readers want a clear overview of the literature and the relation of your study to it.**

## Appendix D

### Abstract (PhD/Master usually 1-3 pages)

In some disciplinary areas, there are huge bodies of research literature that need to be surveyed, and out of which you will need to select what is relevant to your own research. This is often true of the Humanities and sometimes the Social Sciences. Students of the Sciences also spend much time searching the literature.

Abstracts can help you to decide quickly whether or not particular PhDs or Masters should be read. Some Abstracts, however, are so poorly put together that it is difficult to be sure whether or not the thesis will be worth your precious time. It is therefore important to consider, when writing the Abstract, its purpose: to help researchers locate quickly research useful and interesting to them.

Remember too that if your abstract is easy to follow researchers might be more inclined to look at your thesis and maybe quote you, so you will become better known.

#### Below are some questions you might consider:

- **Why was the study undertaken? ie what does it contribute to scholarship?**

You might, for example, have extended an on-going line of research or identified a 'gap' that you have set out to fill, or you might have questioned an established and generally accepted viewpoint. Researchers like to know how a particular piece of research fits into the overall body of research in that particular field.

- **What is the scope of your enquiry? ie have you placed any limitations on the study?**

While you will surely have pointed this out in your Introduction, it is also helpful to restate this in brief in the Abstract.

- **What did you actually do? What were the objectives you set out to prove, establish, show etc.?**

- **What approach did you take?**

If you think it is important you might discuss your methodology. ie how you went about fulfilling your objectives.

- **What were your findings?**

Set out clearly the main conclusions reached and provide some discussion of how you arrived at these conclusions. If some of your experimental work was 'inconclusive' mention that too and indicate why this was so.

## Appendix E

### General breakdown of textual moves in introductory chapters of eleven PhD theses in the sciences

#### **Bio-chemistry and molecular biology**

	<u>Objectives &amp; Procedures (Headings)</u>	<u>Length (pgs)</u>
1. background information on topic + literature review + aims	<u>Aims of this Project</u> listing of objectives + focus + limitations	19
2. (as above)	<u>Outline of Thesis</u> major aim + chp. by chp. description of thesis	37
3. aims and plan of thesis (literature review chp. 2)	no heading	9

#### **Evolution and systematics**

1. background information on topic + literature review + aims	<u>Aims</u> brief listing of these	34
2. (as above)	<u>Aims of Thesis</u> listing of these	44
3. chp. by chp. description of thesis (literature review chp. 3)	no heading	6

#### **Botany**

1. background information on topic + literature review + aims	<u>Aims of Research</u> description of plants and aphids used (no objectives/procedures mentioned)	15
2. (as above)	<u>Present Study</u> chp. by chp. description of thesis	19
3. (as above)	<u>Aims</u> laying out of two hypotheses + procedure for experimental work	19

#### **Visual Sciences**

1. background information on topic + literature review + aims	<u>The Aim of Present Research</u>	59
2. Establish field: background information + topic generalisations and discussion	no heading	83

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## DEVELOPING THINKING SKILLS: SOME RECENT APPROACHES

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### ABSTRACT

Until recently it was taken for granted that so-called "intelligent" students would develop abstract reasoning styles automatically in adolescence. Now, however, it is increasingly becoming accepted around the world that specific teaching programs are often needed to develop thinking skills, and that such programs may be the key to higher educational standards.

This paper surveys a range of programs being developed and used in Britain, the USA, and Australia. It examines their aims, the targetted student clientele and the strategies adopted. It also looks in passing at British General Studies work, and at the IB (International Baccalaureate) Theory of Knowledge component.

Drawing from these examples, the paper concludes by pointing out a symmetry between the exercise of course- and teaching program design for the range of ESL students, from Beginners, through Intermediate, to Proficiency levels, and the targetting and delivery of appropriate Thinking Skills programs to students. This perceived symmetry is related to the completion and integration of secondary curricula, and to more traditional conceptions of foundation studies in tertiary and pre-tertiary education.

## IMPROVING STUDENTS' ACADEMIC DISCOURSE THROUGH TRAINING IN THE SKILLS OF ACTIVE CRITICAL INQUIRY

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### ABSTRACT

We want from our students academic discourse which is the clearly articulated product of active critical inquiry, shaped by an appreciation of what is relevant and what is not. Quality and appropriateness of academic discourse are not merely constrained by the quality of the underlying inquiry, but are its products. Other things being equal, inquiry which is better-focussed and more actively critical will yield clearer, better-focussed theses, analyses, critical evaluations and arguments. In this report I outline a method for improving students' academic discourse by training their skills of inquiry.

The method requires the student to develop an approach to inquiry which is always *question-generated* and is continually *question-generating*. While no new idea, this approach becomes a powerful one for development of students' inquiry- and discourse-skills when it is made a constant and *explicit* focus *both* of the teaching program and of the assessment regime. Recent educational research, and theoretical work in cognitive psychology, discourse theory, and epistemology, permits us to see why this generic approach should be a powerful one. The method nonetheless remains sensitive to (and can be used to sensitise students to) the discourse-requirements of particular disciplines insofar as these requirements reflect special concerns with questions of certain sorts.

I describe how the method has been applied in two multidisciplinary undergraduate general-studies subjects, and in a first-year Historical Introduction to Philosophy and a first-year Introduction to the History of Ideas. Benefits have included not only improvement in students' individual inquiry and written work, but also better group dynamics in the classroom and enhanced collaborative learning. I offer some cautious speculations concerning transfer of learning of the skills fostered by the method.

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### 1. The role of inquiry in the production of academic discourse

It is *inquiry* which gives academic discourse its point and substance. So much may this be a truism to tertiary teachers and researchers, and so much may academic inquiry have become our second nature, that we may overlook its central features – look *through* them rather than see them. Perhaps this is why students often are given little guidance in the *intellectual* demands of inquiry, but instead are merely urged to 'do the reading', 'complete all of the exercises', 'take proper notes', and so forth. What is central to academic inquiry is that it *inquires – asks!* – is driven by questions, and drives itself by generating further questions. It is this crucial intellectual skill of active inquiry that students must practice and master to become sufficiently "at home" in a discipline to write and speak, pertinently and critically, on its issues.

More than this, the questions which shape and are shaped by inquiry are those which give shape to the academic discourse which is its outcome. We are all familiar with the work of students who have seen their "topic" as no more than a string of key-words or key-phrases to be "researched" individually and pointlessly. Lacking a basis in actively questioning inquiry, the resulting essay or assignment is likewise pointless and incoherent. We are familiar too with the student who begins with a question, "answers" it immediately, and whose "research" consists of finding passages that "agree" with that answer, ignoring everything else and employing no critical questioning whatever. For a satisfactory discourse outcome – pertinent, coherent, and critical – inquiry must be both question-driven and question-*generating*.

None of this is new to us. We have all sought in various ways to encourage our students to be actively questioning critical inquirers. We reward work which shows evidence of this approach to inquiry and penalise

work which does not. But many students do not get the message, while others get it only slowly and painfully, and even our brightest sometimes are unable to shape their insights into an essay worthy of them.

Several years ago I was led by such reflections to wonder whether more could be done to assist students to become actively questioning critical inquirers, and thereby to improve both their learning and their written and spoken academic discourse. I decided that rather than simply *encourage* development of that approach to inquiry by making it a constant focus of the teaching program, I would also *require* students to develop the approach – by making it an explicit requirement of the assessment regime. Students would be assessed not only on the quality of the answers they came up with, but on the questions they raised – on the quality of the process of questioning which was at the heart of their inquiry.

## 2. Implementation of the teaching approach and assessment regime

I trialled and developed the idea in 1992 and 1993 at R.M.I.T., in two undergraduate multidisciplinary general-studies subjects – Knowledge and Belief, and Personal Identity and Community – whose students were drawn from all undergraduate years and most schools of the R.M.I.T. city campus, and in 1993 at Swinburne U.T., in a first-year Introduction to Philosophy and a first-year Introduction to the History of Ideas. Classes in all four subjects took the form of lecture-seminars, with around twenty-five students in each of four classes per semester at R.M.I.T., between forty-five and thirty-two in each of the three Swinburne Philosophy 1 classes, and a small group of twelve in the History of Ideas class. As I undertook the Swinburne teaching at very short notice, I did not attempt there to fully implement the approach I had developed at R.M.I.T. I did however try something a little different, which I shall describe in due course. First though I shall describe the form taken by the approach after several semesters of development and fine-tuning at R.M.I.T.

In the very first class of the semester in both R.M.I.T. subjects, centre stage was given to the idea that for inquiry to lead to increased understanding it must be focussed by active questioning, and that for understanding to be ongoing the outcome of inquiry must consist not only of answers, but of further questions for inquiry. It was stressed that, since increased understanding was the object, 'Why?' and 'How?' questions were especially important. Students were given a simple written exercise which would lead them to begin thinking relevantly to the subject's main themes and to articulate some of their pre-theoretical intuitions. They then compared notes – first in pairs, and next in small discussion groups. Those discussions then led to a general class discussion whose object was both to orient students to some main issues for the subject, and to exemplify the question-driven, question-generating approach to inquiry.

In this first class, students' attention was drawn to the assessment requirements spelled out in my introductory subject-information handout – especially the requirement that all of their work for assessment be the outcome of inquiry aimed at increasing their understanding of issues relevant to the subject aims and objectives, and that it therefore raise, and seek to answer, pertinent 'Why?' and 'How?' questions. It was stressed that work which did not attempt this, but was merely descriptive, would receive very low marks (no matter how good the description).

Assessment in both R.M.I.T. subjects was ongoing throughout the semester, with class participation worth between 25 and 50 per cent – as decided by vote in the first class (most classes opting for around 30 per cent). Written work was comprised of five very short essays and a more substantial "research" project. All questions were of the students' own choosing, but my prior approval was required for project proposals. In addition to a numeric grade and my written comments on each piece of assessed work, students were given a "grid" type assessment, two of whose categories were 'relevance of questions raised' and 'quality of questions raised'. Written work which failed in both of these categories had to be repeated. Formally assessed work for a student's class-participation mark included participation in a small inquiry group, part of whose brief was to prepare a set of questions on its research topic which would serve as a basis for later discussion of that topic by the whole class. In the latter half of the semester each student would also take responsibility, either individually or as a member of a pair, for a fifteen to twenty minute class discussion on a topic of the student's choice. These "class presentations" however were not of the usual, information-giving sort; rather the student's object was to be a *question-raiser* – to motivate, and by means of well-planned questioning direct a twenty-minute segment of class collaborative inquiry. Once again, relevance and insightfulness of questioning were weighted heavily in assessment.

The approach, as you can see, is very much a generic one: I have not yet said a word about subject content. Both R.M.I.T. subjects were multidisciplinary. Although Knowledge and Belief had a strongly philosophical slant, its epistemological core was brought into relation with the psychology and social psychology of belief, and

issues drawn from anthropology, the history of thought, current affairs, and students' own experience and cultures. Most students had no background in the humanities. As far as students' writing was concerned, my object was to ensure not only that it was the outcome of active inquiry, but that it was enlivened by that inquiry, and did not degenerate into mere descriptive report. The other R.M.I.T. subject, Personal Identity and Community, was multidisciplinary to a higher degree, drawing upon the humanities, the human sciences, the arts, popular culture, religion, and students' own experiences and cultural backgrounds. Students' approaches to their writing depended on their primary interest in the subject. Some took a humanities-based approach, others a social-sciences or psychological approach, and others again a much more personal approach. All were deemed acceptable. Very seldom were these broad genres mixed, however.

The quality of students' written work was considerably improved by the focus on active questioning. I found in 1993 that I was marking around ten per cent harder at pass and credit levels than in 1991, and around five per cent harder at distinction and high-distinction levels: this tougher marking standard was forced upon me by the need to fit a curve for passing grades. Adjusting for this tougher standard, I would estimate that the average improvement in students' written work, expressed in terms of marks available, was close to ten percent. In more qualitative, but somewhat vaguer terms, the improvement was just what I had hoped for: written work was clearer, better focussed, better argued, and more critical. The general quality of the five shorter pieces showed the greatest improvement – as one might expect given that it is crucial to maintain relevance in a shorter essay, and that relevance is much more likely to be achieved by the question-driven, question-generating approach to inquiry and writing. Similar average levels of writing improvement were to be seen across all cultural groups (an appreciable proportion of students were from Asian and South East Asian cultures) and regardless of whether or not English was the first language of the students. I noted that of those whose first language was not English, Asian and South East Asian students in particular seemed to find that the approach afforded them a congenial *writing* strategy for their discursive academic writing in English.

Not merely students' writing, but everything to do with their learning, was generally improved. Class discussion was livelier and more productive; individual inquiry was more thorough; collaborative learning was more effective (and more fun); and the question-raising student presentations were universally preferred to the more traditional research-report style of presentations.

But to what, precisely, were these improvements due? To the modelling in the classroom of the process of active critical inquiry? To making students themselves practice that question-driven, question-generating approach in the classroom? To the explicit requirements in the assessment regime that inquiry have been driven by clearly articulated questions, especially by 'Why?' and 'How?' questions, and that it raise further questions where appropriate? To the generally livelier classes? I have no way of telling which factors were most important. I think though that there are strong reasons – grounded in recent research in several fields – for regarding all of them as essential parts of an overall *package*. I will discuss these reasons shortly; but first I want to lead into some comments as to how the generic approach outlined above can be used to sensitise students to the special demands of a particular discipline.

In the two first-year subjects I taught at Swinburne in 1993 I adopted a restricted version of the approach above. While it did exemplify all of the features just mentioned, only for ten per cent of the available marks was it actually demanded that the student adopt the question-driven, question-raising approach to inquiry. This was for the student's question-raising class-discussion-starter, and for an associated piece of written work explaining why the student elected to ask the questions that were asked. (I had assigned topics for discussion-starters to particular class dates, thus integrating them with the teaching program. Students signed themselves up for any topic/date that was not yet taken.) I was pleased with the standard of written work in both subjects, but I have no way of knowing to what degree the approach described contributed to its quality. I am certain though that it contributed greatly to the success of *classes*, and hence to the teaching program, bringing all of the classroom benefits that I had come to expect. However, it had also one further benefit – gained from something that I tried for the first time with my three Philosophy 1 classes.

The question 'What is philosophy?' is notoriously a vexed one. It is also one that beginning philosophy students tend to ask. Often a lecturer's answer is evasive: 'Oh, you'll get the idea pretty soon what philosophy is after you've had a chance to do a bit of it'. This answer is truthful enough, but unsatisfying. Alternatively, an informative answer is given, but very likely drifts way over the student's head. I tried a different approach. I suggested to my students, very early in the first class, that philosophers, like thinkers in other fields and like themselves, were interested in questions about reality. The class then arranged itself into groups of five or six students whose task it was to come up with as many questions about reality and as many different types of such questions as they could in four or five minutes. These questions, which covered a considerable range, were then

pooled in a short whole-class discussion, after which the groups were asked to determine which were questions for philosophers to try to answer and which not (and which were for philosophers *and* other thinkers). The whole class then compared notes once again. This was remarkably effective: collaboratively students were able to parcel out questions with almost impeccable judgement. And before the class ended we had discussed, in relation to some of those questions, the metaphysical theories of three presocratic philosophers, and had speculated as to why those three had come up with the sorts of answers they did. That is, the question-driven, question-generating approach to inquiry had been used by the students themselves to establish, to their own satisfaction and sufficiently for their present needs, both what philosophy is and how one might go about doing it. This was borne out a fortnight later by the first piece of written work, with only two students (out of one hundred and ten) failing to produce something appropriately philosophical.

### 3. Why does the approach work?

It has long been recognised that the question-driven, question-generating approach to inquiry is a powerful one – indeed, the most powerful known. But it is only recently that it has become possible to see just *why* it should have this power. For this we need to draw together strands of recent theoretical and empirical work from a number of fields: from cognitive psychology and psycholinguistics; from discourse theory and linguistic pragmatics; and from epistemology. I shall do so here only briefly, omitting mention of some threads altogether, in what really is just a sketch for a more extended theoretical treatment to be undertaken elsewhere. But even this brief answer will be sufficient, I think, to show that we may be confident the teaching and assessment approach I have outlined can bear whatever weight we may choose to give it. I shall tie into this sketch also some further strands drawn from recent research in education, which will allow me to explain why the various components of the approach should be implemented together as a *package*.

It is possible to inquire without asking questions; other verbal directives will serve (Searle, 1976): thus the interrogator's order, 'Reveal the names of your accomplices!'; the student's wish or plea, 'I want to find something – anything – about challenges to the Mabo decision'; and the traveller's polite ('if-you-please') request, 'Please direct me to the railway station'. In every case there is a corresponding question which asks for the information directly; but whether one *asks* for information, or instead instructs, commands, advises, cajoles or begs someone to supply it, will depend on the circumstances. The question-and-answer format is canonical, but not indispensable, for inquiry. It is though an all-purpose tool – the Swiss Army Knife of inquiry – easily and early mastered (Brown *et al.*, 1968), and always ready to hand. For these reasons I shall continue to speak of inquiry in its canonical, question-and-answer form.

A question expresses a need or desire for certain information, and is a directive (sometimes to oneself) that the information be obtained or supplied; an answer seeks to comply with that directive. Inquiry which is question-driven and question-generating makes these needs and directives explicit, assesses the degree to which they have been satisfied, and devises further strategies – further questions – for arriving at answers or at better answers. Inquiry which is not only active in this sense, but which is critical also, submits both potential answers and potential lines of questioning to high standards of rational scrutiny. Thus active critical inquiry maintains explicit critical awareness of its own motivation, procedures, and progress, while actively seeking or generating new potential solutions, and deeper understanding of problems it encounters (Popper, 1979 and, more accessibly, 1976, and Rescher, 1982, provide especially valuable discussions of those aspects of the epistemology of inquiry; Rescher covers the roles of questions in some detail). The explicitness and self-awareness of this process not only make inquiry more thorough, but facilitate its rational reconstruction as discourse.

The advantages of actively questioning inquiry emerge clearly from research on the structure of discourse and on the psychological processing of discourse. Much of academic inquiry involves reading others' academic discourse. Those experienced in this task know pretty much what to expect for, even when an author's style is idiosyncratic, certain conventions typically are followed (Schank and Abelson, 1977). Thus in most forms of discursive writing we expect a position to be taken and to be supported; we expect there to be an introduction, an argument for the position taken, and a conclusion; and we recognise that this discursive pattern may be repeated either sequentially, in a series of arguments each supporting the same conclusion, or recursively, with arguments embedded in other arguments (Cootes, 1992). Even so, comprehension of academic discourse is not always easy: those discourse structures can become complicated. An *active* approach needs to be taken to reading so that we know at each point what is meant to be happening and what is meant to be achieved by it (Gernsbacher, 1990; Allan, 1991; Cootes, 1992). Comparative research on the processing of discourse by skilled and unskilled readers has shown that the procedures of skilled readers are far more economical cognitively than those of unskilled readers (Gernsbacher, 1990; Allan, 1991). The skilled reader, knowing (more or less) what to expect, builds up an appropriately branching provisional cognitive structure to accommodate and predict the discourse

structure of what is read, closing off branches as they are finished with and opening new branches only when they are (likely to be) needed. The unskilled reader, in contrast, through ignorance of what to expect and misunderstanding of what has gone before, constructs inappropriate anticipatory structures, which not only fail to identify the discourse and argument structures of the text, but incur needlessly heavy cognitive processing overheads (Gernsbacher, 1990; Allan, 1991). To become a skilled reader one must therefore learn to be an active reader. And active reading is a form of active inquiry, involving (canonically) a process of asking questions of the text and about the text, modifying the provisional model of its discourse structure in the light of the answers which emerge, and using this to inform subsequent questioning.

While I would certainly expect that a reader can become more skilled through practice of an explicitly questioning approach to reading, what I particularly wanted to note here is the value of this approach for the student's *own* subsequent academic discourse. For by making the process of active reading explicit (particularly if notes are taken on this process of active questioning and discovery, and on the emerging discourse and argument structures of a text) the student produces a much sounder basis for subsequent discourse *about* the text and its issues, and for integrating that active reading into a broader project of inquiry. Furthermore, the benefits of an explicitly questioning approach may be cumulative – from reading to reading, topic to topic, and inquiry to inquiry – but in any case are bound to be considerable in any academic discipline in which reading constitutes a large part of the student's academic inquiry.

The next theoretical strands I shall mention are from the psychology of memory. It is of course upon memory that all learning, all knowledge and understanding, and all intelligent performances depend. But until a couple of decades ago little was known of memory's workings and structure. Earlier experimental studies had established that there was both long-term and short-term memory, and that short-term memory had a strictly limited capacity (Miller, 1956) – for example, that it could contain no more than about seven (plus or minus two) short independent verbal items at a time, and that these were quickly lost forever unless trace of them were transferred to long-term memory. The structure and functioning of both forms of memory have been much studied since then, and while much remains to be understood, what is now known, and theoretically conjectured, about them is of great importance to anyone who seeks to understand the intellectual tasks that are involved in the process of inquiry.

Short-term memory is perhaps the best understood. In the 1970s the cognitive psychologists Baddeley and Hitch (1974; see also Baddeley, 1986) proposed a model of short-term memory which seemed to explain experimental results obtained since Miller's work in the 1950s. Short-term memory was renamed in this model 'Working Memory'. This was for the very good reason that working memory was now *itself* held responsible for the undertaking of most intellectual work. That is, cognitively speaking, Working Memory *is* "the inquirer" and "the reasoner", or at least does the lion's share of the work. This model of Working Memory is still that generally accepted by cognitive psychologists, and has received a vast amount of experimental support (for a survey of seminal research see Ashcraft, 1989; for the current state of play see Gathercole, 1994). How it functions is easiest shown with a diagram (Figure 1). Notice in particular the responsibilities of the Central Executive. Now recall that all of these responsibilities are undertaken within the constraints of *short-term* memory, which is a very limited budget indeed. Its sources of information are elsewhere. Thus it is continually drawing upon information from perception and calling up information from long-term memory, working briefly with this, calling for more, transferring temporary results to its tiny storage loop or its imagery store, sending to long-term memory only results it deems important (in the light of its present task or tasks), and simply letting *everything* else, everything not in immediate use, disappear forever without trace. Thus we see that *efficiency* is of the essence in its operations.

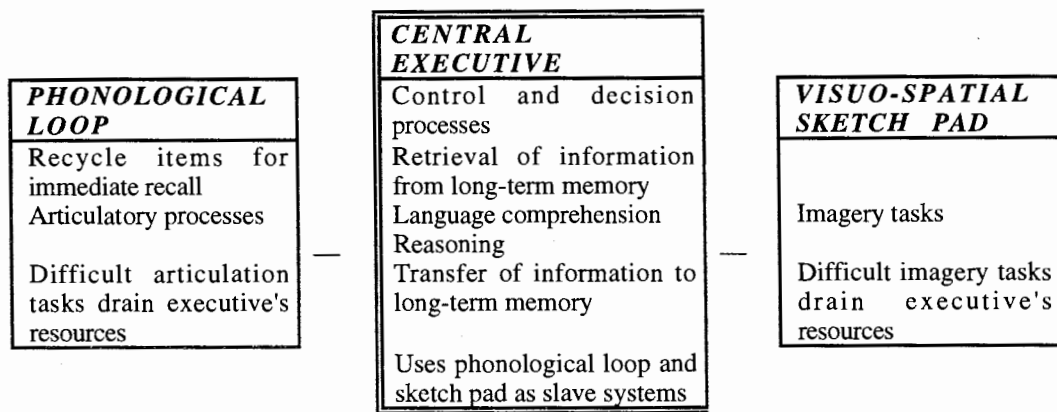


FIGURE 1. Working Memory (after Ashcraft, 1989:179, and Gathercole, 1994).

A prime requirement for efficiency is that the vast contents of long-term memory be efficiently "catalogued" and "indexed" (Schank and Abelson, 1977; Schank, 1982), so that relevant items are speedily accessible to Working Memory. For whatever cannot be located or retrieved from long-term memory within Working Memory's very tight time constraints will simply be unavailable to it – and hence unavailable to the inquirer and reasoner! It will be as if it were not remembered at all. For even greater efficiency, additional special-purpose indexing may be set up – a system especially designed for the inquiry at hand – to organise relevant information and to facilitate recognition of the relevance of further information (a bit like using different folders for inquiries on different matters, and adding special headings, annotations and reminders to the notes in a folder). Indeed, because the immediate resources and focus of Working Memory are *tiny*, context-relative indexing – that is, indexing for *relevance* to the present task – may be absolutely crucial.

Since the responsibility for inquiry lies with Working Memory, it must ensure that items in long-term memory have been adequately indexed, and as inquiry progresses set up suitable special-purpose indexing. Of course this indexing information must itself be stored in long-term memory. Working Memory gets information into long-term memory through processes known as 'rehearsal' (see e.g. Norman, 1976; Ashcraft, 1989; Gathercole, 1994). We are often consciously aware of 'rehearsing' information to make it "stick", sometimes using rote repetition, other times using more powerful techniques relying on relations of meaning and relevance. We noted a moment ago the crucial importance for serious inquiry of special-purpose indexing of information. But such indexing can be performed only through processes of *explicit rehearsal* of information by Working Memory. We are now in a position to see just how important cognitively is the question-driven, question-generating approach to inquiry. For what is gained by Working Memory through this approach is the ability to set up a powerful special-purpose indexing system for relevant information in long-term memory, and to employ this indexing system when dealing with both old and new information. The process of continual questioning is what permits the indexing to be *relevant* for the inquiry, while its explicitness is what permits Working Memory to readily *implement* such a system of indexing by means of rehearsal. Thus it is that inquiry goes best when it is explicitly question-driven and question-generating.

The remaining strands in my explanation of the power of a teaching and assessment approach which makes active critical inquiry its explicit focus are drawn from research in education. The first concerns the distinction between three approaches of students to learning, these being a deep approach (focussing on meaning and significance, aiming at understanding), an achieving approach (taking an instrumental view of learning and focussing on efficiency), and a shallow or surface approach (aiming at memorisation of material) (Biggs, 1979). While the first and second of these are effective modes of learning, with the first in particular being more likely to result in greater understanding, the third approach is by far the least effective. We can see that a teaching program and assessment regime whose explicit focus is actively questioning critical inquiry will be inimical to that shallow approach, and will award very low grades to students who take it exclusively. We might expect, then, that fewer students will take the shallow approach, and that the general standard of assessed work will improve accordingly.

Of course, how students *see* the focus and requirements of the teaching program and assessment regime affects their responses to them, and hence their learning and the work they produce (Marton, 1981; 1988; Marton and

Ramsden, 1988). Phenomenographic research into students' perceptions of the teacher's expectations, the teaching focus and approach, and the requirements for assessable work, clearly shows that from the students' perspective "handsome is as handsome *seems* to do". Thus, for example, if the requirements of the assessment regime seem to run counter to the teaching approach and to what the teacher *says* is required, students will pitch their assessable work to the assessment requirements, seeing these as setting out what the teacher *really* wants from them. It is for such reasons that I regard the teaching and assessment approach I have outlined as comprising a *package* – a package which is consistent across *all* of its aspects, and which leaves students in no doubt as to what really is required.

That the approach is effective as such a package, but *only* as a package, was confirmed by several of my R.M.I.T. colleagues. Those who adapted the package approach for some of their own teaching goals, implementing it early in the semester in the context of collaborative inquiry and making use of assessable small-group work, found that it resulted in the types of benefit I have described, and that it was especially effective in establishing good group dynamics in the classroom. This was as I had expected, although my colleagues' implementations of the approach were different from my own (as their own favoured teaching methods and immediate teaching goals were different). However, when the teaching approach alone was used *ad hoc* in "one-off" classroom situations with students in an 'Independent Mode' variant of Knowledge and Belief (similar to a distance-education subject) it was unsuccessful. Here implementation of the whole package was impossible: firstly because it was not feasible to make revisions to published teaching materials and assessment requirements; and secondly because students came together for only three widely spaced classes per semester. Because these students saw no reflection of the attempted classroom teaching approach in either the assessment regime or the printed teaching materials for the subject, and because each of the three classes began "cold" and could not draw upon (or aim at establishing) any group dynamics for ongoing collaborative inquiry, few students understood what the question-raising approach required of them or saw its point. The attempted classroom exercises fell flat for these students and produced no detectable benefit.

Finally, let us consider the student as the autonomous learner that she or he is, or should become. The question-driven, question-generating approach to learning is not so much a skill that can be taught as an attitude and set of skills that the student can be encouraged to shape and practice for herself or himself. It is a metacognitive approach to learning (on such approaches see Biggs, 1986), which may enhance learning *by* enriching the student's conception of how learning is accomplished. It is therefore something which the student may take with her or him at semester's end, to apply elsewhere. And the question I wish to close on is this: How likely are students to apply the question-driven, question-generating approach in other subjects?

Here I can only speculate, so I will go cautiously. I would expect that those students who have used the approach in one subject and have recognised its success in their own work, will be predisposed to use it in subjects which they see as sufficiently similar to the first. But here of course phenomenographic considerations must enter. If it seems to them that, despite the similarities, the second subject offers no encouragement for such an approach, or that what it really requires is something quite different, they surely will be much less likely to engage in active critical inquiry, or to submit work informed by such inquiry. But on a brighter note, if they see the second subject as one which encourages and rewards a question-driven, question-generating approach to learning, especially if it does so explicitly, I doubt that they will need any further invitation or incentive take that approach. My speculative conclusion, then, is that transfer of skills of active critical inquiry is likely to occur if the second subject is seen as sufficiently similar to the first, but that perceived encouragement or discouragement will be an overriding factor.

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## FACILITATING LITERACY/ACADEMIC DISCOURSE DURING THE FIRST SESSION OF UNIVERSITY

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### ABSTRACT

Given the increasing diversity of students entering tertiary education in Australia there is increasing debate about how best to meet the educational needs of different groups of students. This has been in concert with an increasing emphasis on quality assurance and equity in the tertiary sector, with these concerns propelling a diversity of policy and programme initiatives which have the professed aim of 'helping' students. Questions are often unanswered because of the unarticulated assumptions which underpin these programmes: which groups do not need help and why not? what problems in transition do the ultimately successful students normally have? who is the best helper? and when and where should the help be located?

In an attempt to answer some of the above questions the common approaches currently in use which aim to help students achieve functional literacy during transition to university will be identified. In relation to the above discussion the origins, design and evaluation of an intra-curricular project which has been conducted at Charles Sturt University (Bathurst) with first session Bachelor of Nursing students will be described.

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### INTRODUCTION

In this paper the origins, rationale, implementation and evaluation of a project which aimed to maximise for new students the likelihood of successful transition to the literacy demands of tertiary study will be discussed. The project was based on the principles of Systemic Functional Linguistics and took the view that, for the majority of students, functional literacy at the tertiary level poses a context bound developmental linguistic demand rather than a learning 'problem' which requires 'remediation' outside the context of the curriculum.

Recent times in Australia have seen the emerging proliferation of bridging and enabling courses and tests which are diagnostic for a learning deficit. Whether they are bridging programmes which aim to compensate for a knowledge deficit or enabling programmes which are primarily concerned with learning 'skills' or abilities in academic process, or a mixture of the two, these programmes are predominantly external to the curriculum to which they will connect and are essentially remedial in nature. Their target groups are usually 'at risk' students who at present constitute a minority group in the context of the wider student population. Having made this assumption, however, it is also pertinent to ask whether the increasing diversity of the student population arising from such factors as changing entry criteria or cultural background will alter the proportion of the student body with special learning needs. This in turn raises questions as to which groups of students need special assistance or alternatively, would benefit from such assistance.

Newly enrolling students can be classified into four main groups in terms of predicting their likelihood of academic success. There are those, small in number, who will be outstanding whatever we do and there are those who will fail whatever we do. Of the two remaining groups the smaller of the two has traditionally been those who are targeted by bridging or enabling programmes. They are the ones who presumably would fail in the academic system if left unaided. They are, in the context of the medical analogy of 'triage', those for whom intervention is critical. They are rightfully the target of facilitative programmes. But there is another group of students who, to this writer, are the most interesting and the most neglected who will also benefit from specific intervention. This fourth group are ultimate survivors of the system, the great bulk of the 'bell curve' who either scrape a pass or struggle for a credit throughout their course. They are the great majority of students whose learning needs are rarely specifically targeted. They are the group whom it is assumed do not need 'help'

or facilitation in transition to tertiary study and yet their grade pattern is suggestive of only partially successful adaptation.

It is this writer's belief that most students have the potential to function nearer the outcomes level consistent with that expected of those at the top of the bell curve, that is, to exhibit a degree of mastery in their discipline. Of course, to achieve this aim the requirement by most tertiary institutions for a mandatory normal distribution of grades which has the effect of perpetuating and advocating academic mediocrity will need to be revoked, or at least revised. Hence, it can be argued that ALL students can benefit from facilitative programmes and, further, that some of these programmes should be located within the discipline based curriculum.

This approach assumes an anthropological perspective such as that outlined by Ballard and Clancy (1988) for understanding the process involved in the transition to tertiary study. The most logical, strategically effective, equitable and practical place for the majority of students to be assisted is within the context of the curriculum. To separate 'learning skills' or 'abilities' from the curriculum is largely ineffective and ignores the educational definition of curriculum which any beginning student of an education course has learned by rote. The term 'curriculum' not only encompasses the content so beloved of academics but also is equally concerned with teaching strategy and learning experiences. The quality of teaching has until recently been largely neglected in many tertiary institutions. With the recent push to quality in teaching processes in the tertiary sector it is now opportune for programmes to be initiated through interdisciplinary team work between academic study advisers, librarians and academics which encourage curriculum development with a focus on facilitating successful academic discourse abilities. It is within the light of the above philosophy that the project described below was implemented.

This project, implemented with the newly enrolling students for the Bachelor of Nursing in Autumn 1994, at the Bathurst campus of Charles Sturt University, constituted a further development of an earlier project with the 1993 cohort, which involved diagnostic testing of students in literacy and numeracy during the first week of session. Involvement in the earlier project led to concerns about the practical and philosophical inadequacies of conducting diagnostic testing when students are already enrolled in a course. This led to the development of an alternative approach using the principles of formative assessment which aims to facilitate success, explicate requirements and provide early and continuing positive feedback to students on their performance.

The student population is increasingly diverse. There are both local and national concerns regarding the special needs of different groups of students. Many students are educationally disadvantaged and come to university without the traditional entry qualifications. It can be argued that the university, having enrolled and accepted students as suitable candidates for study, has a contingent obligation to help facilitate their successful transition. It can be argued that diagnostic testing on enrolment provides discouraging feedback for some students at a crucial and strategically awkward point in the student career. Testing conducted on enrolment, which is external to the curriculum, may merely constitute an additional unnecessary stressor for some students at a vulnerable and demanding time. For the teaching development grant proposal which instigated this project it was suggested that embedding the diagnostic testing within the curriculum may reduce perceived additional stressors as well as providing some means for aiding successful transition to the demands of tertiary study.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT**

The project was developed in two main stages with the period September to January 1993 constituting a preparatory phase for the ensuing period February to June 1994 in which the project was implemented and evaluated.

The initial phase of Stage 1 (September - October) involved consultation with learning skills advisers and nurse academics at various tertiary institutions. The second phase of Stage 1 (November - December) involved the development of student self-directed learning and resource material as well as the development of guidelines for classroom teaching strategy and teacher resource material.

Stage 2 involved three main phases. The first of these involved staff development workshops for those engaged in direct teaching in the project during Autumn Session 1994. Introductory workshops, held during February, aimed to provide the theoretical framework for the project, which was based on the principles of systemic functional linguistics, and to familiarise staff with the resource material which had been developed during Stage 1 of the project. The teaching team for the project continued to meet at weekly intervals throughout the ensuing implementation of the project in order to monitor and plan the conduct of the project.

The second phase of Stage 2 constituted the implementation of the project. Lecturers from the School of Nursing and Health Administration were involved in teaching the individual tutorial groups. Michelle Frank (Learning Skills Adviser - Student Services) provided concurrent group and individual sessions which complemented the learning skills focus of each week. Like the main project it had a focus on facilitating transition to tertiary study as a developmental demand rather than providing a remedial service. Nonetheless, the Learning Skills Advisory Service was also available as a referral service to help the very small number of students who were identified early, because of the nature of the project, as requiring special remedial input.

The project was conducted over the first four weeks of the Session and involved embedding literacy skills within the curriculum of the combined first two nursing subjects of the Bachelor of Nursing. Appendix 1 provides an overview of the teaching programme of these first four weeks. The two 8 credit point subjects involved were Professional Nursing 1 (NRS120) and Foundations of Clinical Nursing (NRS125) which are normally taught as discrete subjects. The two subjects were, however, taught contiguously so that there aimed to be continuity and linking of content and teaching strategy between the two. The four lecturers involved in the project taught their nominated tutorial groups across the two subjects with this arrangement reverting to normal (that is, each lecturer teaching in only one subject) after four weeks. A resource based workbook developed by Jenni Brackenreg specifically for the project during Stage 1 was the medium for aiding in determining content integration, for co-ordinating learning experiences and teaching strategy and for providing student feedback and self directed learning experiences for the four week period. A small star on the face-to-face teaching programme indicates that the tutorial or clinical workshop has related specific workbook material.

The third phase of the second stage of the project entailed the evaluation of the project. This was undertaken by the following means:

1. (i) Student evaluation via questionnaire in the last teaching week of session.

*and*

- (ii) Survey of student perception of 'confidence in ability to write essays' conducted in Week One of session.
2. Participating lecturer formal questionnaire and informal discussion group.
3. Analysis by lecturers at the time of marking as to whether students had included functional essay components in the submission of their first major essay. The main components identified were whether there was evidence that individual students had attempted to include an introduction and a conclusion which related to the body of their essay. The rate of evidence of an 'introduction' was compared with the rate apparent in essays submitted by the students concurrently in the third year of the Bachelor of Nursing who were currently being marked by Jenni Brackenreg. The third year students were seen as an appropriate control group because one would expect that their basic essay writing skills would be more developed than students two years less experienced.
4. Comparison of the 1993 withdrawal (AW AND FW) or failure (FL) rate with the rate for 1994 in 'Foundations of Clinical Nursing' NRS125 because of an academic related/literacy problem as identified by the subject co-ordinator for each year. Many students withdraw early or fail because of reasons unrelated to a learning or literacy problem.
5. Comparison of student demand for Learning Skills Advisory Services and individual consultation between 1993 and 1994. It was considered likely that a drop in demand would occur if the literacy project was achieving its objectives.

## STAGE 1 - PHASE 1

### Consultation

This phase was identified in the original Teaching Development Grant proposal under point 9.1 ii (a) as:

- a) *Intention*  
Individual interviews with nurse academics at CSU and other institutions in NSW with the purpose of identifying any diagnostic or remedial strategies currently being employed.
- b) *Expected Results*  
Generation of further ideas and knowledge base pertaining to diagnostic testing and remediation in literacy.

Originally it was intended that only nurse academics be consulted but as contact was made with different institutions it appeared that no nurse academics were involved in projects which addressed 'literacy' within the curriculum. Ultimately, Learning Skills Advisers were the most helpful group of contacts. Those nurse academics who were interviewed were very willing to be helpful even though they did not have a particular interest or expertise in the area.

## STAGE 1 - PHASE 2

### Preparation

This phase involved the development of the overall programme, development of resource material and lecturer workshop material. It was identified in the original Teaching Development Proposal under point 9 iii (a and b) as:

#### *Intention*

Development of formative assessment modules as an integral part of the curriculum implementation for the two initial subjects in the Bachelor of Nursing (NRS125 Foundations of Clinical Nursing and NRS 120 Professional Nursing I) which will aim to identify and address potential/actual literacy deficits.

#### *Expected Results*

This will involve the development of student self-directed learning material and student resource material as well as the development of guidelines for classroom teaching strategy and teacher resource material which will be used in pilot version in Autumn Session 1994 with the new intake of the Bachelor of Nursing (Bathurst campus).

The programme aimed to embed aspects of literacy within the context of the initial stages of the first two nursing subjects. Hence, for each week there is a learning skills focus as well as a nursing focus. The aim was that the students would simultaneously study the normal content of the nursing subjects whilst using a functional systemic linguistics approach as the lens for viewing the material. This either involved suggesting, or exploring, the possible 'genre' for approaching the relevant content under scrutiny.

The project spanned three main dimensions of 'literacy':

- (i) oral and spoken genre within both nursing practice and tertiary education contexts
- (ii) approaches to accessing information in the library and within texts
- (iii) written genre within the context of the nursing discipline and the traditional expectations of academia.

The first two weeks (dimensions i and ii above) focused on areas which are usually neglected and poorly researched as areas of functional literacy. 'Literacy' is often interpreted purely in terms of the written mode, yet outcomes for graduates are often expressed also in terms of oral linguistic capabilities or in terms of the ability to mobilise learning resources. A 'learned' or literate person is usually not only expected to be able to write well, the unexplicated agenda is also usually that they be articulate and be able to 'talk on their feet' and harness information coherently. Facility in the oral, spoken language or sociolinguistic dimension of academic life is

often critical for academic success and is probably also the basis for later successful and effective integration into professional life. It follows that such facility is best acquired within an explicit acknowledgement of the professional or discipline context/s in which it will ultimately be used.

The first week focused on selected aspects of oral learning and behaviour in the tertiary setting and combined this with an introduction to aspects of oral or interpersonal communication and the way in which these are incorporated within the role of the nurse in practice. For example, the students first considered the structure and function of the typical tutorial group and their perceptions, for example, of the role of debate as either being a form of 'conflict' or a 'sharing' of ideas. Further, the generic concept of 'active listening' was introduced with an early focus being on the principles of effective note taking in lectures using these principles of active listening. The focus then shifted to the context of nursing case studies or 'clinical vignettes' written in the first person that describe the therapeutic use of interpersonal or active listening skills. The aim was for students to extrapolate the generic listening skills to the discipline specific context. Many students come to the nursing course with a poor understanding of what nursing entails and the use of the case studies also provides an introduction to the diverse roles of the nurse.

The second week addressed library use skills and approaches to extracting information from texts. The texts which were used as exemplars for the experiential activities, focused on different aspects of the concept of health. 'Accessing information' or 'research skills' was the basis of the learning skills focus whilst the concept of 'health' constituted the content normally covered at that point in Foundations of Clinical Nursing (NRS125). This was complemented by an introduction to the nature of health care systems in Professional Nursing 1 (NRS120). For example, a paper on health was deliberately chosen as a reading for analysis because it was written in the lexical density so characteristic of academic language. Not only did the reading, which had a sociological focus, aim to provide what were possibly novel ideas for the students, the choice of this paper with this particular level of difficulty also aimed to stimulate discussion about the nature of academic language and the students' feelings about dealing with such material.

The third and fourth week of the programme dealt with the written mode. Development of the first assignment for the nursing subjects increasingly became the focus of the activities. The activities focused on adapting the genre of an essay to the demands of the topic question. The functional components of the traditional essay (for example, 'introduction', 'body' and 'conclusion' and the inter-relationship of paragraphing, sentence structure to the purpose of the whole) were didactically presented as one model for approaching essay design. Ideally, the students should, in the process of working through the activities, have emerged with a completed essay plan for their first assignment. Many students did in fact submit their plan with the completed assignment.

A second focus of the third and fourth weeks of the programme addressed other types of written genre specific to the health or nursing context. For example, the students were introduced to the basic principles and conventions of written nursing care plans and report writing. The nature of interpersonal, multidisciplinary relationships, the typical patterns of oral reporting between health workers and the functional elements to be negotiated when reading client case histories in medical files were also addressed in a mass lecture.

## **STAGE 2 - PHASE 1**

### **Staff Workshops**

A preparatory workshop was conducted by Jenni Brackenreg for the teaching team in the period immediately prior to the beginning of the Session. The aim of the workshop was to familiarise staff with the programme and the resources which had been developed. Most importantly, the workshop aimed to facilitate final decisions about integration of teaching strategy and for staff to discuss and develop individual ways of adapting the resources which had been developed. The Workbook was designed as a student/teacher resource package rather than as a didactic and rigid teaching guide or 'how to do it manual'. It was not intended that all material in each session of the workbook be covered by the teacher in the allocated class time slot. It was expected that individual teachers would harness, emphasise or highlight what they felt most beneficial from the material for an individual group and that students would complete the material not covered in class in their study time. To this end, the workbook was designed to double as a student self directed learning resource. Completion of all the activities in the workbook was essential for each student to "meet terms" in both the nursing subjects.

Each staff member was provided with preparatory reading prior to the workshop. This included a paper by Ballard and Clanchy (1988) and papers on approaches to teaching literacy and the basic principles of systemic linguistics.

## STAGE TWO - PHASE 2

### Implementation

The teaching team met weekly with Jenni Brackenreg in order to monitor progress and to plan the teaching options for the upcoming week. There were six tutorial groups. Each lecturer had two tutorial groups for the whole of the weekly activities whilst one group was shared between two lecturers so that one lecturer had the students for half their sessions and the other lecturer had the remaining half. Despite some problems with continuity of group leadership this arrangement worked reasonably well.

Implementation proceeded fairly smoothly. Fairly predictably, the activities which entailed greater student interaction were the most successful. For example, the students were most positive in the first two weeks and for the 'debating' and 'brainstorming' activities in the last week of the programme.

Beginning the programme in the first week of classes also brought some minor disadvantages since some students did not arrive on campus until the first week with a few not commencing classes until the second week. Others had 'settling in' problems: inability to find a tutorial room meant one group missed a whole tutorial. Some students, at this stage, were still negotiating problems with accommodation and other personal matters, hence concentration can be low at this point for some students. Nonetheless, the majority of the student group were exposed to the critical first week of the programme which placed the rest of the programme in context.

The staff expressed appreciation that the main teaching resources were already prepared for use.

## STAGE 2 - PHASE 3

### Evaluation

#### 1. *Final Teaching Week Questionnaire and Week One Survey*

Student perceptions of the programme were evaluated during the last teaching week of session via questionnaire. Of the 105 students enrolled, 95 were surveyed. The questionnaire consisted of twelve multiple choice questions (each with a space for additional comment), two open ended short answer questions and a section for any additional comments.

Students were also surveyed in Week One of session about their self perception of confidence in ability to write essays. Eighty-three students present at a mass lecture were asked the following open ended question: "How confident do you feel at this point in time, in your ability to write essays? Please explain briefly why you believe this." Question 1 of the survey in the final teaching week also asked a similar question retrospectively.

The questions in the questionnaire focused on eight main aspects. The eight foci were:

- (i) Perception of essay writing ability before and after being involved in the programme (Questions 1, 2, 4 and 5);
- (ii) Reaction to knowledge of the programme before participating in it (Question 3);
- (iii) Retrospective perception of how the programme had helped in the development of the student role, research skills and feedback on academic strengths and weaknesses (Question 6, 7, 11 and 12);
- (iv) Perception of teacher effectiveness (Question 8);
- (v) Effectiveness of the resource material developed specially for the programme (Tutorial/Clinical Workbook) in structuring and directing student learning (Question 9);
- (vi) Time span for the conduct of the programme (Question 10);
- (vii) Any aspect/s of the programme not covered adequately (Question 13);

- (viii) Whether the programme should be continued to be maintained and developed for future students or whether it was a 'waste of time' (Question 14).

Each cluster of related questions from the survey will be briefly discussed.

- (i) *Perceptions About Essay Writing Ability*

The students were asked about their perception of their essay writing ability both in Week One (open ended question) and at the end of the session (multiple choice question).

The findings revealed a diverse student group in terms of their self perception of skill and feelings about essay writing on enrolment. Question 1 of the questionnaire (completed at end of session) revealed that 62% of the students surveyed felt that, in retrospect, they had perceived themselves as having possessed extremely or moderately well developed essay writing skills on enrolment whilst 38% felt they possessed very few or extremely low levels of skill. On the other hand, belief in one's skill did not seem to necessarily translate directly into feelings of confidence or decreased anxiety. Question 2 revealed that on enrolment, 63% of the student group felt either moderately or extremely anxious about the prospect of writing essays whilst only 36% felt moderately to extremely confident. Of concern is the significantly large group who reported high anxiety combined with a perception of low skill. This latter group becomes more evident when the results of the survey conducted in Week One are considered.

In contrast, the survey conducted in Week One of session, which asked the degree of confidence in self perceived ability to write essays and the reason why, emphasised a greater group polarity, with the reasons supplied for being either confident or not, being particularly informative. Of the 83 students surveyed in Week One, 53% (or 44 students) stated they were not confident whilst 46.9% (or 39 students) stated a relative degree of confidence. The comments made by both groups illustrate some of the special needs of newly enrolling students as well as raising questions about some of the assumptions commonly made by educators about the entry behaviour of certain categories of student.

Generalisations are often made about differences in the entry behaviour of mature age students as opposed to school leavers as if each is a homogenous group. Mature age entry students are often characterized as having special problems and most bridging or assistance schemes traditionally target this group. On the other hand students who enter university on the basis of a Higher School Certificate are often assumed to have fairly well developed literacy abilities.

Although some of the 'non confident' students expressed concern because it was a long time since they had studied or because they had left secondary school early, there were many others who were obviously coming to university with a Higher School Certificate and who were concerned that their poor performance there in writing skills would affect their ability to write essays at university. Most of the 'non confident' responses reflected a high level of distress about their ability to meet tertiary literacy demands. Typical of these comments are the following:

*"No Confidence whats so ever! Because I was always marked extremely low at school, I don't know why!! I'm not good at writing my thoughts down on paper"*

and

*"At this point in time I feel that I do not have the ability to write a good essay. When I did my HSC my essays were usually commented on because I would repeat myself and skirt around the issue. I am extremely nervous about writing an essay and this is causing me a great deal of stress"*

and

*"not very confident because I haven't had very much experience writing them. It's been awhile since I was at school and even then I didn't write very many"*

and

*"not at all. why? I don't know how to set it out. Can't remember"*

and

*"I don't really feel confident about writing essays at the moment because I don't know how or what you really expect in them. I know its a lot different to school essay writing. Also interpreting questions worries me. whether my information will be relevant. How will I know this information?"*

and

*"very nervous so not very confident. I have never been very good at essays. My spelling, punctuation and grammar are not very good".*

In contrast the students who expressed a degree of confidence in their essay writing abilities rarely expressed any level of distress or anxiety even when their essay writing background was limited. They often mentioned successful essay writing at school but most added the caveat that there was room for improvement and that they hoped help would be available. The following are typical of the 'confident' responses:

*"How confident at this point in time do I feel about writing essays? Well, you might ask. I have never written an essay of the standard being asked here. However my wife has done her time at uni and is full of ideas for me to undertake this task. So, I feel sort of confident but I know there is a long way to go"*

and

*"At the moment, I feel quite confident at writing essays, but with more practice they could improve. Sometimes, I find it hard to get past the introduction and sometimes in exams, I find that I run out of time and rush my conclusion. From high school I received the general idea about essays, and through practice, they will get better. I could still use more help!"*

and

*"Confident enough. My best subjects at school were English, Religion and General studies (all essay writing subjects). I'm best at argumentative essays but I'm not supremely confident because uni, so far, has been so different to school"*

and

*"1/2 confident on my ability to write essays, a change of teachers in the TPC course last year resulted in not enough help with information for effective essay writing"*

and

*"I feel quite confident about writing essays because I went well in my English at the HSC level. I was taught how to properly plan essays to give an objective point of view".*

It is apparent from the comments made by the students at the point of entry to the course that a significant number (more than half) feel high levels of inadequacy about their ability to meet the literacy demands of the course. Those from both groups of student (confident and non confident) often expressed a common concern about the need to adapt to the 'strangeness' of the tertiary context and the need for ongoing support in developing literacy ability. This simple survey of student perception conducted in the early weeks of the course has touched upon an important area for future research: in order to develop appropriate teaching or diagnostic strategies to facilitate transition to tertiary study it is important to first explore the perceptions of the newly enrolling student in conjunction with more objective data. The emotional state

or level of anxiety of the new student may be a critical factor for consideration when designing remedial or transition programmes.

Given the low levels of confidence in essay writing expressed by a significant number of students as well as the need for additional help expressed by students across the board irrespective of level of confidence, how effective was the Literacy Programme in meeting these needs? Questions 4 and 5 provided some data in answer to this particular aspect whilst Questions 6 and 7, which are discussed in Section (iii) below, address the effectiveness of the programme in relation to facilitating ability in the student role and in accessing information/research skills.

Question 4 of the questionnaire asked the students to compare their essay writing abilities in the final teaching week with that of their ability in the first week of session. Eighty-six percent considered their ability to be well developed. Of significance, however were the 59% who considered their ability was "well developed with great improvement" by the end of the programme. Only 9% were unchanged whilst 4% felt they had lost confidence during this time. The rate of confidence had obviously increased significantly during the time of the programme and that this can be argued as largely attributable to the programme is subsequently indicated in the responses to Question 5. Question 5 indicates that 85% of respondents considered the programme had been a moderate to great help in their ability to write essays (with 20% indicating that it was a great help and 65% that it was a moderate help).

- (ii) *Reaction to Knowledge of the Programme Before Participating in it*  
 This question asked about the main feelings experienced when first hearing about the programme. A positive attitude to the programme presumably enhances the likelihood of the student subsequently benefiting from the programme. The responses to this question were compared to responses to a similar question given to students in the 1993 cohort who participated in the diagnostic testing project. The comparison of results is tabled below.

**Table 1**  
**Initial Feeling when First Informed of the Project**

	1993	1994
A. PLEASED	3.8%	45%
B. INDIFFERENT	52.8%	31%
C. ANXIOUS	38.8%	17%
D. THREATENED	5.0%	7%

Although some students still had a negative reaction in 1994, students in 1994 reported being significantly less threatened by the 'embedded' programme as opposed to the programme which focused in 1993 purely in terms of diagnosing literacy problems. It can be argued that a positive initial perception of a learning skills programme will potentiate the likelihood of students benefiting from the programme.

- (iii) Retrospective perception of how the programme had helped in the development of the student role, research skills and feedback on academic strengths and weaknesses (Questions 6, 7, 11 and 12).

Responses to these questions revealed that most students perceived that they benefited either a great deal or to some extent from the programme in their understanding of the student role and in research skills. Seventy-three per cent of students, in response to Question 12, reported that the literacy programme had provided either a great deal of feedback (21%) or some feedback (52%) on their academic strengths and weaknesses. Twenty-seven per cent reported little or no benefit in this regard. It would be useful to explore this group further in regard to their entry behaviour and reasons for not having benefited.

- (iv) *Perception of teacher effectiveness (Question 8)*  
Overall the majority (86%) of students expressed great or moderate confidence in the ability of their teachers to use the programme material effectively. There is a small group who expressed a negative view.
- (v) *Effectiveness of the resource material developed specially for the programme (Tutorial/Clinical Workbook) in structuring and directing student learning (Question 9)*  
Seventy-one percent of the students found the Workbook prepared specially for the programme to be either extremely helpful (25%) or of some help (46%). Twenty-one percent found it of little help whilst 7% found it of no help at all. It would be interesting to know the reasons why some students did not find the resource material helpful. For example, were they among the most able group with high entry behaviours or were they derived from those with an educationally disadvantaged background?
- (vi) *Timespan for the conduct of the programme (Question 10)*  
Forty-nine percent of students thought that the timespan for the programme was just right or about right but perhaps a bit too long (14% and 35% respectively). Thirteen per cent thought the programme was far too short. In all, 62% thought that the time span was either *the right length, too short or only a bit too long*. On the other hand 39% thought that the programme was far too long. Correspondingly, in answer to Question 14 eighteen students commented that they thought the programme should be shortened.
- vii) *Any aspect/s of the programme not covered adequately (Question 13)*  
The majority of students who commented here felt that most aspects were well covered. Eight students commented that they would like more on referencing whilst five students commented that they would like to see more activities on using the library and *researching skills*.
- (viii) *Whether the programme should be continued to be maintained and developed for future students or whether it was a "waste of time" (Question 14)*  
Of the fifty students who commented forty-six were strongly positive that it should be continued. Typical of such comments were:

*"The literacy programme I think was a great value in developing my critical analytical skills, although I am still in need of more guidance in this area"*

and

*"Definitely keep it going. It's a great start to uni - explained expectations and requirements. Makes everything a lot easier"*

and

*"...on the whole I think it was good way to begin the course. When I began Uni. at Hawkesbury (UWS), I had no such programme and felt that I was being thrown in at the deep end of this sort of work. While I coped, I had little confidence in my ability and felt very anxious because of this"*

and

*"I believe students both M.A. and school leavers will be at a loss without the literacy program".*

Three students were opposed to the programme being continued. Two stated it was either a "waste of time" and "took up too much" time whilst the third commented that:

*"no. maybe just some hints for essay writing and referencing - that would be sufficient".*

In Question 14 and the section for additional optional comment fifteen students said that the programme could be shorter in length with a number of these commenting that they were either bored with it towards the end or that it became too "detailed" or "went into too much

depth". A few students commented that there needed to be more "nursing content" although only one student explicated the comment further. Many new students often have a preconceived idea that they should immediately be covering 'real' nursing in terms of such activities as taking blood pressures or acute medical/ surgical interventions. Conversely, the early content of the two subjects is about the concept of health, the health system per se and the nature of nursing with this being intertwined with an introduction to communication principles in the context of nursing. This issue of early student expectations about the vocation they are entering is perhaps an important one. Only one student elaborated upon this point:

*"I think there needed to be greater nursing content. I was unsure of my choice of nursing when I started the course and I needed some reassurance that I had made the right decision, once the 'normal' syllabus began I felt reassured but the Literacy Programme did not give me this".*

In the planning for the continuation of the project for the 1995 intake the programme is being adapted to address this issue.

## 2. **Lecturer Evaluation**

Lecturer perception of the effectiveness of the programme was evaluated by questionnaire and informal discussion.

Responses to the questionnaire will be discussed in terms of responses to each of the questions.

### \* *Questions 1, 2 and 3 (Comparison with other cohorts)*

The two lecturers who had taught first year students in 1993 commented respectively that:

*"Generally students in 1994 indicated a greater understanding of how to structure their essay. All students in my TG's had attempted an introduction and conclusion. This was not the case with the '93 cohort."*

and

*"while content of essays remained diverse in quality and what would be expected for 1st year students there was a considerable improvement in students' ability to reference, plan and organize an essay".*

The two lecturers who had not taught first year in 1993 both commented that they perceived the first year essays as being better overall than essays written by students in more senior years with one lecturer commenting that "compared to 2nd year students the structure of the essays and referencing overall was better."

### \* *Questions 4 and 5 (staff development)*

All of the lecturers commented that not only had participation in the programme resulted in an increase in knowledge about strategies for teaching aspects of literacy but they had also gained a better personal understanding of what constituted effective essay design. A further comment was that the programme also provided a means by which an ongoing common language could be established between students and teacher about academic requirements. The explicit instructions assisted the ability to teach effectively.

Although the lecturers were appreciative of the aids provided for teaching, each also thought that the project involved a greater investment of energy in terms of additional team meetings and discussions about teaching strategy. Although three thought the extra load was definitely worthwhile because of the long term outcomes, one commented that they were not sure if the extra work was worth it because of some additional marking arising from the way the two subjects were combined. This situation only occurred for one lecturer.

### \* *Question 6 (Strengths of the programme)*

Each of the lecturers felt that the programme enabled the early explication of academic requirements to students and that it provided a common frame of reference or structure for

communicating about these requirements. In particular the workbook was seen as a strength of the programme. The cumulative comments referred to the workbook as a "sound tool for the Faculty" which was effective because it provided "guided learning" and was for students "a base to work from and to refer back to" and a "stepping stone for students entering tertiary education".

\* *Question 7 (Weaknesses of the programme)*

A couple of the lecturers commented that some students had difficulty relating some of the material to nursing. The section on taxonomies was mentioned by one lecturer as needing to be from a nursing context. Another lecturer thought the workload for the students was too great. A greater focus on developing an argument in the body of an essay was seen as requiring greater input.

During informal discussions it was agreed by the team that the ongoing project should further emphasise and develop the nursing context of the material. For example, the model student assignment provided for analysis in the workbook will in future be that of an assignment from a previous first year student. With the permission of the relevant students, several assignments from the 1994 cohort have been copied and one or two of these will be selected for inclusion in the 1995 workbook in place of the essays currently included which are from students in the social science area.

\* *Question 8 (Should the programme be continued?)*

The lecturers were strongly unanimous that the programme was effective and that it should be maintained and developed because of the very positive outcomes which it had achieved for students.

\* *Question 9 (Teacher preparation)*

Three of the lecturers considered that the preparation was adequate whilst the fourth would have liked more time to "digest" the preparatory material. One lecturer who missed the preparatory workshop felt that, despite this disadvantage, she still felt adequately prepared.

\* *Question 10 (Suggested changes or improvements)*

The changes suggested included the following:

- reducing homework and reducing some class work so that there is greater opportunity for free discussion
- increase the "doing" activities
- the one lecturer needs to stay with a tutorial group for all their sessions since two lecturers cause the classes to become "fragmented"
- there exists the "potential to work more closely with the library staff to plan activities relating to accessing information".

\* *Question 11 (What should be retained?)*

Overall the lecturers perceived that the activities in the first two weeks were the most successful whilst the debating activities in the latter weeks were seen also as a strength and an aspect that could be further developed. The process of "working through" the activities via the workbook was also seen as an important feature of the programme.

### 3. **Evidence of the Use of Structure in First Essay Submission**

At the time of marking the first assessable essay (due well after the programme finished) each lecturer recorded whether certain elements of structure were evident. Using the criteria which had been provided during the programme for developing an 'Introduction' and a 'Conclusion' which was linked to the body of the essay, each essay was assessed as to whether there had been an attempt to include these elements.

The lecturers reported that all students included an 'Introduction' and a 'Conclusion'. Many also attached a plan of their essay along with the completed essay. Interestingly, those students who also included a plan which had been developed prior to completing the essay, were predominantly those who achieved higher grades. When the results were tabled it was strikingly obvious that those who did not submit an essay plan were largely clustered among the lower grades.

The rate of inclusion of an 'Introduction' and a 'Conclusion' in the essays submitted concurrently by the third year students was also recorded. Seventy per cent of these students were not including a readily identifiable 'Introduction' or 'Conclusion'. Although the content was often appropriate and well used, most students evidenced that they had little idea at this late stage in the course of how to structure an essay.

4. **Comparison of Failure or Withdrawal Rate for NRS 125 between 1993 and 1994**

Students who withdrew early (AW) or failed (FL) because of an academic difficulty in coping with the course were noted. In 1993 eighteen students (17.1%) withdrew or failed from the key nursing subject 'Foundations of Clinical Nursing' NRS 125 because of a clearly identifiable academic disability. In 1994 only four students (3.9%) withdrew or failed for this reason. The cohort was a similar size for each year and the admission criteria were relatively unchanged. Although there may be other reasons to account for the difference, the result is at least suggestive that the literacy programme may have played some part in reducing early attrition.

5. **Student Demand for Learning Skills Services**

Michelle Frank, Learning Skills Adviser, Student Services has reported a significant decrease in demand for learning skills services from first year nursing students in 1994 as compared with 1993.

## PROJECT OUTCOMES

The evidence suggests that student outcomes for this project have overall been positive in terms of improved academic performance based on assessment results, reduced attrition as well as a fairly high level of student receptiveness to the intent of the programme as evidenced in the responses to the student questionnaire.

Implementation of the project has resulted in the development of a teaching approach which can be further developed by the teaching team and the creation of a set of resource materials which constitute an ongoing re-usable and adaptable resource. Participation in the project has constituted a form of staff development with positive outcomes generally expressed by the staff involved.

The teaching team at the Bathurst campus are currently in the process of modifying the programme for 1995 to take account of some of the identified strengths and weaknesses of the 1994 project.

In 1995 it is proposed to disseminate the programme throughout the session rather than concentrate it in the first four weeks and to introduce a greater number of nursing practice based experiential activities earlier. A meeting with the library staff has already established plans to involve them in the writing and development and teaching of workbook activities related to accessing information in the library. It has also been proposed that the Information Librarian give the relevant tutorials on accessing information in the library.

In summary, there is enough evidence to strongly suggest that the programme should continue. In the present state of development it is still evolving. Perhaps one of the main strengths of the programme is that it provides staff with both a focus and a vehicle for exploring, developing and evaluating teaching strategy.

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# BACHELOR OF NURSING

UNIVERSITY

## FACULTY OF HEALTH STUDIES

### Aspects of Literacy in Transition to University

Week	Focus	NRS120 Professional Nursing 1				NRS125 Foundations of Clinical Nursing		
		1 hour ML	1 hour ML	1 hour Tut	1 hour Tut	1 hour ML	1 hour ML	3 hour Clinical Workshop
1	<p><u>Learning Skills Focus:</u> Communication at University/active listening.</p> <p><u>Nursing Focus:</u> Interpersonal communication.</p>	Subject Introduction.	Academic expectations. <i>Related Workbook activity - page 7.</i>	Role of nurse/student nurse. (1st TG) <i>Related Workbook activity - page 3.</i>	Role of student in tutorial groups. (2nd TG) <i>Related Workbook activity - page 7.</i>	Subject introduction. <i>Related Workbook activity - page 3.</i>	Introduction to communication.	Role of nurse/student nurse. <i>Related Workbook activity - page 15.</i> NB: Bring lecture notes from Intro Comm to workshop.
2	<p><u>Learning Skills Focus:</u> Investigative communication: researching, using the library and textbook.</p> <p><u>Nursing Focus:</u> What is health?</p>	Using the Library and texts.	Images of nursing.	<p><i>Related Workbook activity - page 27.</i></p> <p>half student group / half student group (3rd TG) / (3rd TG) Library Tour</p>	<p>half student group / half student group Library Tour (3rd TG)</p> <p><i>Related Workbook activity - page 27.</i></p>	Interpersonal communication - responding.	What is health?	Researching health. <i>Related Workbook activity - page 30.</i> NB: Bring text, book and journal article on health to workshop.
3	<p><u>Learning Skills Focus:</u> Academic writing.</p> <p><u>Nursing Focus:</u> Lifestyle factors and health.</p>	History and development of health care system.	Types of writing - use of evidence/analysis.	What is analysis? Analysis in writing. (4th TG) <i>Related Workbook activity - page 42.</i>	Use of evidence. (5th TG) <i>Related Workbook activity - page 51.</i>	Primary, secondary, tertiary health care.	Health through the lifespan.	Essay structure and function. <i>Related Workbook activity - page 57.</i>
4	<p><u>Learning Skills Focus:</u> Developing an integrated written essay.</p> <p><u>Nursing Focus:</u> Health: Lifestyle factors, whose responsibility?</p>	History and development of health care system.	Types of writing - essay structure.	Types of writing - essay structure. (6th TG) <i>Related Workbook activity - page 81.</i>	Types of writing - essay structure. (7th TG) <i>Related Workbook activity - page 86.</i>	Holism: The nursing process and care plans in nursing. The needs approach.	Written and spoken genres in health care.	Creating an integrated essay on health. <i>Related Workbook activity - page 92.</i>

Workbook activities have been developed to accompany the above sessions as marked. For the first four weeks of the course, two subjects have been combined so that there is integration between subjects of content and teaching strategy. After the four weeks, the two subjects are taught separately.

## UNIVERSITY PREPARATION PROGRAM (NURSING)

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### ABSTRACT

This course aimed to prepare students for tertiary study in Nursing in the areas of language, science and mathematics. We collaborated with lecturers in these areas to provide a basic introduction to the content area of their Nursing course, and we provided practice in language tasks relevant to the course. As well, it was considered important to develop students' confidence and learning strategies that would assist them to cope with the course. Liaison with counselling and library staff was effective here.

Many students are returning to study after a long period. Others are from non-English speaking backgrounds. Seminars were informal and interactionary to encourage participation and confidence. Collaboration with the Nursing Faculty ensured follow-up group and individual tuition. Evaluation of the program was conducted by the University's Centre for Teaching and Learning, which showed positive feed-back from the students.

This paper will describe and analyse the Program and discuss the team-work and collaboration required for effective liaison.

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### **Introduction**

Tertiary preparation programs have been offered by the Student Learning Centre (SLC) at the University of Technology, Sydney for the last three years (1992-1994). The program delivered to prospective Nursing students has undergone various changes in organisation and methodology. These changes were based on surveys which canvassed student responses and input from the increased participation of Nursing Faculty staff. Students who have completed the course feel more empowered about their abilities, more motivated to succeed. Preliminary studies on students enrolled in the Nursing undergraduate course have shown they feel positive about the benefits of a tertiary preparation program and succeed in their future studies.

The *imprimatur* of the Faculty of Nursing has been a significant factor since the course must meet rigorous guidelines for course approval. The cooperation of members of the Nursing Faculty who teach in the mainstream undergraduate program means that the students gain first-hand knowledge of teaching styles to which they will be exposed. They gain some understanding of the expectations of academic staff and how the skills learnt will be relevant to the Nursing course in which they hope to enrol. An introduction to the academic discourse of Nursing is a great asset for potential students, especially to those who have not worked in the health care area. For students whose last formal schooling may have been twenty years ago, acculturation to the new environment of a tertiary institution is an important factor in their success.

### **The Program**

The University Preparation Program (Nursing) is an integrated program of language, learning, mathematics and science. The current program runs for 27 hours, designed to give students basic skills to prepare them for tertiary studies, to build confidence in their ability, and to fill in gaps of knowledge. Demystifying elements of tertiary study gives students important information and skills. It is easy to forget how many features of tertiary study are taken for granted by teaching staff but are confusing or difficult to grasp for students who have not studied for many years. A tertiary preparation program gives a map to unknown territory such as recognising individual learning styles, participating in a 'tutorial' session, organising study timetables amongst many others. Simply by attending the course on a regular basis students gain experience in juggling home, work and study commitments.

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Teaching methodology is deliberately varied to allow students to experience different teaching and learning styles. Lectures, workshops, small group discussion, seminars, team teaching are used in classes. Problem solving, questioning and critical thinking are skills which many students use in their everyday lives but they are a crucial component of a university education.

### **Objectives**

The course aims to prepare students for tertiary Nursing studies by:

- encouraging students to develop confidence, skills and strategies that will promote effective learning in their Nursing studies
- developing language and learning skills appropriate for tertiary study
- developing the basic mathematical skills required in the study of science
- providing an introduction to science concepts.

### **Target Group**

The majority of our students have been those who wish to bridge the gap in returning to study and/or those who want to gain confidence and skills to succeed in tertiary nursing studies - particularly in the areas of language, mathematics, science and learning skills.

### **Organisation**

Basic organisational tasks at the preparation and planning stage have included a needs analysis and the preparation of a course proposal. At the University of Technology, Sydney, the need was demonstrated by the number of mature-age Nursing students who used the services of the SLC and expressed a desire to have completed a tertiary preparation course, believing they were ill-prepared for the demands of an undergraduate course. Other tasks such as meeting and consulting with academic staff, preparing a budget and timetabling present their own demands.

Initially, an outline of the basic structure of the course prepared by staff of the Student Learning Centre was discussed with academic staff of the Faculty of Nursing. Others who contributed suggestions and expertise were the Counsellor from Student Services and the Faculty Liaison Librarian.

Various administrative staff were also consulted such as the Recruitment and Planning Officer and the Faculty of Nursing Administrative Officer, an important link with the Dean of Nursing. Administrative assistance is essential for various tasks e.g. banking, booking rooms. Every effort was made to streamline procedures such as the use of *pro forma* letters to contact students, computerised receipts etc. Typing of lists of class participants, timetables, course outlines, course handouts and ordering of printing are other tasks for administrative staff. Many students made initial telephone enquiries to find out details of the course and the time spent here can be considerable.

Avenues of publicity such as newspaper advertisements need to be explored but a vital element in the increased enrolment was the notification of the course in the University Admissions Guide (UAG). Some Faculty staff were also willing to disseminate publicity for the course. The brochure was designed by SLC staff and printed by the UTS Printing Branch.

### **The content of the program**

Over two sessions of three hours each, it was decided to cover the essential skills needed for survival in the tertiary context and to contextualise the skills in materials relevant and interesting to potential Nursing students. The sessions were designed as workshops, with some lectures to provide information and to model processes, and group and pair work to encourage interaction and participation. Individual writing tasks in the final session allowed assessment of students' learning and reinforcement of the skills covered in the program.

As skills were modelled, frequent reference was made to the tertiary context and to the role that efficient strategies of learning and language would play in reducing stress, assisting understanding and enabling success. Sessions were designed to move logically from one task to the next. Authentic texts were used: a textbook Science in Nursing, and two articles from the Sydney Morning Herald, one a news item and the second a feature article. All texts were related to the theme of the use of advanced technology in health care.

### **Session One:**

#### **How We Learn - How We Read for Meaning - Listening**

Session One began with brainstorming 'How We Learn', working from students' existing experiences of learning towards providing researched information on effective learning strategies. Games assisted in demonstrating these strategies.

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'How We Read for Meaning' followed, with skimming, scanning and study reading exercises. Students then applied these skills to real texts, discussing the usefulness of knowing how to vary reading strategies for different purposes. Reading for the main idea was introduced as a strategy, and compared to Listening where body language provides important clues.

### **Efficient Notemaking**

After a break, the second hour of the first session dealt with Efficient Notemaking. Students practised 'walking through' the Nursing text, locating the useful features of the text such as the table of contents, index, preface and glossary, and discussing the usefulness of the bibliographic information for their research-notes.

Strategies were modelled for surveying a chapter for headings, subheadings, graphics and the first and last paragraph as indicators of theme and writer's purpose. The usefulness of reading chapter summaries/reviews/revision questions before the notemaking process was discussed as a means of setting up problems for the reading to solve. This reinforced the earlier notion of the need for reading to be an active process where the student keeps 'pen-in-hand' to underline, highlight or note down the main information in answer to questions posed by the task. It was suggested that where the text does not provide questions or a summary, that prior to reading, the reader poses Who, What, Where, When and How questions. If reading becomes a problem-solving process, the student may be more actively engaged with the text.

The structuring of text by the frequent use of topic sentences in paragraphs was demonstrated and practised, and applied to the real texts provided.

Enabling students to appreciate the organisation of the text by recognising the signposts helps to demystify the process of reading for meaning and to make notemaking easier. Having a purpose and questions to answer help to make the process more efficient, and to give students a sense of accomplishment.

### **Text Structure**

In the third hour of the first session, newspaper texts were used to reinforce the concept of text structure by demonstrating the use of signalling words in topic sentences. The text's organisation as an argument, explanation, sequence, description or exposition could be seen as a guide for notemaking. Students practised listening for these signals in a note taking exercise.

### **Assessment**

Students were asked to read the second newspaper text at home, practising underlining and highlighting main ideas and key terms.

### **Session Two:**

#### **Mindmapping - Participation - Essay writing**

Session Two began with a demonstration of mindmapping as a means to recall the main information from the previous session. Using the assessment task, the text was divided into sections for groups to prepare a short summary. After a preliminary discussion of what group work entailed, each group reported back its findings. This part of the session enabled participation and encouraged oral skills, and the students remained in their groups to brainstorm the next writing task, which was a plan for an essay entitled "We should resist the temptation to shape our evolutionary destiny".

This task was based on information from the previous texts, and students were encouraged to try a variety of planning strategies: brainstorming, mindmaps, lists etc. Once ideas had been discussed and a first plan drawn up, the lecturer explained the functions of the parts of the essay, and from the students' drafts, a plan was jointly constructed, demonstrating the need to concentrate on paragraphs as a main unit of meaning. The writing process was discussed so that students could appreciate the stages in the development of an essay. The need for cohesion through the use of topic sentences and signal words was reiterated.

### **Assessment**

Students were asked to write a draft for the essay, and the lecturer assisted individually as questions arose. The more able students completed the task in the time, while others completed it at home and brought it to a later session. Drafts were commented on and returned to the students with suggestions for follow-up if relevant.

### **Overall Evaluation**

Evaluation from staff and students involved in the program provided valuable feedback although their suggestions were not always able to be carried out, e.g. provision of computer awareness.

Assessment of the course was primarily through the Centre for Learning and Teaching at UTS. Items were chosen from a bank of statements and students were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed (from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*):

- I now have a better understanding of the language requirements of a tertiary course.
- The mathematical concepts were clearly explained.
- I have developed my ability to solve science problems.
- I feel better prepared to commence a Nursing course.

Open-ended questions gained responses such as "Knowing what is expected of me at Uni." highlighting the kind of assistance students perceived as helpful.

Experience of the University Preparation Program at UTS indicates that collaborative work with the Faculties in planning pre-sessional courses will provide great benefits for students who eventually enrol in undergraduate courses.

Semester 2:

WEEK	TOPIC
5	Progress Reports
6	Argument: in the literature review and the research proposal
7	Analysis and critique of sample literature reviews
8	Structure, format and style of a research proposal
9 and 10	Presentation and discussion of first drafts
11 and 12	Scientific writing: workshopping the drafts
14	Course review and close

Table 1: Course outline.

### **Needs assessment**

The aims of this component were to expose the students to the research process, and to assist them in compiling a literature review and a research proposal. The objective could not however be formulated in terms of the students' ability to satisfy the internal requirements of their School or of the University. They had already done that sufficiently well to gain admission to the Honours programme. The initial needs assessment was therefore simply a review of the tasks they had successfully completed in their previous year of study.

In Year 2 Diagnostic Radiography, the largest stream in the School, the major task was a 3000-word case study. This had required a simple 'Review-Comment' text organisation, in which authorial standpoint and argument was less important than content knowledge, and the conclusions to be drawn from it. The task did however show that the students could be assumed to be experienced library users, and expert readers in their subject areas and related disciplines (e.g. radiation technology, pathology and anatomy). They were therefore likely to be acquainted with the general conventions of scientific writing, but from the perspective of the receiver of information delivered by an authoritative text.

This outcome precluded any idea that the course would be supplying a deficit. The students could be considered novice scientists, and possibly inexperienced writers, but they could not be assumed to be inept. Furthermore, teaching them 'how to write science' by conforming to a set of discourse conventions was unlikely to promote a transition from content-based writing (in Bakhtin's view, repeating others' words) to compelling argument. Our objective then became clear. If they were to accomplish the transition from receivers to producers of authoritative texts, we should first help them to develop the authority underlying scientific writing; this would allow them to find their voices as scientists.

### **Approach to teaching**

Modelling alone seemed inappropriate; first, because it was doubtful that the teachers could model the research process as it would be experienced by a novice; and (principally) because we wished not to risk teaching the group what they already knew. The most productive option was to adopt an enquiry-based approach to teaching and learning. The flexibility of this approach would allow the students to verbalise (and so to know) what they knew, and to indicate any gaps in their knowledge which might require direct input of information. Their

academic ability and prior experience could thus be explicitly linked to the process of producing reader-based, scientific prose. Figures 1 and 2 show the first discussion starters:

SCIENTIFIC WRITING	
Conventions:	intellectual methodological structural stylistic

Figure 1: Stimulus for brainstorm and discussion (session 1)

THE LITERATURE REVIEW	
	What is it?
	What use is it:
	- to the scientific community?
	- to the researcher who writes?
THE CRITIQUE	
	What is it?
	What use is it:
	- to the scientific community?
	- to the researcher who writes?

Figure 2: Stimulus for brainstorm and discussion

Our preference for the enquiry-based approach turned the classroom into a microcosm of the students' discourse communities, because the same individuals (peers and lecturers) would participate in both. In practical terms, this preference meant a far greater emphasis initially on content and context than on producing written text. Much of semester 1 was spent 'demystifying' the research process, since the textual outcomes of this process all stand in a metaphorical relation to it, and can obscure its non-linear nature. Thus, for example, students' discouragement on comparing the apparent 'fuzziness' of their thinking with the logical flow they had perceived in research papers was dissipated during small-group discussions, when it emerged that research questions and hypotheses did not necessarily arise from deduction or induction, but could be arrived at by analogy, intuition, or plain 'common sense' (Givon, 1989; Johnson-Laird, 1986; Moore, 1986).

There was no question here of abandoning students to the 'trial and error' process encountered by Webb and Bridge (1994). The point of departure for almost all teaching activities was the students' expertise as critical readers, and as exponents of a research topic of their own choosing. We insisted on a hermeneutical approach to classroom interaction. As producer of authoritative (though spoken) text for his/her peers, each student was required to adopt and maintain an authorial standpoint, and constantly to map out the topic around it, formulating and explaining the connections among the ideas. As receiver of such text, each had to identify and verify the other's standpoint, follow the argument and seek clarification when necessary. This format resembles the 'peer workshop' approach mentioned by Torrance et al., with one significant difference: the outcome required of all discussion and 'sharing' was consensus as to the author's meaning.

This constant movement between the whole (the authorial standpoint) and its parts (the arguments which supported it) generated 'question outlines' which helped the research process, and later the organisation of written texts. It also enabled the integration of the research process with the process of producing text. For instance, when evaluating techniques for classifying sources during research for the literature review, students found that the categories which served to organise their texts were more likely to be 'clusters' than the Platonic type familiar from their earlier courses, and that the criteria for including or excluding any item derived solely from the researcher's rhetorical purpose (here, to identify and connect the research question with existing research in the topic area). Similarly, the inclusion or exclusion of any points in the research proposal, and the sequencing of them, was seen to depend entirely on the rhetorical purpose of the document: to gain approval for the research project.

### **Materials**

The hermeneutical approach necessarily determined the type of materials produced for the class. The few sample texts introduced were interpreted, critiqued and improved upon by the students, with the aid of heuristics. These consisted of questions, addressed to the writer by a reader, which drew the students' attention to the link between text organisation and the impact of the text on the reader. At paragraph and sentence level, this entailed recasting thematisation as the more reader-oriented concept of topicality, in order to clarify the importance of authorial standpoint and judgement in the sequencing of information (Givon, 1989; Gopin and Swan, 1990; Peters, 1985).

The few writing heuristics distributed resembled the 'question outlines' generated by the students themselves. They were formulations of reader reactions, and so sequenced according to the expected staging of information, but were intended to generate text. Figure 3 shows the first part of the heuristic used in the in-class preparation of the first semester assessment task: a critique of an article of the students' own selection. The latter part included prompts intended to help the students organise their text around a single rhetorical purpose: that of presenting and justifying their evaluation of the article they had selected. This heuristic also formed the basis of a performative assessment instrument, comprising descriptive rubrics written specifically to evaluate the skills needed to fulfil that purpose.

<p>THE CRITIQUE</p> <p><u>Components:</u> The Introduction</p> <p>Answer the following, in the order given:</p> <p>a) Sketch in the background to the problem (BRIEFLY!)</p> <p>b) What problem is investigated, in this article?</p> <p>c) Why is it considered important?</p> <p>d) How is this publication related to it?</p> <p>and/or</p> <p>What contribution does this publication make?</p> <p>and/or</p> <p>Why did you choose this publication?</p> <p>(Tip: compose the introduction LAST)</p>
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Figure 3: Writing heuristic (assessment task)

Seven of the eleven students made use of the heuristic, and successfully organised their texts according to their rhetorical purpose. Four did so very convincingly.

All this amounts to, of course, is giving priority to the conception of a text as a means of compelling assent, rather than as an artefact; emphasising the reader's role in the construction of meaning, and assuming that the resulting coherence of thought will engender coherent, cohesive texts. This last is beginning to be the case. It now seems likely that the finer points of register (specifically, grammatical metaphor) will be mastered without difficulty, as their relationship to the rhetorical purpose of the text is clear.

### **Conclusion**

In integrating language and academic skills into the disciplines, it is important to define clearly what the concept of genre can contribute to the teaching of native speakers, and at what stages of text production this concept may be most useful. Unless the teacher's primary concern is to identify and remedy writing problems, this contribution might be limited to sequencing information and facilitating the revision of drafts.

These Honours students are by definition an elite minority, but the texts they produced indicate that students can become 'scientific writers' if they are first considered expert readers of each other's texts, and authoritative exponents of their own. If their experience can be generalised to native-speaker students at other levels (excluding first year), teaching language and academic skills could mean only acting as a reader by asking questions only the student-writer can answer, and providing support and reassurance as the novice scientists find their voices.

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**CHANGING TIMES, CHANGING DEMOGRAPHY IN A SOUTH AFRICAN  
UNIVERSITY: SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR STAFF AND STUDENT DEVELOPMENT**

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**ABSTRACT**

The paper briefly contextualises staff and student development interventions in the Arts Faculty of the University of the Witwatersrand over the last five years. It does this first in relation to the momentous changes which have taken place in the country since December 1989 and secondly in relation to the particular situation within the University of the Witwatersrand.

It looks at add-on and infusion models of academic development for students, and at pre- and in-service models of academic development for staff members of the Faculty and the Academic Development Centre.

It then focuses on two instances of academic development in the Arts Faculty. First, it discusses the introduction in 1993 of a Foundation Course in English Literature in the English Department for students whose first language is not Standard South African English and who would be ineligible in terms of entry qualifications for acceptance in the traditional first year course in the English Department. Secondly, it considers the proposed two year Foundation College currently under consideration for historically disadvantaged students in the Arts Faculty.

It briefly summarises and comments on the lengthy procedure of research, discussion and consultation which has gone into developing a model which seems likely to give good results. It focuses in particular on the articulation between the discipline and department-specific courses and the core, compulsory, course which aims to teach academic literary skills and processes, reflective thinking and critical awareness as well as university and faculty know-how and thus to provide a bridge for transfer from itself to the discipline-specific courses and from one discipline-specific course to another. It discusses the conceptualisation underlying the need for transfer across discipline areas and for transfer from one level of generalisation to another.

It considers the implications of such a course for the student body it aims to serve, for the staff and for the institution. In regard to students this involves attempting not simply to enlarge the cohort of black students gaining a low pass level in the BA degree. It involves providing the foundation for high level performance from students whose very presence in the University attests to their ability to survive and succeed in what has been a socially destructive educational system. In regard to staff, the implications discussed include a flexible academic development program and the need to locate in effective practice our awareness that part of our responsibility as academic practitioners in South Africa today is actively to facilitate the quality performance of members of the entire racial and class spectrum of students in South Africa.

A further implication concerns replicability. The paper surfaces the following issue: to what degree is the situation in the Arts Faculty at our university similar to and different from that in other South African universities and those beyond our borders and what are the implications of the answers to this complex question?

## CRITICAL LITERACY, LANGUAGE AND WRITING

### Critical Journaling in an Enabling Program

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#### ABSTRACT

In this paper, I will focus on writing as social practice and curriculum as social practice. I wish to explore and interrogate the nexus between the type of curriculum offered to marginalised individuals and the related teaching practices. It is my belief that the development of critical literacy that is grounded pedagogically in a politics of difference, and which recognises the importance of language in the construction and maintenance of social power and control, should be a central concern for educators working with disadvantaged groups. It is undeniable that students must learn the techniques and skills needed for achievement in the academy; equally, I believe they should feel free to write of their personal concerns, and critique and question those discursive practices which have contributed to their marginalised positions. This means that the writing they are to do as part of their course should be both 'academic' and 'personal', with the tension between these two being addressed through journal writing. Through journal writing, students can explore their differing subjectivities within a complex social and cultural environment, gaining in the process a recognition of the importance of language in the construction and maintenance of social power and control.

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The focus of this paper is on the journal as a tool for critical literacy. My aim is to bring to the centre of the discussion the notion of discourses of language and literacy, critical literacy, and writing, and to situate these discourses within the context of an enabling program for disadvantaged students. I am particularly interested in exploring the possibility of bridging the gap between 'academic' and 'personal' writing through critical journal writing, and I wish to do this within the framework of feminist poststructural theory because it provides the means for exploring the complex ways in which meaning, institutions, power, subjectivity and gender intersect, leading to a new pathway for theorising about change, power and subjectivity. As a teacher educator, working with marginalised students in adult education, I am challenged by the need to develop in students a recognition of the complex roles of literacy in the wider uses of language in education and society. It is my belief that the development of critical literacy that is grounded pedagogically in a politics of difference, and which recognises the importance of language in the construction and maintenance of social power and control should be a central concern for educators working with disadvantaged groups. I argue that a powerful cultural critique can be provided through journal writing, that boundaries can be broken and existing genres and discourses disrupted, thereby opening up the possibilities for change and transformation, empowering students to use their voices to explore the connection between individual consciousness, social meaning, power and language.

The language and literacy practices required for tertiary study are understood primarily as a series of skills that are needed for the different disciplines and contexts of the academy. The objectives of an enabling, or bridging, course are to provide students with those skills that would enable them to participate successfully in tertiary study. Essential though these skills are, however, they do not help students to develop their skills in raising questions about our culture, which they had previously taken as a given (Lewis, 1990); nor do they address the construction and maintenance of the dominant discourses in society which marginalise certain individuals, perpetuate social inequality, and which see one set of meanings having intrinsic power and control over another.

It is undeniable that students must learn the techniques and skills needed for achievement in the academy; equally, they must feel free to write of their personal concerns, and critique and question those discursive practices which have contributed to their marginalised positions. This means that the writing they are to do as part of their course should be both 'academic' and 'personal'. By rejecting the distinction between 'personal' writing and 'academic' writing, and by showing that genre boundaries themselves are as questionable as gender boundaries, it can be demonstrated that all writing is a means of creating a self, not for expressing a self that already exists. This means that 'academic' and 'personal' writing can be seen as inseparable elements of the same thing, not as binary opposites (Davies, 1994).

The tension between 'personal' and 'academic' writing can, I believe, be addressed by journal writing. Students can be encouraged to remember experiences, histories and activities which are traditionally dismissed and marginalised by academic discourse. They can use these experiences of cultural dissonance to make problematic, and to challenge, hegemonic culture both within and outside the classroom. Through journal writing, they can explore their differing subjectivities within a complex social and cultural environment, gaining in the process a 'conception of what it means to be released into language; not simply learning the jargon of an elite, fitting unexceptionally into the status quo, but learning that language can be a means of changing reality' (Rich, 1986: 67)

In this paper I will focus particularly on writing as social practice and curriculum as social practice. I wish to explore and interrogate the nexus between the type of curriculum offered to marginalised students and the related teaching practices. My concern is to make students themselves theorists of their own lives by analysing and interrogating their own experiences (Weiler, 1991). A way to address this concern is through a consideration of the centrality of language and the part it plays in the construction and maintenance of social power and control. Critical literacy and critical pedagogy can be powerful forces for exploring the relationship between literacy and education, and a recognition of the significance of the language and power nexus should be at the centre of a language and literacy pedagogy in an enabling course.

### **Poststructural Theory and Discourse**

As the research on which this paper is based is framed within a feminist poststructural perspective, I will briefly discuss this theory as it provides the interpretive framework for investigating the complex ways in which meaning, institutions, power, subjectivity and gender intersect, developing a new direction for theorising about change, power and subjectivity. I will first clarify my use of the term 'discourse'. I see discourse as all the ways of seeing, doing, believing, and valuing determined by historical, cultural and social factors, in which meaning is shaped (Gee, 1990). It is through discourse that human subjects and meaning are produced, and relations of power are maintained and changed (Foucault, 1977). The discourses and texts which make up social institutions and cultural practices are emphasised in poststructuralism (Kenway, 1992, 1993). Poststructuralism becomes feminist when 'matters of femaleness and maleness and the differences between and within them are made a central feature of analysis and...when analysis implies a challenge to some sort of any inequitable relationships of power which involve gender or sexuality' (Kenway, 1992).

A significant feature of the poststructuralism paradigm is that it recognises both the constitutive force of discursive practices and at the same time recognises the subject as capable of having agency in relation to those practices. For individuals not accorded full human status within society, 'agency stems from a critical awareness of the constitutive force of discourse' (Davies, 1993: 3). Thus, individuals are not passively shaped by others, but are active in taking up discourses through which they are shaped, with their 'identity' consisting of a 'nexus of contradictory subjectivities' (Walkerdine, 1990: 3). What feminist poststructuralism claims to be able to do is to offer discursive space in which the individual woman is able to resist her subject position (Weiner, 1993), as well as revealing how power is exercised through discourse, how oppression works and how resistances might be possible (Weedon, 1987).

The strength of poststructuralism lies in its claim to create an analytic framework for defining and exploring social relations (Weiner, 1993), viewing language as the common factor in any analysis of individual consciousness, social organisation and power. Poststructuralism also assumes that meaning is constituted

within language and is not guaranteed by the subject who speaks it, but which allows one to examine the internal contradictions and illogicalities that reside within discourse and thus challenge the foundations on which they are based (Weedon, 1987; Davies, 1991; Kenway, 1992).

### **Language and Literacy**

Language and literacy can be constructed as separate and interchangeable with neither term having a common meaning. Increasingly, educators are writing of 'literacies' pointing out that there is no one state that can be achieved, and described, as literacy; that, in fact, literacy is defined by culture, context, history, that it is a social construct (Freebody and Luke, 1990). There is also a large literature analysing the flow of literacy as technology, practice and embedded social relations. The high-tech information society imposes increasingly high minimum levels of literacy and numeracy on all members of modern populations (Lankshear, 1993), resulting in educational requirements increasing, independently of changes in job requirements (Collins, 1993), or independently of the degree to which changing job demands genuinely call for more or different forms of literacy competence (Freebody and Welch, 1993:13).

As a teacher educator involved with courses on language and literacy, with a specific interest in gender in language, I have observed the emergence of discourses on literacy in educational debate. I am concerned, however, that while there may be much professional interest in literacy issues, it does not follow that an innovative, enlightened, socially critical literacy will result. My concern is based on the relatively recent emergence of two contending discourses on literacy in educational debate, that of 'functional literacy' and that of 'critical literacy', which involve different understandings and emphases with regard to literacy and curriculum, as well as different political and social interests (Green and Bigum, 1993). In the briefest terms, 'functional literacy' can be articulated with 'basic skills', the 'bottom line' being to ensure that, in line with competency frameworks, all individuals have elements of survival literacy skills; whereas 'critical literacy' questions culture, power and social transformation.

Functional literacy could be viewed as a carefully thought out compromise where the individual is able to function as a productive unit in the economic machine, yet, significantly, is not enabled to question or critique the dynamics of society and their 'place' within it. Critical literacy, on the other hand, provides students with more than functional skills; it provides them with 'conceptual tools necessary to critique and engage society along with its inequities and injustices' (Kretovics, 1985: 51). In general educational debate, the discourses of 'functional' and 'critical' literacy contend with each other because of their ultimately differing constructions of education and society.

The practical result of the differing constructions of literacy in education and society, and of the shift in multinational, economic, and market forces can clearly be seen in the students who come into an enabling course. They have already been disenfranchised from powerful cultural texts and knowledges, and they have undoubtedly realised that being 'literate' has not led to increased social or economic power. How they had previously used language, while satisfactory for the varying 'roles' they have taken in life, does not equip them for membership in discourses which promise status, prestige, power or increased economic and social advancement. Their 'skills' in reading and writing, which served them quite well so long as they stayed in their subordinate positions, were insufficient if they wished to step out of the margins.

Through my involvement in teaching language and literacy in an enabling course, I have made a preliminary move to gather together the disparate discourses on literacy in education and society in an attempt to develop a socially critical agenda for exploring the relationship between literacy and education. 'More' literacy does not necessarily mean 'more' social power. However, particular forms of critical literacy may contribute to the construction of individuals who can contest and change the discourses which maintain their subordinate status. Marginalised adults coming into the academy would be better addressed, I would argue, not by a basic or functional literacy curriculum, but by a radical or critical literacy curriculum (Giroux, 1983).

## Critical Literacy

At present, being 'critical' is somewhat of a ubiquitous term, appearing in a range of documents and contexts. In these documents, it is suggested that students are to have fostered in them the skills of critical analysis and critical thinking. But, while there are a multiplicity of views on what 'critical' means, there is a general lack of interpretation or theorisation of a critical orientation towards society and culture, and the discursive practices which shape and form individuals. The DEET (1991) document, *Australia's Language*, suggests that effective literacy involves integrating listening, speaking and critical thinking with reading and writing (1991: 5). In *A Statement on English for Australian Schools (1994)*, it is noted that students are expected to indicate growing achievement in being critically aware of the way authors use language to construct meaning (1994: 42). However, in neither case is it made clear what would characterise a critical orientation towards literacy and language. While educators may be in agreement on the importance of promoting critical literacy, even a cursory survey of current educational theories reveals a range of different approaches to critical literacy.

As proposed by Freire (1990), critical literacy should achieve the right to authentic speech and conscientisation that occurs in the dialectical relationship between individuals and the world (Andreola, 1993). According to Gilbert (1993: 325), critical literacy explores how language practices are used in powerful institutions like the state, the law, the family, the church, education, demonstrating how these practices contribute to the maintenance of inequalities and injustices. Relating this to education, critical literacy attempts to address the issue of the systematic reproduction of inequality in educational institutions along the lines of class, ethnicity, age and gender (Baker and Luke, 1991). Critical literacy avoids valoring 'voice' or 'literature' and positions as 'public artefacts subject to critique, contestation and dispute' (Luke, Freebody and Gilbert, 1991). It is sceptical of both child-centred models of literacy which assume literacy is a natural phenomenon rather than a social phenomenon, as well as functional literacy which is an inadequate objective for a participatory democracy.

Critical educators and theorists have recognised that educational institutions and their curricula both enable and constrain students, and they have attempted to shift the balance towards enabling and inclusive curriculums. They are aware of the 'selective, interest-bound versions of culture' proposed by the common culture agenda (Agger, 1991), and they have suggested an alternative construction of culture, literary texts, what counts as literature, what counts as reading, in order to work against the grain of reproducing structural inequality, and the ideas of student 'individual achievement' which serves to mask its function of stratification (Luke, 1992: 22). At the same time, they argue that it is not sufficient to replace one 'authentic' text or voice with another (Baker and Luke, 1991), by simply learning new discourses and thus becoming a member of the group and being apprenticed into new ways with words through interaction with other texts, students and teachers. What is needed, suggests Shor (1989), is a 'situated' curriculum that engages the lives and language of students and which is both participatory and dialogic.

It is important to note the nexus between the type of curriculum offered to marginalised individuals and the related teaching practices. On the one hand, students need to gain knowledge and competence with literate practices that will facilitate access to and engagement with the texts, practices and genres that are considered powerful. On the other hand, a central classroom aim should be the empowerment of students as active subjects in the learning process, bearing in mind that this may bring one face-to-face with the issues of resistance, domination and conflict (Weiler, 1988). In coming into the academic community, the students are being introduced to discursive practices that are 'embedded in the particular world view of particular social groups' (Gee, 1990: 67). In acquiring a new identity, the students become complicit with a set of values and norms of particular social groups. This world view may conflict with the students' initial enculturation, with some feeling that they are being asked to 'abandon their less prestigious, less socially powerful world views in favor of the academic' (Bizzell, 1992: 171). Therefore, there is a need to develop a pedagogy that leads to a consideration of how they and others are influenced and constructed by complex social structures (Weiser, 1988), which can have the effect of silencing their voices (Clandinin, 1991; Gilligan, 1990; Grumet, 1988; Belenky et al, 1986).

Language is not a 'tool' for describing the 'real' world, any more than literacy can be 'achieved' and thus commodified. That they are social constructs (Freebody and Luke, 1990), in dialectical relationship with other social phenomena (Fairclough, 1989), learned in and through the 'bodily, sexed, living of social processes' (Threadgold, 1991: 66-67) has undermined the humanist or technicist notions of language and literacy. This

has opened up a space for a critical social literacy which can enhance an individual's 'powerful' participation in language, as it recognises that experiences, knowledge, values and information are constructed in various textual or discursive practices (Christie et al, 1991). How this is translated in the curriculum provides a further space in which the 'common culture' position (Giroux, 1987) can be contested by 'voices of students from subordinate groups' (Giroux, 1987: 176) who can develop new perceptions of textuality, writing and literacy (Green, 1993).

### **Academic Writing**

To introduce individuals to the academic community means inducting them into the genres and requirements of academic writing. This implies a discrete set of skills and abilities which, once mastered, will allow one to 'know' how to write for the varying academic discourses (Swales, 1991: Oliver, 1990). Learning to read and write academic prose is also a matter of learning conventions, such as whom to cite and when to do so, for these conventions are part of the cultural repertoire of the academy (Brodkey, 1987). These conventions include the use of argument as the preferred mode for discussion, the importance of the objective and impersonal, and the necessity of being thorough, and to reach a definitive, or objective, conclusion. 'A common denominator of each convention seems to be "to get it right", that is, establish cognitive authority' (Frey, 1990: 509).

There are serious problems, however, with conceiving of writing as a basic skill and with the pedagogies that flow from such a conception (Collins, 1993; Gilbert, 1991). From this perspective, student writing is a set of techniques, not a product of culture, and writing is taught as a set of rules about grammar, rhetoric and style (Burhans, 1983; Colvino et al, 1980). Because skills are viewed as basic procedures, there is the strong expectation that they may be mastered at various junctures in one's educational career, and in the places where such tools are 'properly crafted' (Rose, 1985: 347). It has been demonstrated by Aronowitz and Giroux (1985) that teaching basic skills 'underestimates and undermines both teachers and students' (Fox, 1990: 66), because writing is not just a skill with which one can present or analyse knowledge. Writing is essential to the 'very existence of certain kinds of knowledge' (Rose, 1985: 348), and to acts of knowing which are to be stimulated and grounded in an individual's own being, needs, circumstances and experiences (Freire and Macedo, 1987), and which cannot be considered independently of the social forces which have set up the conventions of appropriacy for that context (Fairclough, 1992). Writing can, therefore, serve in two ways; it offers the chance to manipulate words and ideas and also to deal with systems of social meanings that underlie the words that are written

Bartholomae (1988: 273) suggests that when student writers come into the academy they have to 'invent' the university, that is they have to learn to speak the language, and to take on the varying ways of knowing, evaluating, reporting and arguing that define the discourses of the academic community. If the differences between academic discourse and students' discourse is overstated, 'we send a message to those who are most uncomfortable, more anxious, about the status of their language in the university' (Fox, 1990: 71). An emphasis on the distinctiveness of academic discourse can also perpetuate the cultural division and conflicts that cause the discomfort of many students. Therefore, to teach writing only in terms of academic discourse could invalidate any history and experiences which might cause dissonance with academic discourse. This can have the effect of silencing the voices of students, and giving unquestioned pedagogical authority to discursive practices which concentrate on form at the expense of content, or on the academic at the expense of the personal.

### **Critical Journal Writing**

My reasons for placing an emphasis on journal writing and the individual expression of meaning are, in essence, twofold. One reason is concerned with my standpoint as a feminist educator, and my aim to expand the 'limits of discourse' (Luke and Gore, 1992) by directly addressing the forces that shape students' lives. The other reason for journal writing is to provide a non-judgmental forum for an exchange of ideas between the students and myself, and to subvert the 'structured hierarchical relationship' which can exist between a teacher and the students (Perry, 1987), and in which we can reveal the work of words in the lives of our students and in our own lives (McQuade, 1992: 11). Journal writing would appear to provide such a forum.

I wish, however, to place journal writing within the framework of academic writing as there are conflicting views regarding its efficacy and potential. Journals are a ubiquitous item in many educational institutions, though their use ranges from the intense to the abysmal. The 'personal' aspect of journal writing is considered by some writers as a disempowering vehicle for exploring an individual's lived experience, as it is resonant of the humanist/personalist discourse which does not take account of gendered subjectivity. It is also said to gloss the socially constructed nature of language practices and the discursive nature of subjectivity (Gilbert, 1991b). The prose in journals is often characterised as incompetent, ill-considered, immature, descriptive and personal or subjective (Griffiths, 1994), and of limited value in the development and construction of meaning in a discipline. Academic prose, conversely, is ideally organised, clear, assertive, analytical and objective. Whether or not student writers actually achieve this 'ideal' is a moot point.

These interpretations of journal writing and academic writing perpetuate the binaries between 'personal' and 'academic' writing, and inevitably continue to give power and authority to the discourse that is analytic and objective, leading to the 'invisibility and silencing of all those in the marginal, non-ascendant groups' (Davies, 1994: 20). What is needed, I believe, is a more complex understanding of writing in the academy. Writing should offer a way to cross the old divide between objectivity and subjectivity, to rework the notion of objectivity, and the discursive practices which valorise such concepts as, say, 'science' and 'objectivity' (Davies, 1994: 19), and to make visible the constitutive power of ways of talking and writing.

Journal writing can be 'political and critical' (Griffiths, 1994: 73), and it is a means by which individuals can critique hegemonic regimes and discourses which perpetuate marginalisation. When this critique is placed within a dialogic framework where the journal is used as a forum for critical discussion, reflection and analysis between teacher and student, it provides a powerful force for exploring the relationship between literacy and education, and for considering the centrality of language in the construction and maintenance of social power and control. Journal writing can facilitate the allow the complexities of the teacher/student classroom interaction to be realised in a way that neither silences nor grants authority to any specific participant. It can allow recognition of the 'value of students' own voices, subjective experiences of power and oppression, and the worth of their class and ethnic cultures' (Weiler, 1988: 149), and it offers teacher and students the opportunity to explore a 'discourse of possibility' (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1985).

Through most of my examination of journal writing, I have been influenced by the theories of Davies (1990, 1991, 1993, 1994), Davies and Harre, (1990), Clandinin (1991), Haug (1987), Lather (1988, 1991), Brodkey (1989), and Weedon (1987). The feminist poststructural theory of Weedon (1987) provides the most fertile ground for the consideration of students' writing as:

it is language in the form of conflicting discourses which constitute us as conscious thinking subject and enables us to give meaning to the world and act to transform it. (1987: 32)

### **Journal Writing by the Students**

I wish now to turn to the journal writing produced by four of the students from the bridging course, specifically from the Language and Literacy component of the course for which I was responsible. Most of the students in the course have not 'written' for years; that is, their writing has been confined to filling out forms, writing shopping lists, writing letters (personal more often than business correspondence), with the very occasional student who may have kept a diary, or written poetry or stories. They feel very uneasy at their ability to succeed in the tertiary environment, although all are strongly motivated to achieve. The four students whose journal extracts we will be looking at were chosen because they present a diverse range of experiences and personalities. The following is a brief introduction, and the names used are not their real names. The information was gleaned from application forms, and from an early introductory writing exercise in which they were asked to briefly explain what they hoped to gain from tertiary study.

**Ruth:** Early 30s. Hopes to be accepted into applied science or engineering. Interested in dressage and working with horses, an interest which is commensurate with her rural background. She is a single parent, separated from her husband, and has a 10 year old child. She writes: *Stupid is a word that springs to mind when reading*

*the program sheets for the different units, how can I begin to think in a university way? The only thinking I have done over the past decade was concerned with childcare, men, cattle, potatoes etc.*

**Tom:** Late 20s., Koori. Employed in a successful Koori tourist venture, which involves him in speaking to individuals and groups about his culture, and in visiting schools and talking to students. He has three children who live with his wife from whom he is separated. He commented: *It took three months to decide if this course will be good for me in the future. I had to think of transport also accommodation also finding and meeting knew friends. This is very knew to me.*

**Marion:** Since her marriage, has been at home with her three children and husband. She is in her late 30s. Has been very involved in her daughters' education, and in school matters. She writes: *Children always come first, so if they are sick I look after them, unless it would be an exam day and a 'supp' was not allowed. Getting behind in work and juggling family life could be interesting. If they can't be right, I could not go on with a course.*

**Anthony:** In his early 20s. Has been unemployed for some time, and is estranged from his family. Is severely hearing impaired, and is gay. Keenly interested in spirituality, Tarot cards, witchcraft, crystals and so on. He writes: *I decide too try this course so I would have a better chance of getting into Humanities next year. I want to do the course next year because I have something to prove since I am hearing impaired (Prove to myself). I beening wanting to return to study for years but it took my years to full except and be unashamed of my hearing aids which I got at a late age.*

#### ***Learning a New Literacy in a New Place***

Becoming literate in the academy involves learning to 'read the culture' (Ballard and Clanchy, 1988: 8), learning to come to terms with its values, rituals, behaviour and styles. All of the students hoped to become a part of the academic community, which is 'literally a community of readers who write and writers who read' (Brodkey, 1987: 3). In achieving this, however, the students are being apprenticed to dominant ways of using language in speech and print, and of making sense of experience. This apprenticeship (Gee, 1990) involves students in discourse practices which may conflict with their initial enculturation, or with any other experiences they may have had over time. Their differing experiences of literacy, therefore, may have a major impact on their construction as students initially, on their realisation of the relationship between the self and language, and on their understanding of the varying discourses of the academy and the discursive practices inherent in each.

Towards the end of the Language and Literacy course, in Week 9, students were asked to discuss what it was like learning a new literacy in a new place. While I will include some extracts of their writing on this question, I also want to bring in their first journal entries as a point of comparison, and as a demonstration of their abilities to use language that is powerful, individual, and contestatory. The writing in these journal entries also show the development of 'voice', and their differing subjectivities, as they negotiate meanings and experiences for themselves and discover how these are realised in language.

**Tom:** As a teacher in my culture I find it easy to deliver cultural programs to non-Aboriginal students by knowledge orally and visual because that's my heritage and I live it and feel it and have experienced it. Christie (1985) has commented that "The disadvantage of the Aboriginal World-view (and this is where Western education, if done properly, should be able to help) is that it renders them mostly powerless to resist the relentless onslaught of Western Civilization" (1985:13). I disagree because we are now in mainstream societies and only we can determine our futures as we may wish.

*(First Entry) I hoping that can survive this course. I think I doing all of this for myself maybe I am wrong we will have to wait and see. This is my third time I writing this paper and I feel pretty bad about my writing and spelling mistake also feeling pretty tied so I will finish off here until my next essay I suppose.*

Tom's First Entry is tentative, ungrammatical, hesitant, and it has spelling errors. He was not inarticulate to speak to, but obviously felt very constrained when he had to write for another person. He shows his anxiety regarding his ability to complete the course, as well as being critical of his abilities and skills. The inconclusive way he completes this entry is in contrast to the assertive manner in which, in Week 10, he

proclaims agency for an Aboriginal perspective on the future. In Week 10, his writing is assured and confident, and he discusses his role as an educator to non-aboriginal students. Of some significance is his position in regard to education and the Aboriginal world-view as promulgated by Christie. In disagreeing with this statement, he is writing his way to a new subject position, one which rejects culture as fixed and powerless, to a new way of ordering the cultural.

**Ruth:** Two major factors that have acted as inhibitors to the learning of new literacy in my life have been the subjective issue of gender, and the indoctrination of Catholicism. The power, in both these discourses, lies with the white, male majority. This dominant social group gives a passive cultural, and social relationship to the followers of religion, and the disenfranchised female section of society.....(R)real literacy opportunity cannot succeed when set up by a dominant social group, that, as Lorde argues, views women as an "educational audience to the colonising discourse...set up for us as exemplary". Therefore, the adoption of the traditional area of women's literacy, within the cultural framework is held up as a model to strive for. Any attempt at creating manoeuvrability in feminine discourse outside this sphere is severely inhibited by culture, social and power boundaries.....The empowerment available to an individual in learning new literacy is dependent on the cultural relationship she has, and position she occupies, within her community.

*(First Entry In writing this journal...I will be embarking on a journey through the past and into the present. I hope you won't get too bored Pat, or that this gets too heavy. (Observation from Week 2). (You'll get a laugh at this Pat). At first I thought the class would be feminist oriented class and felt hostile towards this. You have to understand that this was coming from a subordinate female background, imposed by men and upbringing. New experiences and ways of thinking and a little questioning after classes, and thinking, when reading for the first assignment turn my mind to the feminist issue. I am enjoying starting to explore that 'dirty' word 'feminism' and how it relates to me. It's challenging to my pre- conceptions of a self that is womanhood. It could be a very powerful tool in writing to be able to position an audience in a certain way. It would make interesting research - to position and thus gain reaction and action. The power of language.*

Ruth's First Entry shows the lack of importance she gives to her life, as she 'hopes' the reader will not get 'too bored', reading of her experiences and thoughts. In Week 2, she indicates the changing position she is taking to her studies, to herself, to reading, and to her writing. She feels assured enough to write of her hostility towards the class, but still retains some degree of doubt regarding positioning an audience in writing, which 'could' be a powerful tool. Her use of modality here means that she is still tentative regarding the power of language to position an audience, but she is 'exploring and 'challenging'. In Week 10, her writing is forceful and definite, as she ties gender with Catholicism because she sees the power of these discourses belonging with the white, male majority. In locating the power of these discourses, she is also recognising the discursive practices which sustain and maintain that ascendancy, and the way that power is made problematic for those assigned to the female gender. Her subjectivity made possible through these discourses both creates an interpretive lens through which to see the social world (Davies, 1994), and allows her to disrupt these dominant discourses and to make possible a life which can be lived differently.

**Anthony:** The cultural background of the English Educational system, I found, inhibited me to the extent that all subjects were taught in a heterosexual point of view. As an active homosexual at the time, I found that I could not feel involved in the work for all the characters in the books we read were 'straight', and the discussion of relationships and sex education was taught on the presumption that we would be heterosexual.

*(Entry in Week 6) What pisses me off! I picked up a book "Dictionary of Sociology" by Abercrombie, 2nd Ed 1988, and came across a definition of witchcraft; "In anthropology, this is defined as the belief that members of a community employ supernatural means to harm others in ways which are socially disapproved". I am hoping to get into wiccan (witches) religion and rituals over the summer holidays and I already know that the use of witchcraft is to be in harmony with nature to bring about healing. I find it disturbing that a book that outlines academic terms should define it in such a narrow minded way. I thought sociology was to help people understand different religions and cultures and dispense with outworn and outdated lies.*

I have chosen these samples from Anthony's journal as they are significant for particular reasons. In the first response, which relates to gaining a new literacy in a new place, he was writing of his experiences at secondary school, and the way in which he felt colonised by the dominant heterosexual discourse of the curriculum. In this extract, Anthony is writing both from the unmarked position of (male) individual, and from the marked position of homosexual, which renders him powerless and other to hegemonic masculinity (Davies, 1994). At the same time he has made visible to himself the ways in which gender is constructed and sustained, within particular power relations, in certain contexts, considering what effects this may have had on him. Journal Entry Week 6 is significant because in it Anthony is contesting a definition in an 'academic' text book. Based on his personal experiences, and on his reading, he is rejecting the 'legitimized' definition, and interrogating a discourse which appears to him to be narrow and exclusionary.

**Marion:** The biggest challenge to learning a new literacy has been returning to study as a mature age student..... One conflict I am faced with is language and sexism. Personally, I have never been challenged and now I am. I can comprehend how women have been viewed in the past and how it certainly is a male-dominated world.

*(First Entry) I feel happy using 'man' as a generic term for human beings. I like being feminine but would not call myself a feminist. Maybe this word is used wrongly but to my mind conjures up the idea of pushing controversial and current issues pertaining to women. I like 'Mrs', I do not like 'Ms'. I guess I like tradition.. Unless a radical change takes place in my life I am very happy to use the title 'Mrs' and carry the traditional roles of wife and mother -going back to 3 years study full time hardly falls into this category though.*

In her First Entry, Marion constitutes herself in the current phallogentric gender order which perpetuates the male/female dichotomy. But, while she is asserting her desire to be considered 'feminine', but certainly not 'feminist', she is beginning to recognise the contradictions that such categorisation entails. In speaking of her 'traditional role' as a wife and mother, she is, as Davies (1994) puts it, 'inevitably tied up in patterns of talk and ways of being that constitute us as male or female' (1994: 2). At the same time, she is beginning to develop an awareness of the limitations and entrapments entailed in categorisation, when she acknowledges that going back to full time study hardly fits in with the 'traditional' wife and mother role. Her other journal entry continues the struggle she is still facing with the discourses of gender and education, and the tensions and possibilities of each.

The nature of what it is to be a man or a woman is one of the key sites of discursive struggle for the individual. At the centre of the struggle is the 'common sense assumption' (Weedon, 1987: 98) that there is a natural way for women and men to be. Both Anthony and Marion, in different ways and for different reasons, were questioning gender definitions, boundaries and cultural expectations. They were contesting that meaning is fixed for all time and were in the process of producing 'new versions of meaning from the conflicts and contradictions between existing discourses' (Weedon, 1987: 106).

At the same time, considering Marion's initial statement that her children and family must come first, and her early realisation that there may be conflict with the discourses of motherhood and of education, her positioning within these varying discourses may be contradictory, dissonant and unsettling. Walkerdine (1985) has written 'as new identifications are created, so too is the potential for loss, annihilation and disavowal' (1985: 225). We need, therefore, to be well aware of the potential upheaval which our discursive practices may cause to the students' lives. Pedagogy, even feminist pedagogy, does not easily translate into an education that includes women if we do not address the threat to women's survival and livelihood that a critique of patriarchy, in its varied manifestations, confronts. (Lewis, 1990).

### **'Critical' Dialogue in Journal Writing**

Most of these writers in their journal entries referred to other texts to support what they were writing; that is, they used the authority of other writers to illustrate and substantiate points they were trying to make, as well as to disagree with certain points the writers were making. They have successfully combined the 'personal' and the 'academic' in a way that blurs the boundaries between these two discourses, enabling them to write themselves

into a subject position that is neither student only, nor woman/aboriginal/homosexual only, but is appropriately a mixture of differing, and at times, conflicting subjectivities. In this way, they are constructing for themselves a way of writing that produces a new subject position in language, one that continues to create a self, rather than one which expresses a self that already exists.

The students obviously wanted to learn, and I felt it was important that they saw the journal as a valuable learning activity, as an integral part of the course, and not simply the place where they wrote of personal struggles and issues, important though these are. I also shared the concern of Caywood and Overing (1987) for equity in the classroom. Their statement that 'a writing course has the potential to be the single, most important learning experience for students if it provides them with the confidence in their own ideas and belief in their authority' (1987: xv), I found relevant and significant.

I also hoped that would see their journals, not as a means of describing 'naturalistic realism; for life is not lived realistically, in a linear manner' (Denzin, 1992: 27), but as a means in which they could write of their experiences and critique the discursive practices which create and maintain their subordinate status. I considered that my task was to explore educational possibilities and discursive practices which could impact on what students actually do in the classroom, as well as educating them to take risks, to critically appropriate forms of knowledge that exist outside of their immediate experience, and to envisage versions of a world which is 'not yet' in order to be able to alter the grounds upon which life is lived (Simon, 1987). My goal was to make students themselves theorists of their own lives by analysing and interrogating their own experiences (Weiler, 1991).

As an introduction to journal writing, the students were told that the journal should be a place in which one asks questions and moves towards answers; it was to provide a safe place in which to grapple with some of the issues to be dealt with during the Language and Literacy course. Literacy means reading as well as writing, and in order to give the students a further 'authentic' reason to write, I considered I should respond to what they had written, to engage in a 'literacy dialogue' (Brodkey, 1989: 52).

### **Response to Writing**

I wish here to clarify what I mean by response, as it is a crucial aspect of the journal writing undertaken by the students. By 'response', I do not mean a statement which 'functions as the material expression of the student-reader inner-self and (that) provides the means by which the student is nurtured/scrutinised, cherished/corrected and guided/reconstructed through a constant process of revelation and examination. (Patterson, 1993: 79). In this sense, 'response' can be both a reflection of a 'depth of inner feelings' (Patterson, 1993: 79), as well as a pedagogy which can be employed 'in the interests of a comprehensive system for surveillance and correction' (Patterson, 1993: 80)

My use of response was influenced by Jana Staton (1987) who suggests that responding to persons in dialogue journals can bring about 'new understanding, new ideas, new possibilities' (1987: 54). In a dialogue, the student and teacher are equal participants, with the right to comment on each other's entry, and with the added freedom of attention not having necessarily being paid to the conventions of written language. While I acknowledge the premise that dialogue journals are not inherently meaningful or important, but become so through the social interaction in which they are embedded (Staton, 1987), I also wished to encourage students to explore their lived experiences and gradually come to a realisation of how their lives had been shaped by ideological and material forces. This would also enable them to see the constitutive force of the images and language through which 'real worlds' are constituted, as well as the 'power of all that is left unsaid' (Davies, 1994: 122).

It may be appropriate at this point to include one of the student's comments on journal writing, as it has relevance to the issue of response that is being discussed. This entry in the latter part of the course came from a woman student in her early 50s, and she had been discussing Fairclough's book *Language and Power*, which she had "enjoyed reading and thinking about, believing that "social" conditions do determine properties of discourse." She writes, "...I have slowly grown to enjoy and feel more comfortable about (journal writing), being able to picture you reading my thoughts, without having to be critical of my grammar and spelling - perhaps the same as if I was sitting across a table talking to you face to face. This has been an important part

*of my feeling comfortable with my journal writing - being an example of 'social' conditions as Fairclough mentions in his book.*" In this writing, she is opening up the possibilities and diversity of experience of being a person as she finds herself positioned now one way and now another, in one context or another, constituted through one discourse or another (Davies, 1994), and discovering the multi-faceted connections and subjectivity made possible through the discourse to which she has access. She is also engaging in a dialogue in which meaning is being shared with the teacher, based on shared reading, interactive writing, and the gradual realisation of the discursive practices that are mutually constitutive elements of the life process (Davies, 1994).

Consequently, the way I use response was more as a process of 'active involvement' (Nielsen, 1989: 21) or 'intervention' in which I commented on what students had written, encouraged them to question the discursive practices which had positioned them as marginalised individuals, explore their differing subjectivities, and examine the relationship between language and power. Within those parameters, I responded to what they had written, and we exchanged a good deal of information about our lives and concerns. The journal writing provided an ongoing dialogue in a format that was personal, meaningful, and critical.

While it was encouraging for me to feel that the students were open in their responses, and were beginning to question, I also realised that I must be aware of any preconceived notion of a 'resister', 'someone so saturated with false consciousness that she could not see the "light" being offered here in our classrooms' (Lather, 1992: 22). Even though I shared with them my thoughts, ideas and reflections of their journal entries, together with what was written in my own journal, where appropriate, I was aware that their journal writing may have been constrained by the thought of their words being scrutinised, and this may raise 'issues of self-protection and self-censorship which could inhibit the reflective enterprise' (Convery, 1993: 137). Equally, I have in mind the warning of Giroux and Simon (1989), who query the ethics of inviting students to bring the private areas of their lives into the official discourse of education, suggesting that 'encouraging student voice (in journals) can become a form of voyeurism or a way to satisfy a form of ego expansionism constituted on the pleasures of understanding those who appear as 'other' to us' (1989: 247)

I acknowledge this warning, and constantly reassessed my own positioning in the teacher/student nexus throughout the course. However, the gradual and growing ability of the students to 'find in each moment of contradiction a clearer comprehension of their own fractured and fragmented female subjectivity' (Haug, 1987) was becoming more explicit in their writing. They were also clearly demonstrating their recognition of the centrality of language in the construction and maintenance of social power and control, and their ability to contest the reproduction of gender identity in language.

### ***Language, Power and 'Voice'***

The following extracts are from the journals of two other students in the course, whose writing has not been included to this point. Both Margaret and Dianne have spent the past few years at home with their children, and neither have been 'near' education for many years. Margaret is in her late 40s, and Dianne in her late 30s.

**Margaret:** Looking back through my journal, I remember the way in which I used language and I notice its changes. There were points in my journal when I wrote about myself as 'just a mother'. Now this shows a certain type of thought that had been generated by society through the use of language. Language has been used to downgrade the roles that women have as mothers and home-makers and that is another way in which we see the use of language and the power it has.

**Dianne:** Control of one's life is important, without it women are silent. Low self esteem, self-worth and lack of goal achieving is common-place for most women in our culture due to the control used linguistically against them. Women need to create new language to suit their own needs. Consider a major catastrophe that has occurred in society in recent times, that has empowered the people involved with a recognised and respected voice, e.g. homosexual males found a voice - the HIV virus would not be kept silent. Does it take another catastrophe for women to find a voice?

In these two extracts, the writers speak of two factors crucial to a consideration of language and literacy in the discourse of education, and in society: that of language and power; and that of 'voice'. These factors are central to a consideration of the relationship between literacy and social structure and between curriculum and critical pedagogy because they address the complex roles of language and literacy in society, and in the discourse

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of education. What is at issue is the need to challenge the inevitable unequal distribution of power and knowing in the classroom (Lather, 1991), in which some students are comfortable and confident, and some are silent. Students who do not have access to ways of knowing, to an understanding of the relationship between language and power, or who are denied the validity of their own lived experiences from which to make meaning, are silenced and can thus 'become objects of regulation' (Walkerdine, 1990: 31).

In language we make meaning, but these meanings are always multiple in that they differ not only across groups, individuals and situations, but within them as well. Meaning therefore is not internally consistent, but inherently unstable. The journal entries indicate a multiplicity of meanings, constructed by the writers and reconstructed by the readers. In this, they are valuable indicators of the perspectives the writers have taken as they describe and name a world, and thus shape the reality in which they live and limit the possibilities that they can see and hear. It is in order to stretch the boundaries of these possibilities that journal writing can be seen to have value and significance.

### **Construction of Discourse**

I have argued throughout that a powerful cultural critique can be provided through journal writing, that boundaries may be broken and existing genres and discourses disrupted, thereby opening up the possibilities for change and transformation. I have also suggested that it is important to note the nexus between the type of curriculum offered to the marginalised and the related teaching practices. Equally, when considering the implications for a theory of discourse in language and literacy education, it is important to note that an individual's discursive history is not a unitary, coherent phenomenon, but is replete with contradictions, in which we may be constructed as both belonging and as 'other'. Students, therefore, need to realise that their identities are socially constructed in and through discursive practices, and that they are not necessarily independent agents of action and meaning. This realisation should generate the knowledge that the individual self is not unified, but is made up of multiple subject positions (Davies, 1991; Davies and Harre, 1990; Lather, 1991), and is a creation of language and ideology. This should allow a critique of the discourses which have shaped their identity and constrained and enabled their individual thought and action (Davies, 1989), and which can present subjects as either privileged or underprivileged. It can also allow their subjectivity to be reconstructed through 'the process of reflective practice' (Alcoff, 1988: 425).

As with any other social context, the classroom is the site of discursive difference, where students actively seek access to new discourses through the control of specific textual practices. One of the frequent comments made by students when they first encounter the language and literacy demands of specific disciplines in the academy is "Why do we have to write that way?". Some students will be mollified by the response which discusses how each discipline has its own ways of shaping meaning, and in order to become part of that particular discourse community, it is necessary to employ the skills and discursive practices and goals of that community (Swales, 1990). Other students interpret this rather cynically as 'writing the way the lecturer wants'. While some are challenged by the demands of the discipline and are willing and eager to engage with the discursive practices in which meaning is shaped, this does not imply that such knowledge 'automatically ensures equality and social success or erases racism or minority disenfranchisement' (Gee, 1990: 67). Nor does it address the alienation felt by students, who, in the process of encountering these new discourses and repositioning themselves as new subjects within new communities, find that conflict arises with the diverse ways of being and knowing that form their existing discursive history.

Rather than seeing this as problematic, Gee (1990: 48) suggests that students who are 'marginal' to a discourse valorised within education are often more able to reflect upon the 'workings' of these discourses because they consciously perceive them as different from their own. Discursive difference in the classroom, therefore, can be viewed as a rich resource that can assist students to succeed within the educational environment. In the process of any acquisition, the specificities of the discourse become apparent to the student. These distinguish the new discourse from other discourses within the academic community, and the discursive history of the individual. The individual student acquiring the new discourse is always conscious of difference between new and existing discourses. In this regard, students need to learn that the language they use will vary in different disciplines and in different contexts, and that they can 'learn to transform materials, structures and situations that seem fixed or

inevitable, and that in doing so they can move from the margins of the university to establish a place for themselves on the inside' (Bartholomae and Petkovsky, 1986: 41)

### **The Construction of 'Voice'**

I now look at the construction of 'voice' because in poststructural terms, the category of voice can only be constituted in differences, and it is in, and through, these multiple layers of meanings that students are positioned and position themselves in order to the subject rather than merely the object of history (Giroux, 1990). Voice, therefore, is not simply the expression of private experience, but is an amalgam of personal meanings and public meanings which dialogue, interpret, contradict and conflict with each other, and which is positioned in terms of underlying discursive frameworks (Giroux, 1992). Students do not have a singular voice (Giroux, 1990); rather their voices are constituted in multiple, complex and often contradictory discourses.

The discourse on student voice sees the student as 'empowered' when the teacher 'helps' students to express their subjugated knowledges (Shor and Freire, 1987). The literature on critical pedagogy also recognises the possibility that students will be capable of identifying a multiplicity of authentic voices in themselves. By speaking in their 'authentic' voices, students are seen to make themselves visible, with such self-definition presumably giving students an identity and political position from which to act as agents of social change (Simon, 1987).

The concept of 'authentic' voice does not, however, confront the ways in which any individual student's voice is always a teeth gritting and often contradictory intersection of voices constituted by gender, race, class, ability, ethnicity, sexual orientation or ideology' (Ellsworth, 1989: 312). It is impossible, Ellsworth suggests, to speak from all voices at once, or even from any one, with the 'traces of others being present and interruptive' (1989: 312). While pluralizing the concept of 'student voice' to 'student voices' implies correction through addition, it 'loses sight of the contradictory and partial nature of all voices' (Ellsworth, 1989: 313). More consideration needs to be given to how the voices of, for example, students of colour, disabled students, white women, 'white men against masculinist culture, and fat students will necessarily be constructed in opposition to the teacher/institution when they try to change the power imbalances they inhabit in their daily lives, including their lives in school' (Ellsworth, 1989: 310).

The variety and complexity of 'voice' is a significant characteristic of students who are part of a bridging program. Chiefly this comes about through the mechanism by which they gain entry to such programs. In institutional terms, they are derived from certain 'target' groups in government writing on social justice. The 'target' groups cover those of lower socio-economic status, people from isolated or rural areas, individuals who are physically disadvantaged, people from a non-English speaking background, Koories, and women who wish to begin study in non-traditional disciplines. From an equity standpoint, students enter the bridging course as marginalised individuals. However, this can have the effect of being a totalising discourse, as 'no-one is oppressed in all situations' (Janks and Ivanic, 1992: 307). Indeed, we all can claim to stand as oppressed and oppressor in relation to someone else and in relation to differing contexts. To term a group disadvantaged, or to refer to them as marginalised individuals, does not cover with the ways they are marginalised, or that they may be disadvantaged only in certain contexts and in particular situations. Similarly, their 'voices' are not always, and at all times, marginalised or oppressed. They may also define themselves outside of the categories of disadvantage which attempt to subsume their 'voices' within the paternalistic rhetoric that marginalises them so neatly.

A consideration of students in an enabling course brings out the recognition that multiplicity of knowledges are present in the classroom, and that these knowledges are contradictory, partial and irreducible. Within the dynamics of the classroom, in their journals, and through discussions, there was a constant shifting and dispersal as contradictory contexts of knowing were explored and revealed. This became both empowering and threatening as students struggled to find their voices in the contexts of learning and knowing. But, to state that the classroom is a site of multiple perspectives or ways of knowing is not to diminish the oppression experienced by the group in a multiplicity of contexts. Rather, the oppression, ways of knowing, and voice, must be understood, struggled against, and defined (Ellsworth, 1989).

'Voice', therefore, can also mean questioning what is not understood, even undermining the idea that 'those of us with power and wisdom' are models for students to imitate (Buley-Neissner, 1990). Developing a 'self-conscious' voice enables students to participate in the kinds of dialogue essential to progressive education - dialogue that places students in active, critical relationships to teacher, texts, institutions, history culture. Essentially, having a voice enables an individual to 'resist being silenced, to resist being made anonymous' (Buley-Neissner, 1990:54).

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, I have argued that the journal can be used as a site for critical literacy, opening up the possibilities for change and transformation, and empowering students to use their voices to explore the connection between consciousness, social meanings, power and language, and to see their voices respected and legitimized (Weiler, 1988). The journal can be used to 'learn from the stories of others...and improve one's own vision and practices' (Griffiths, 1994: 80); and it can also be used to interrogate the many ways in which individuals are marginalised through discursive practices. Students may use the journal to reflect, write and critique, to question discursive practices, to reshape subjectivity, and to explore the possibility of bridging the gap between 'academic' and 'personal' writing through critical journal writing.

The notion of bridging the gap between 'academic' and 'personal' writing through critical journal writing is central to the exploration of literacy and writing pedagogy, in which feminist poststructuralist initiatives are used to frame a socially critical agenda for engaging the relationship between literacy and education. In the classroom, teaching bodies of knowledges, or the discursive practices employed, can result in potentially totalising discourses. This can also be the situation in classrooms where teachers are positioned differently in terms of their gender, race, ethnicity and class, or where students themselves are colonised by the 'facts' being taught. Discourses which can be rewritten in ways that are non-totalising, or which have to be disrupted or contested can, I believe, be accomplished through critical journal writing. Using the journal this way is a means of empowering students who are not satisfied with what 'is', and allows them to consider what 'may be'.

All our individual ways of describing and naming the world shape the realities in which we live and limit the possibilities that we can see and hear. Indeed, in writing of the 'personal', we can become 'plurivocal', thereby rejecting the old notion of the autonomous individual. Because we are constituted in socio-cultural conditions, and are both constituted by and constitutive of language (Luke, 1992), using the 'personal' allows us to occupy a culturally and politically contestable space, in which we can contest and change discursive practices, form new categories, and allow different discourses to emerge.

As a profession, teaching demands of its practitioners an ability to live with a great deal of ambiguity and uncertainty. In this regard, we are not different from our students who, when questioning discourses once perceived as 'natural', may find that they are confused and alienated. I questioned myself constantly through the course in terms of the discursive practices I was using and the subsequent ramifications for the students. I was also aware of the writings of Gore (1993) who injects a note of caution:

In our attempts to empower others we need to acknowledge that our agency has limits, that we might 'get it wrong', in assuming we know what would be empowering for others, and that no matter what our aims or how we go about 'empowering', our efforts will be partial and inconsistent (1993: 63).

Political change can be exhilarating; it can also be traumatic. I was aware during the course of the somewhat contradictory notion of a person in an authoritative position, e.g. a teacher, seeking to help others exercise power, to empower themselves. The responsibility one faces in providing pedagogical practices which seek to empower students may be equalled only by the arrogance which assumes we know what empowerment means for individuals, and that their lives will be 'enriched' because of their empowerment.

The equity groups targeted by DEET as disadvantaged, and therefore eligible for bridging or enabling courses, consist of individuals assumed to be in need of literacy skills in order to achieve success and gain a degree at a University. What is gradually emerging is that their literacy skills - gained in a variety of contexts - can be

equal to, if not better than, many students at tertiary institutions who have gained entrance to University through 'normal' means. Their literacy has been gained in a variety of situations, work, home, courses, leisure activities, and it can have a multiplicity of dimensions that are inevitably lacking in a young school leaver. They have already used literacy for a variety of purposes, for differing audiences, and in a variety of contexts. But literacy is not always liberating, as literacy per se will not enslave or empower. Rather, the kinds of outcomes are seen to be dependent to some extent upon the pedagogical practices with which they are associated (Freire, 1990; Lankshear and Lawler, 1989; Luke, 1992). Moreover, education and literacy cannot be used interchangeably. Some individuals are highly literate, but not educated in the traditional sense of the word.

The myths and stereotypes that create images of specific groups...have no relevance when we stop counting and start observing and working with people" (Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines, 1988: 202).

Poststructural theory addresses the possibility of critique and change in discursive practices because it sees language and discourse as complicit in the representation of self and others. Rather than being an arbitrary or neutral means of expression or thought, language is a social construction, with the result being that writers of texts cannot avoid the social and political factors which have formed their subjectivities and which will appear in their writing. To seek, therefore, to instruct students only in the techniques and skills of academic discourse is to artificially and arbitrarily impose a curriculum which takes no account of their lives and histories and which can further devalue their experiences and knowledge. Students who are enabled to articulate their experiences, their lives, their knowledges can also be enabled to question and critique the discourses which maintain their marginalisation. This realisation of the relationship between the self and language will also allow them to better understand the varying discourses of the academy and the varying discursive practices inherent in each.

Writing pedagogy in a tertiary context need not perpetuate and reproduce dominant discourses, but may, if framed within a feminist poststructuralist theoretical base, introduce individuals to language as a meaning potential in which individuals and the social are constructed and reproduced. It can allow individuals to position themselves within the discourse of education so that they learn to resist discursive practices that 'diminish human subjectivity', opening up to them the 'possibility of imagining (themselves) as agents of their own lives' (Brodkey, 1992: 312).

At a time when language and literacy are being framed in technicist terms, and are bounded by competencies, there is the possibility that writing in classrooms may become narrow and defined by conforming discourses. It seems imperative, therefore, that the writing which is done in journals is not trivialised and overlooked because of its assumed humanist framework. Instead, the journal can be used to interrogate the many ways in which individuals are marginalised through discursive practices. This use of the journal moves on from the journal as a tool of reflection to a tool for critique and contestation.

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## **BRINGING ACADEMIC DISCOURSE TO THE DISCIPLINES: A FACULTY-BASED APPROACH**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper begins from the position that learning derives its value from the socio-cultural environment in which it is presented (Mangubhai, 1993). Griffith University is a devolved political structure which allows for a great deal of autonomy and innovation within its faculties and campuses. The Academic Support Unit in the Faculty of Commerce and Administration was conceived in response to an equity initiative in meeting the learning needs of specific student groups - ESL/EFL, Murri and Torres Strait Islander Students and Students with Disabilities.

With two full-time staff, the unit has developed an ESP adjunct model (Snow & Brinton, 1988) which combines content courses in the Foundation Year program with integrated tuition in language and study skills (academic discourse) using the course material. The Academic Support Unit services 7 schools as well as the post-graduate centre and at any one week in the academic year has between 130-150 students engaged in structured and semi-structured study groups. At the end of October this year, the service had also provided greater than 1900 individual student consultations. It is the belief of the staff of the centre that academic literacy is not a unitary competence, but is contingent upon learning context, learning process and background knowledge and skills. We believe this approach places academic discourse squarely within the disciplines to which it relates, in a pragmatic, innovative and effective response to learner needs.

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### **BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE**

Study-skills counsellors have been prolific in their representation of the experiences of NESB students. (Ballard, 1987, 1989; Bradley & Bradley, 1984; Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Burke, 1986; Samuelowicz, 1987; and Burns, 1994) These studies of psycho-social adjustment attempt to place and position the NESB student within the general rubric of tertiary education, and then to report upon ways in which the experience of the student may be enhanced. This literature identifies difficulties in reading and writing skills, and the adjustment to educational traditions demanding independent learning, and the rhetorical organisation of academic text and ideas in English. (Ballard & Clanchy, 1984, 1991; Bradley & Bradley, 1984) Work undertaken in this area also indicates some specific difficulties in vocabulary development, reflected in reading and writing strategies at more advanced levels of study and in word recognition. (Saville-Troike, 1984; Santos, 1988) To compound language difficulties, problems in understanding the styles and conventions of academic writing are also well documented. (Ostler, 1980)

The major problems researchers identify as affecting academic performance are:

- the nature of the academic system through which students come;
- the availability of English language teaching in their own home country;
- the degree of adjustment of the students to the requirements of study in Australia, in terms of conceptions of knowledge, standards, expectations and learning approaches needed to attain the goals and aims of the host education system; and
- English proficiency. (Burns, 1994)

The psychology of this approach is problem-centred: it invites the administrators of our institutions to combine all NESB students within a common, stable and continuous frame of reference and meaning, imposing an imaginary coherence on very different groups of people. This approach unfairly places responsibility for learning in the lap of the student, where more immediate causes of poor performance may be placed in aspects of course design, delivery, presentation and assessment.

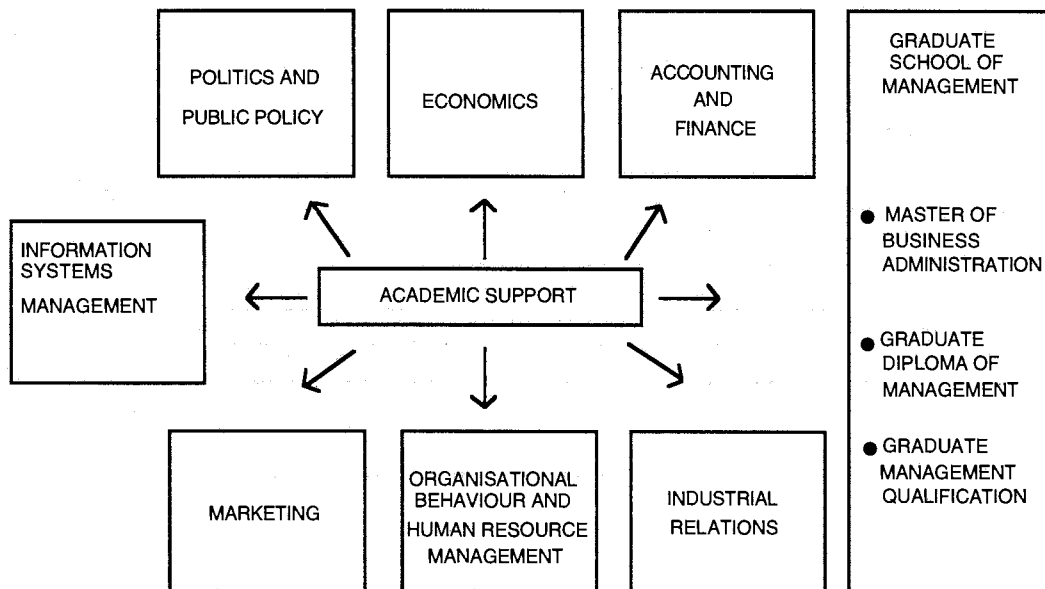
The Academic Support Unit in the Faculty of Commerce and Administration (CAD) begins from the position that learning is socially constructed, and the learning needs of NESB students ought to be differentiated and addressed as a matter of learning style within CAD units of study. The aim of this approach is to challenge the current regime of representation which views NESB students as dialogic opposites to local students. Underlying the CAD approach is the work of Mangubhai (1993) who contends that Academic Literacy is not a unitary competence, but is contingent upon the learning process, learning context and background knowledge and skills. Ballard (1987), Samuelowicz (1987) and Burns (1994) lobby for more comprehensive schemes of learning support for NESB students. By immersing learners firmly within the learning context, the CAD response seeks to develop access to deeper and more relational modes of learning, to develop basics in order to enable higher order learning to proceed and to scaffold assessment so that it better informs the learning process.

### STRUCTURE AND POSITIONING

Griffith University is a devolved political structure, embracing four campuses across Brisbane and the Gold Coast. The Faculty of Commerce and Administration is one of eight faculties at the Nathan Campus, and houses seven individual schools, plus its Graduate school of Management. The faculty services a student population of around 1800, each of whom is a potential user of the Academic Support Service. Since its inception the service has networked extensively with the International Office, the Disabilities Co-ordinator and the Co-ordinator of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support unit (GUMURRI centre).

### CAD/GSM STRUCTURE

CAD/GSM Academic Support services seven schools as well as the GSM.



### THE SERVICE

The service commenced operation in the last week of February 1994, owing its existence to an equity initiative arising from within the faculty's own service planning. Funds were commissioned by each school and set aside for the provision of a support service primarily to target ESL/EFL students, and Murri or Torres Strait Island students. The scope of the service soon grew to include students with disabilities and groups of mature-aged students undertaking a return to study.

## AIMS OF THE SERVICE

The service developed a range of units and programs which aimed to:

- place academic discourse in the context of specific disciplines;
- develop students' understanding of their learning process;
- develop analytical skills as part of academic culture;
- develop writing and language skills to improve linguistic competence.

The aims identified by the Support Service gave rise to the models and approaches we adapted as part of a comprehensive faculty service. In total, the service employed four separate approaches in meeting the needs of our client groups, each of which is detailed in the services menu and discussion below.

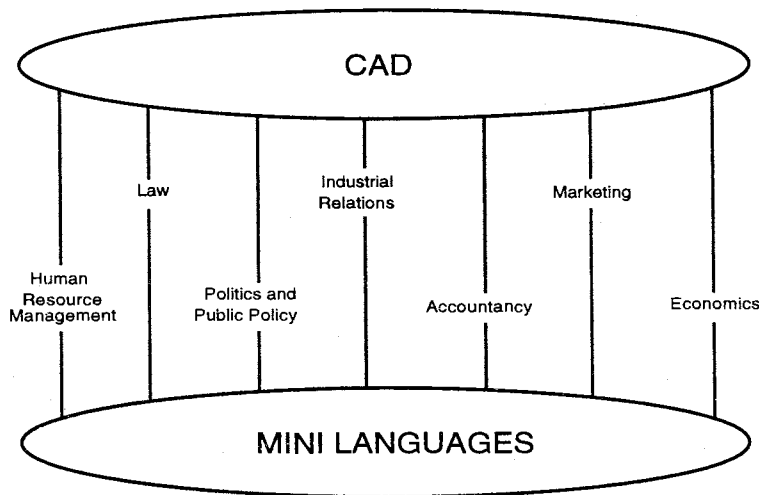
## SERVICE MENU

Faculty	Target Group	Course	Services Offered
CAD	1st Year student (EFL/ESL ATSSIS)	Foundations Program (40 credit points)	Tutors in core units <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Politics</li> <li>• Law</li> <li>• Industrial Relations</li> <li>• HRM</li> </ul> (6 tutorials per week)
	Continuing Students	Marketing Accounting Economics	Voluntary Workshops (each @ 2hrs per week)
		Across 7 Schools	Individual Consultations and Drop-in
GSM	MBA students and Grad. Dip Students	All	Individual Consultations 5 hours of weekly workshops

## AN ADJUNCT MODEL OF E.S.P : APPROACH 1

The first approach identified relates to first year students and involves the development of an Adjunct model of English for Special (Academic) Purposes (Snow & Brinton, 1988) which draws upon task-based learning as the key to development of conceptual, linguistic and academic discourse competencies. As tutors in the Foundations Course we experience four (4) hours per week contact with target group students in each discipline - other schools outside the Foundations program (Marketing, Economics, Accounting) prefer that the service offers a complementary 2 hour workshop, on a voluntary principle of attendance, to support course specific learning offered in school-based tutorials. The attendance at these voluntary workshops was encouraging, with 85% of all target group students attending the entire voluntary program. Our approach to learning starts from the simple premise that learning occurs when students are placed in the position in which they have to use any and all resources available to them in order to achieve meaningful discourse-specific communication. Our approach to teaching involves creating a framework in which to strip, conceptualise and structure information to facilitate this learning. To this end, each CAD unit of study provides a separate conceptual system encoded by language - its own systemic network. The Academic Support Service operates as an adjunct to the more traditional aspects and schools of the faculty. As such, it is the role of Academic Support Services to integrate academic discourse into the many mini-languages of the faculty.

**SYSTEMIC NETWORK: CONCEPTUAL SYSTEMS OF A SUBJECT ENCODED BY LANGUAGE**

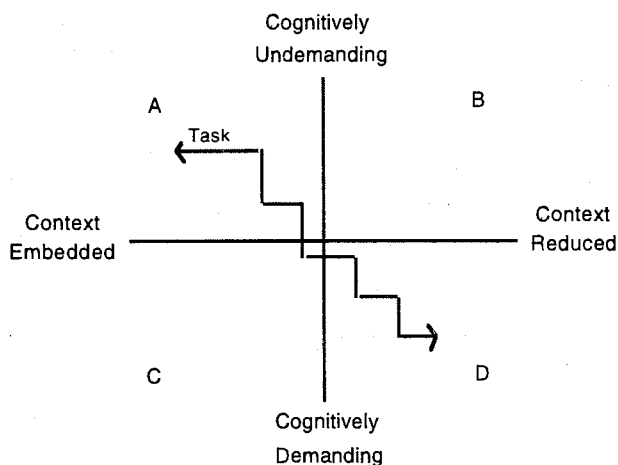


\* Systemic networks with linguistic, conceptual, physical aspects.

- Linguistics - Language which realises concepts
- Conceptual - Subject content
- Physical - External manifestation - essays/reports/case-studies etc.

(Wilson, 1986)

Cummins' (1986) distinction between basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) is a useful heuristic in framing the distinction between deeper (relational) and surface (reproductive) learning. Academic proficiency must be conceptualised along two continua - one relates to the range of contextual support available for learning, and the other relates to the matter of which learning tasks are either automatised or require a greater level of cognitive engagement. Given this scenario, it becomes possible to structure a learning program so that it engages the learner in a series of tasks which begins from a context embedded and cognitively undemanding level and moves towards more context reduced and cognitively demanding learning tasks.



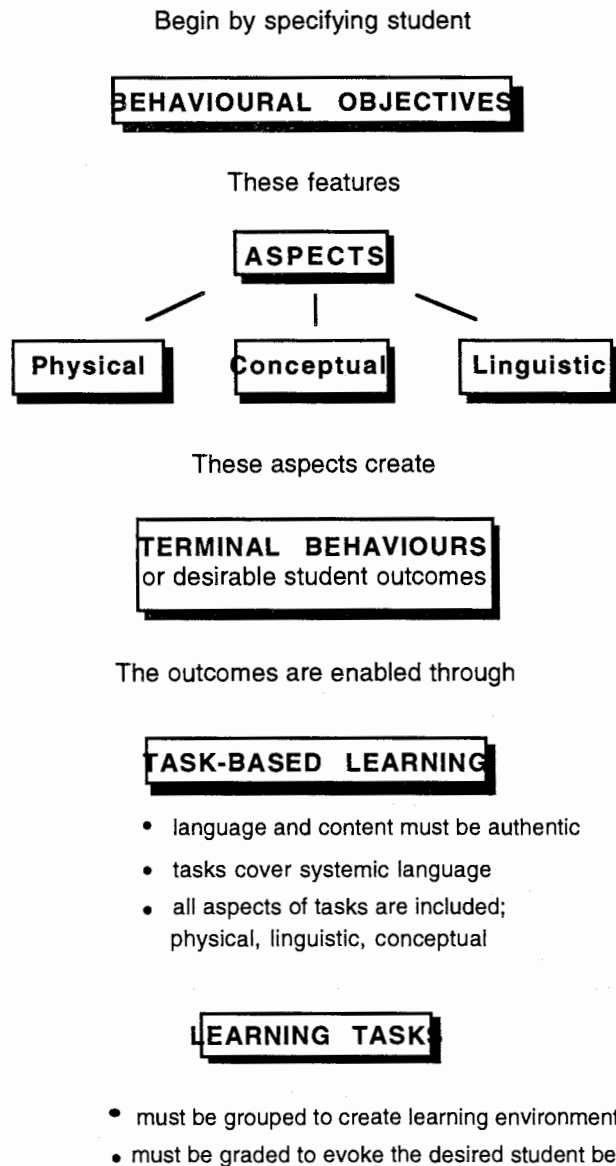
(Cummins, 1986)

**A FRAMEWORK FOR CONCEPTUALISING LEARNING**

The model makes possible an integrated approach to the teaching of academic discourse in each specific disciplinary framework. Its strength is its focus on contextual learning where English is the medium of study and not the object. The aim is to design a series of learning tasks which enable the learner to move from

quadrant (a) to quadrant (d) in terms of conceptual, linguistic and academic discourse competency. The learning approach used in this particular model involves setting behavioural objectives in which the key features are aspects of conceptual, linguistic and academic discourse competency, grouped and graded in order to evoke the desired student outcome.

### **LEARNING APPROACH MODEL**



(Allwright, 1977; Wilson, 1986)

In this fashion the semantic properties of words and word groups are placed by linguistic (co-text) and non-linguistic (situational or functional) contexts, and made available to the learner. The physical aspect is the external manifestation of content and language - a written report, essay, paper, fish bowl presentation etc. The ESP model facilitates the teaching of content and linguistic nuance and places this within the parameters of the defined academic discourse.

At present the Academic Support Service has anywhere between 130 and 150 students participating in 22 hours of subject specific weekly learning support workshops.

## STUDENT CONSULTATIONS: APPROACH 2

As prescribed in the services menu, individual and small group consultations form a large part of service provision for all student groups. The service has a weekly clientele of students numbering about 65, with around 200 students being regular (each 15 days) users of the service. The remaining service users are largely of an *ad hoc* nature.

Some indication of the varied nature of student consultation is provided in the following information.

### Total Number of Consultations This Academic Year: 1940

- essay assistance 43%
- assistance with presentations and case study material 23%
- study skills 9%
- topic definition and interpretation 9%
- advocacy (particularly MBA) 7%
- research and library 4%
- other (poorly categorised) 5%

Some interesting trends emerge from user statistics. Despite the mission of the service expressly targeting first year ESL/EFL and Murri and Torres Strait Island students these student groups comprised only 42% of our total consultation time. The remaining time was allocated in the following way:

- 1st year EFL/ESL & ATSIS 42%
- 1st year Local 24%
- Continuing 7%
- Post-graduates 27%

This suggests that 66% of service consultations were used by first year students, indicating that service-use may well increase in volume as students come to accept the legitimacy of using the service in an ongoing capacity. This is reflected in the number of new service users in the second semester, of whom 81% had been referrals by outside parties and stakeholders.

In terms of student consultations our aim to integrate academic discourse through comprehensive learning support seems to be on target. Although the team members are less conversant with aspects of continuing and post-graduate courses we experience a great deal of overlap in the nature of the problems students encounter. Our approach is largely to develop semi-autonomous workgroups where possible, in a bid to encourage self-sufficiency and self-advocacy. Often this has to be modelled at the outset, but certain student teams have collaborated for an entire semester. Given that the Service is located within the faculty, resolution of problems and referral to subject specialist sources has only ever been a management issue, and not a serious problem.

Number of Visits	% of Total
1	10%
1-4	19%
4-10	42%
> 10	29%

Those students identified in the final category (>10) are largely students from the ESL/EFL and disabilities categories, who, by the nature of their interaction with academic study, are likely to demand a long-term contextually supportive framework. These students are also offered the opportunity to access the workshops and tutorials conducted by the service. In the first two categories we were able to identify continuing and local students, whose use of the service differs from the target groups in that it is much more a sampling and reinforcement strategy than one of immersion.

### **DROP IN: APPROACH 3**

As the service evolved it became evident that time constraints and booking problems had begun to emerge. Students with quick and urgent matters found it hard to access speedy resolution and as a result the 12.00 to 1.00pm session became a five minute drop-in session four days per week. This later evolved into more of an administrative session for planning student consultations and representations.

### **THE POST-GRADUATE PANDORA'S BOX: APPROACH 4**

It is our experience with post-graduate students that most reminds us that as educators we need to be sure of our measures of proficiency - if we underplay the cultural aspects of learning we are committing students to judgement based on the panic to learn surface facts, or on cultural difference instead of learning. The post-graduate students in many ways presented greater cultural distance than did the undergraduate students. Our work in these workshops was largely in creating a context for learning transfer, as most students in these courses presented as capable learners in a variety of learning styles. As such, study-skills superimposed onto a backdrop of Australian Culture and context underlay the approach to these voluntary workshops. Given an enrolment of some 30 MBA students, the workshops averaged 18 students per session over five hours per week, synchronising reading and writing skills in line with course demands. As the previous statistic shows, some 27% of consultation time is allocated to the post-graduate students, not all of whom are comfortable attending group sessions for social, cultural and political reasons.

Much workshop contact time is spent dealing with the expectation of academics regarding essay-writing and report-writing as given in course guidelines. As tutors in these workshops, we scaffold a program of generic skills which coincides with student assessment pieces, bridging both Australian context and academic discourse. We do not deal with course material direct, but are able to examine it through a case-study approach, thus addressing problems with reading and work recognition.

### **SOME CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS:**

At the time of writing, the Service was in the process of review through the office of the Equity Pro-Vice Chancellor in conjunction with the Faculty's Deputy-Dean, Staffing and Equity. In what looks like being an extensive qualitative and quantitative process, early feedback tends to suggest (strongly) that the faculty-based approach is bridging gaps between academic discourse, the disciplines and student learning needs.

### **THE ADJUNCT (ESP) APPROACH**

This academic year the service conducted ESP Workshops and Tutorials across seven disciplines.

Some data emerging from review:

An overwhelming majority of students articulated positive responses towards their tutors and the conduct of tutorial classes. In particular students were pleased with:

1. Advice given on learning techniques and approaches (84%)
2. Encouragement of discussion (84%)
3. Clarity with which content is explained (92%)
4. Availability outside class (88%)
5. Encouragement towards students taking responsibility for their own learning (88%)
6. The effort made by tutors to understand academic related difficulties. (84%)
7. The structuring of material in ways to assist student learning (88%)
8. Provision of constructive feedback (86%)
9. Adopting a genuine concern for student progress and needs (90%)
10. Clarity of course material (88%)

Many of these criteria relate to integrating academic discourse into the disciplines, and do so in a positive way. The single most obvious negative trend in statistics related to "pressures for time" and "class room preparation".

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Whilst 69% believed this aspect of the tutors' work was good to outstanding, a significant portion of students have begun to see the impact of a very heavy workload on their learning process.

## STUDENT CONSULTATIONS

The average duration of student consultations decreased across the academic year (from 45 minutes to 32 minutes). Whilst this statistic indicates a lesser reliance on the service by its users - and hopefully greater discourse competency - the statistic is skewed by the time-intensive nature of 'problem', 'crisis', 'advocacy' and student with disability consultations. Though few in the overall scheme of things, these consultations sometimes required half a day.

As stated earlier, 71% of consultations are of an on-going nature, indicating that the positioning of academic support in the faculty does encourage a deeper, more contextual and relational style of learning in students.

The Foundation program, as a central monitoring unit, is vital in the structuring of a generic skills program. With membership of the academic teaching team, and various peer development groups, our integration with general and academic staff is ongoing. Some 81% of new users of the service were sent on a referral basis from other aspects of the university:

- CAD tutors 42%
- CAD lecturers 12%
- International Office 13%
- Murri Centre 2%
- CAD Administration 12%

Student perceptions of the service consultation hours are positive. Whilst we can never offer "enough" time on an individual basis, the 36 hours (average) per week we have offered has been well-received. Interestingly, all students surveyed believe the faculty-based model is both efficient and effective in its support of learning - the major criteria cited have been its "accessibility", and its relevance to the "mode of study". Not only has the service seen an increase in the incidence of referrals, but it has also witnessed a marked development in group visitation, and the occurrence of semi-autonomous study groups. This can only be improved as current students move through the system, having developed networks, teams and points of reference in their introductory year.

## CONCLUSION

The Foundations Program in the Bachelor of Commerce Degree carries with it 40 credit points (CP). The success of an adjunct approach is enhanced by the 'institutional creditability' this weighting carries. This needs to be tempered with the knowledge that non-credit bearing voluntary workshops are also conducted by the service, which in the areas of accounting, marketing and economics enjoy higher attendance (90%) than compulsory tutorials (50%). Whilst on the one hand this can't be condoned as a positive outcome (political & resource implications) the students do choose to support a learning environment which supports them. This is a vote of confidence in the methodology and positioning of the service.

In terms of the broader University, our membership of Faculty, Equity and Administrative Committees, and input to Policy and Teaching and Learning Development processes, enable us to push the Teaching and Learning barrow to a broad community of listeners. This is one avenue we fully intend to exploit. Our immediate plans for next year include the development of a generic skills lecture series (11 in all) to be presented to the entire first year student population. This will be followed by a numeracy skills program (adjunct) in second semester. On top of our commitment to University and Faculty orientation programs, our positioning within the Faculty enables us to politicise the issue of Academic Support as a legitimate quality and equity concern.

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**THE ROLES OF LANGUAGE AND LEARNING STAFF:  
INSIGHTS FROM COLLABORATION WITH THE SUBJECT DISCOURSES**

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**ABSTRACT**

Language and learning units in universities across Australia are very diverse in their structural locations, their staff conditions, and the substance of the work they do. Their lack of a recognised identity has important implications for their stability and status, and for the success of the collaborative work they undertake with discipline staff teaching the university's subjects. In this paper, we examine the roles of language and learning staff by comparing some qualitative aspects of their work with those of subject staff in faculties. Some suggestions are made for how the status of language and learning may be enhanced as an emerging profession within higher education.

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**Introduction**

Language and learning units have operated in some Australian universities for more than two decades. Currently, almost every Australian university has some form of language and learning unit, and an impressive variety of key-words is used to represent the subject of their interest including learning skills, language development, study skills, academic skills, use of English, and communication skills. The variation across units is great, not only in their names, but also in their structural location, staff conditions, and the substance of the work performed. Perhaps the only common thread is their universally firm commitment to improving student learning.

Periodically, units have been subjected to the process of review, a normally healthy process of reflection on the unit's broad mission and its achievement of goals, leading to consolidation and improvement. However, where the review is motivated primarily by the need to rationalise and "down-size", and where the reviewers are unfamiliar with the complex nature of the work of units, the outcomes can be disastrous. When the outcomes are unfavourable for a language and learning unit, an underlying mismatch is often evident between the beliefs and values of staff in units, and those of the management and perhaps the broader academic community.

The judgements that review teams must make about the effectiveness of language and learning units are probably predicated on the reviewers' assumptions about the primary role they play within the institution. For example, if the unit adopts a role which is oriented towards counselling individual students with the focus on their psycho-social welfare as learners, then it may be more likely that a reviewer would judge their effectiveness as one might judge a counselling service. If a unit adopts an approach that focuses on the integration of communication skills within the subject curriculum, then a reviewer may make judgements about the unit's effectiveness as one might judge a faculty or department.

Whilst it is clear to language and learning staff themselves that these and many other approaches may be adopted concurrently within one unit, the profile that is projected to the broader community may not reflect adequately the breadth of its goals and strategies. Therefore, the resultant measures of performance and effectiveness that reviewers select may be focussed on only a small range of the work of the units. Indeed, the misconceptions that abound about the work of language and learning staff are testimony to the poor public profiling of the units.

Although language and learning staff have been grappling with trying to clarify their own professional identity over many years, there have been few systematic attempts to define the roles that staff play. A survey of language and learning units conducted in the mid-eighties (Quintrell, 1985) showed that about one-third of units surveyed across 19 institutions were located within counselling centres, and that there was a clear preference for working directly with students in small groups or as individuals. This strongly counselling-influenced origin to the language and learning industry has been seen as, and possibly still is, one reason preventing "study skills

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counsellors from being accepted as legitimate teachers or sources of knowledge pertinent to the learning of academic subjects" (Andresen, 1983).

Other modes in which some language and learning staff were operating during the eighties were being reported as effective alternatives to the student counselling mode. For example, Zuber-Skerritt (1982) was advocating the need to work with staff to develop their ability to design better teaching, and Hancock and Bowden (1983) were developing their roles as "consultants" advising subject staff in how to integrate language and learning skills into the subject teaching.

In 1990, two papers presented at the eighth Australasian Tertiary Learning and Language Skills conference directly confronted the issue of defining the role of language and learning staff. From a survey of 57 counsellors involved in learning skills advising, Samuelowicz (1990) found that almost half did not see learning skills advising as a profession, because they saw the role as being an adjunct and "band-aid" one, not a discipline in its own right, and without a career path. Bain's interpretation (1990) was that the "learning skills practitioner" acts as an interpreter between the novice and the expert, centred on the subject of study, with interventions conducted jointly with subject staff.

In spite of these forays into defining the role of language and learning specialists, there has been no overall systematic attempt to describe the characteristics of their work in a way that distinguishes their roles. This paper aims to make a beginning in this direction, by identifying some qualitative aspects of the work of language and learning units, as compared with those of academic staff in the disciplines. The analysis identifies a number of dimensions of work in which the contrasts between the two groups are most pronounced. The evidence for this analysis is mostly personal experience from working in the area of university language and learning and sharing experience with counterparts in other universities, as well as, more recently, from working closely with subject staff in designing their courses. It is hoped that this paper will stimulate further critical discussion about the work of language and learning units within universities.

**a. *The relationship between research and teaching***

Staff in disciplines are typically appointed on the basis of their knowledge of the content of their subject. This is apparent in the emphasis in recruiting subject academics which is placed on independent research skills as demonstrated by doctoral qualifications and a publications record. The evaluation of the subject academic's work, either individually or collectively, is usually made under two discrete categories, teaching AND research.

For staff in language and learning units, it is rare that appointments are made on the basis of their expertise in a content area, evidenced by skills in independent research. Rather, the criteria for recruitment tend to be heavily focussed on evidence of good teaching skills and understanding of student needs. Required qualifications in position advertisements are typically undefined, other than through vague references such as "higher degree in a relevant discipline". The kinds of disciplines from which language and learning staff hail are numerous and too diverse to list, although the more common backgrounds include education, literature, linguistics, psychology, anthropology, sociology and philosophy.

It is rare for positions to require a doctoral qualification, rare for appointments to be made of doctoral holders, and equally rare for staff, once appointed, to be encouraged to undertake doctoral studies. Research tends to be overlooked in many units, sometimes because the positions are not defined as having research duties, sometimes because the staff themselves do not have research skills, or sometimes because the units do not plan their activities in a way that allows for research. Measurement of unit effectiveness does not usually include indicators of research and publications.

Whilst it is clear that language and learning staff are experts in their work, the evidence of that expertise may be missing unless staff observe the academic convention of "doing" research. Without the focussed, systematic, and sustained exploration of knowledge within a field which is undertaken through research, and which leads to extending knowledge in the field, the nature of the work that language and learning staff do is unlikely to be viewed as truly academic. Equally, without the public dissemination of the outcomes of that research in scholarly form, judgements about the quality of academic work cannot be made easily.

**b. *Perception of teaching***

Whilst it is essential that the subject teacher's role is to teach the subject, the approach to teaching often betrays an underlying perception of "teaching as telling or transmission" (Ramsden, 1992: 111). From this perception

of the nature of teaching, knowledge is seen as a bank of unassailable ideas which are transmitted from authoritative teacher to passive learner. Put like this, few teachers would align themselves with this perception, yet an examination of their courses and their own teaching often shows evidence of this perception. Courses are frequently described in terms of the major elements of content being covered, with topics listed as discrete headings, elaborated by some significant key-words. Although subject staff in many universities are increasingly being urged to write their course descriptions in terms of student learning outcomes, this is often done as an after-thought to meet requirements, rather than as the starting point to inform the design of a course.

For language and learning teachers, the more common perceptions of teaching, using Ramsden's other categories, are either about "teaching as organising student activity", or "teaching as making learning possible". From either of these two perspectives, the teaching tends to be more focussed on skills than on content. If teaching is seen as organising student activity, then the skills are often taught separately from the content. If teaching is seen as making learning possible, then the content tends to be seen as the vehicle for developing the skills. In either case, the development of skills is the logical starting point.

These tendencies to begin at different places can cause tensions in the process of collaborating with subject staff unless they are explicitly addressed. Perhaps more importantly for the purposes of this discussion, the focus on skills development as the object of teaching can make it difficult to identify the substance of expertise of the language and learning specialist. Without a relevant theoretical framework or set of frameworks to inform one's pedagogy, the expertise may comprise mere common sense, a very useful commodity, but not amenable by itself to academic and scholarly enquiry and extension. Without a rigorous and enduring expert content to inform both teaching and research, and a scholarly approach to dissemination of teaching innovations and research, it is unlikely that language and learning staff will gain academic recognition for their valuable contributions to student learning, and to university teaching. Moreover, the distinctive nature of their expertise needs to be clarified so that university management can recognise how the language and learning unit's contribution is different from and additional to the role of academic development units, namely through its expert knowledge about language and the discourses of the disciplines.

**c. Perception of the role of language in learning**

Perhaps the most fundamental distinction between language and learning specialists and subject specialists is in their perceptions of language and its relationship to learning. The commonly held perception of language is that it is distinct from and secondary to meaning. Fran Christie (1990: 8) refers to this perception as seeing language as "a rather neutral commodity which, once learned, simply becomes a kind of carrier, - ... a *conduit* - by means of which various forms of content or information are 'conveyed'".

From this perception of language, one would naturally argue that the rules of language should have been acquired at some earlier point in education than university, and that it should only be necessary to transfer these rules to a new context of use. This argument is the one which is usually reiterated in both the popular press as well as in many academic forums. The argument usually commences with a statement such as: "... students are not properly literate when they get here...". The problem having been defined in terms of deficits in students, the argument then proceeds to identifying the symptoms which typically concern problems with the orthographic elements of text presentation (such as spelling and punctuation), but which sometimes extend to complaints about students' abilities to think clearly and develop a logical train of thought. That language and content are viewed in this dichotomised way is borne out by the fact that many language and learning units are relegated to the very margins of the university's "real" teaching.

Admittedly, this more extreme view of the role of language in learning is not universally shared, and there appears to be a growing acceptance of the need for a university education to equip its graduates to be flexible and independent learners, and able to communicate with facility in order to make use of their learning. The difficulty for many subject staff, however, is to take on the responsibility for teaching students these skills, particularly when their deeply embedded, unconsciously realised, perception may be that students should already possess these skills at the start of their university studies. The complication which encourages this view is the fact that increasing numbers of students are undertaking university courses without the requisite English language proficiency skills on which the development of academic and professional literacy and oracy depend.

The perception of language which seems to be fairly commonly held by language and learning specialists is that, far from being an instrument to convey information, language is "centrally involved in the construction of meaning" (Christie, 1990: 8). There is no natural dichotomy between language and meaning, between form and content, between process and product. Just as meanings can only be inspected through language, language can

only be inspected through the meanings it represents. This case has been put convincingly and repeatedly in the language and learning literature over the last decade by writers such as Bock and Lewit (1984), Ballard and Clanchy (1988), Marshall (1989), Lee (1990), and Taylor (1990).

The applied linguistics literature on research in the area of tertiary language and learning supports the argument that language is fundamental to learning, and must be taught within its authentic context of use (see for example, Lee, 1991; Prosser and Webb, 1994; Webb and Bonanno, 1994). The literature from the field of student learning in higher education echoes the same concerns about contextualising learning (for example, Ramsden, 1988). Just as language and communication skills develop in an authentic context of use, learning itself can only be facilitated within the context of the content to be learned, rather than as a theoretical exercise in "study skills" on the periphery of the subject.

There is now a substantial body of research and literature to support this argument, and it is in this literature that the expert knowledge of language and learning staff is enshrined. Yet, in spite of what is commonly accepted in the specialist literature, the misinformation, folklore, and prejudices about language lead to a lack of understanding of the key role that language plays in learning. As well as having significant implications for teaching and learning in universities, these irreconcilable views about language have resulted in the marginalisation of language and learning staff in many universities. Lee (1991: 133) suggests the problem is that "educational knowledge - knowledge *about* the production, reproduction and critique of knowledge - appears to be the least valued knowledge in the highest institutions of learning in the country".

**d. *The assessment of learning***

The context of studying for a university degree demands that subject teachers provide summative assessment of student learning for the purposes of grading student achievement according to merit. What is assessed tends to be the cognitive aspects of learning. Coupled with a transmission model of teaching/learning, and an impoverished understanding of how learning and language develop, this fact often leads subject teachers to set assessment tasks that might be pedagogically inappropriate and unjustifiable for the context. For example, a common assessment practice is to set students a difficult writing task early in a first year course in order to "sort out the sheep from the goats".

For language and learning staff, their role as assessors of learning is primarily to provide assessment feedback to students which is formative. The emphasis is on facilitating change in the student's learning, leading to achievement in the subject and, in the long term, good grades in the summative assessment. What is assessed, therefore, tend to be the metacognitive aspects of learning. Thus, the "sorting out" assessment task would be seen as unjustifiable if the metacognitive skills required to perform the task had not been taught, or at least explained.

This primarily formative assessment function tends to militate against full acceptance of language and learning staff within the central business of universities to award degrees. Rather, their role in providing formative learning experiences and assessment feedback to students tends to be perceived as a "support" role, with a preference for this support to be provided outside the award programs. By working in collaboration with subject staff, towards the enhancement of learning within the subjects, and the incorporation of both formative and summative assessment practices, language and learning staff can actively counteract the under-valued image of intermediary, counsellor, and carer on the periphery of the university. In this way too, the status of language within learning (learning through language) can be considerably elevated.

**e. *Perceptions of the ownership of teaching and research***

As teachers of the subjects, staff in the faculties are "owners" of their own teaching. The recipients of their teaching are *their* students, with whom the relationship is akin to that of master and apprentice. Students are required to learn their way of thinking. Subject staff also bear the ultimate responsibility for their teaching and for the learning outcomes of their students.

For language and learning staff, the recipients of our teaching are not strictly our students: they are students of the subjects in which they are apprenticed. The relationship we have with students is as facilitators of the apprenticeship, as intermediaries, as interpreters, and so on, rather than as masters of their subjects. Our task is to help students learn *the subject's* way of thinking. We do not bear the ultimate burden of responsibility for the teaching and learning.

These differences have important implications, not only their contribution to the marginalising of language and learning staff generally from the university community, but also for creating potential tensions in working collaboratively with subject staff. These conflicts are the natural result of the need to identify ownership of one's own contribution to a shared project, when the ultimate owner is and should be the subject teacher. In this regard, the role that the language and learning specialist plays is one of nurturing and developing. The desirable outcome is not that we become experts in the subject field, but that the subject teacher learn more about teaching and learning in order to assume full responsibility for fostering better learning and language outcomes in students. In this, we provide an educational service to the subjects, using our expertise about knowledge, about ways of knowing, about learning, and about the role of language in all this, to serve and support the teaching of the subjects and the learners.

The arguments in favour of working collaboratively with staff are compelling for managers who are persuaded by the resource efficiencies associated with improving the learning environment within the subjects for all students rather than equipping individual students to cope within poor learning environments. More importantly, the educational advantages of working collaboratively with staff are also compelling. However, in order to succeed, the collaborative work depends on the willingness of the subject expert to undertake an apprenticeship in a new area of expertise, so that they may eventually assume the responsibility of developing students as autonomous learners and effective communicators. The success of the work also depends on the willingness of the language and learning expert to gradually invest this authority in the subject teacher, which means withdrawing from ownership of the teaching.

Albeit a desirable process of empowerment of the subject staff member, this process has some inevitable dangers for the language and learning expert, unless there is a conscious understanding of what constitutes the language and learning expertise, and what avenues there are for demonstrating that expertise in an academically recognised outcome. In our experience, the most successful collaborative projects have resulted in ongoing systematic investigations of teaching innovation, and the publication of joint writing as inter-disciplinary scholarship showing how two sets of expertise are integrated. Where new collaborations are proposed, it is important to consider the potential outcomes not just in terms of benefits to students, but also in terms of benefits to the project participants themselves, to the profiles of their units, and to the gradual development of a recognised profession of language and learning specialists.

#### **f. Professional status**

Subject teachers are typically experts in one discipline, and sometimes have a foot in several other disciplines. Their work is directed towards the same discipline(s). By contrast, although language and learning staff have expertise based in one or a few disciplines, their work is directed towards all disciplines. In this sense, their work *serves* the disciplines.

The status of the subject disciplines is typically high in the traditional university subjects where entitlements are unquestioned, and typically not quite so high in the newer, often more applied, university subjects, where entitlements are sometimes questioned. However, for practitioners in the field of language and learning, their status as a group has not yet clearly emerged. The continuing debates about whether they should be academics or not suggest that they have no recognised entitlements yet in many universities.

These contrasts in status are reflected in the lack of natural career paths for language and learning staff in most universities. While subject staff are appointed as apprentices themselves in university departments with the expectation of career progression signalled by the full hierarchy of positions up to professorial level, language and learning staff are often appointed within settings that are devoid of positions at the upper end of the hierarchy. Although it may seem unlikely in the current climate to imagine a plethora of professorial appointments in Learning Assistance, or of Tertiary Language and Literacy, it is heartening that universities commonly have professorial appointments in academic development units, our near cousins. What is more encouraging is the fact that many staff in language and learning units are being promoted on the basis of the merit of their teaching, their research, and their service to their institutions. For language and learning staff to aspire to a similar hierarchy based on academic merit, their work will have to encompass all roles of an academic, and be seen to do so through processes of accountability.

#### **Conclusion**

We have outlined a number of distinctive characteristics of the work of language and learning staff, showing how these characteristics are different from those of subject staff working in the disciplines. The differences are

not necessarily at issue as long as language and learning staff are committed to a peripheral role in university teaching and learning. However, they become issues when we begin to seek more professional recognition, when we begin to claim our entitlements, and when the status confusions highlighted through our collaborative work with subject staff demand a more explicit understanding of our roles and responsibilities.

Critical reflection on the work of language and learning units can be useful in many ways, for example:

- in defining appropriate unit goals and strategies
- in identifying appropriate means for evaluating unit (and individual) effectiveness
- in providing appropriate information to justify the effectiveness of unit performance
- in establishing more clearly defined position descriptions
- in ensuring more effective collaboration with subject staff
- in establishing standards for benchmarking across institutions.

These kinds of processes need to be engaged in for the purpose of establishing a truly professional and academic profile for the work of language and learning staff in universities.

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**ISSUES IN COLLABORATION BETWEEN ACADEMIC SKILLS TEACHERS AND  
SUBJECT TEACHERS:  
TWO APPROACHES TO INTEGRATING ACADEMIC SKILLS TEACHING WITH  
SUBJECT TUTORIALS**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper describes part of an on-going project (now in its second year) to incorporate academic skills teaching in first-year core subjects in the B.A.(Social Sciences) at La Trobe University. Different subject co-ordinators in the Schools of Law and Legal Studies, Politics, and Sociology and Anthropology have each opted for one of four alternative approaches to the incorporation of academic skills teaching in their subjects. These four alternatives are:

1. An academic skills specialist gives a two-hour lecture (in the regular lecture time) on essay writing, approximately three weeks prior to the due date of the first essay.
2. The teaching team and an academic skills specialist draft week-by-week teaching goals and develop a teaching approach to achieve these goals over the semester and to address any learning problems which might arise.
3. After consultation with the subject co-ordinator, an academic skills specialist writes tutorial lesson plans for the subject tutors which will achieve both content and academic skills learning goals.
4. Subject co-ordinators and/or tutors or teaching teams develop their own approach informed by my 1993 lesson plans and research assessing the value of that incorporation.

After discussing a number of issues which arise in the collaborative design of teaching strategies, I outline two of the 1994 collaborations in more detail. These two approaches, newly developed in 1994, reflect the co-ordinators' perspective, their power within their teaching teams, and their goals for their subjects. While the two approaches differ, each succeeds in its aims.

The outcomes for students were found to depend almost entirely on their tutor's degree of commitment to the skills incorporation. All teaching approaches were successful, although each could be further improved. Participating tutors were agreed that tutorial reading and discussion were much improved, and that on the whole essays were better than in previous years, although further work on essay-writing skills was needed.

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**Introduction**

The collaborations I will discuss are part of an ongoing project to develop academic skills teaching within all first-year core subjects in the B.A.(Social Sciences) at La Trobe University, Bundoora. The project itself began in 1993, when, in consultation with the subject co-ordinator, I designed tutorial lesson plans combining academic skills with subject content for a first-year Sociology subject. The approach basically followed that of a non-compulsory introductory course for first-year Social Sciences students which LASU Social Sciences had offered for a number of years and in whose later development and modification I had a hand. The integration was achieved by using the subject's readings and assignments as the basis of activities/tasks/exercises to teach the skills; thus tutorial discussion was modified to reinforce skills development. To allow a more detailed consideration of the materials and the skills, two-hour tutorials were held for the first five weeks of semester (until the Easter break), after which tutorials reverted to the more common one-hour format. Although discussion of skills issues continued throughout the year, it occurred somewhat at random - depending on students' questions and tutors' assessments of student needs. Thus from the Easter break tutorials were much like those in other Sociology subjects. However, tutors commented that students were more likely to pose questions relating to skills and that these questions were more readily discussed as the tutorial groups were accustomed to such topics.

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Because this pilot project was so successful (and cheaper than providing a supplementary introductory course), the (then) School of Social Sciences decided all first-year subjects would incorporate academic skills teaching. Thus at the beginning of 1994, I collaborated in this project with the teaching staff of eleven first-year subjects. These eleven collaborations led to a variety of different approaches. This variety was not planned but evolved from the various concerns of the teaching staff I was collaborating with.

### **Approaches to collaborating**

As the focus of the pilot had been modifying the tutorial teaching approach to include academic skills teaching/development, the primary concern for a number of subject co-ordinators was the degree to which it was appropriate for them to intervene in tutors' teaching approaches. This was not a problem where the tutors were relatively new to teaching and to the subject concerned. In subjects where this was the case, after consultation with the subject co-ordinator, I wrote tutorial lesson plans for the subject tutors which would achieve the learning goals for both content and academic skills. Nor were concerns about imposing teaching approaches on tutors relevant in a subject where the subject co-ordinator was taking all the tutorials; here too I wrote tutorial lesson plans, as I did also at the invitation of a subject co-ordinator who was the subject's tutor, and not its lecturer. But this last subject presented a new set of difficulties. The tutor's academic skills teaching goals could not readily be met given the readings chosen by the lecturer. The lecturer was happy to accommodate the teaching goals presented and so sought readings appropriate to both content and academic skills goals. This task proved difficult and I suspect lecturers will in future be quite wary of committing themselves to finding readings which can satisfy both sets of goals.

Other subject co-ordinators, not wishing to direct their tutors, had tutors develop their own academic skills teaching approach(es) informed by my 1993 lesson plans and my research assessing the value of that pilot incorporation (Cootes, 1993). Similarly, one subject co-ordinator modified tutorial questions and assignments to develop a more critical approach to the readings. Although my views were sought during development of these approaches, I had no direct role in planning tutorials or assignments.

Another strategy which resolved the problem of imposing a teaching approach on tutors was to cover the academic skills teaching in the lecture time, leaving tutors free to develop their own teaching approach in tutorials. A lecture on essay-writing was given by an academic skills specialist in the regular lecture time slot, three weeks before the first essay was due. In one subject which chose this approach, I was also invited to talk to the teaching team about problems students face in adjusting to university study and in particular to this subject. This led to tutors taking a revised approach to the first tutorial: focussing on the students' role and a broad framework for the subject, rather than employing the previous meet-each-other approach.

A fourth solution to the problem of imposing lesson plans on tutors was to invite them to collaborate in the creation of teaching strategies by participating in teaching team meetings which looked at the skills needed for the subject and at the problems students might encounter. At these meetings ideas were contributed by both lecturers and tutors and myself; tutors were then free to implement these ideas in their own way. In the case of one subject, however, the tutors experienced these discussions not as joint collaborations, but as a pretence of taking their views into account, and consequently felt violated. They saw the meetings as a way of imposing an approach on them and as a criticism of their teaching.

Four basic approaches to collaboration of academic skills teachers and subject teachers were implemented in 1994. These four approaches are:

1. An academic skills specialist gives a lecture (in the regular lecture time) on essay writing, approximately three weeks prior to the due date of the first essay.
2. The teaching team and an academic skills specialist draft week-by-week teaching goals and develop a teaching approach to achieve these goals over the semester and to address any learning problems which might arise.
3. After consultation with the subject co-ordinator, an academic skills specialist writes tutorial lesson plans for the subject tutors which will achieve both content and academic skills learning goals.
4. Subject co-ordinators and/or tutors or teaching teams develop their own approach informed by my 1993 lesson plans and research assessing the value of that pilot incorporation.

### **Issues in Collaborative Design of Teaching Strategies**

My role in these collaborations was to design (or help others design) methods for teaching academic skills. The question of which skills to address raised some interesting issues.

The skills focus of each subject depended largely on which skills the subject co-ordinator or teaching team wanted to address. Within the Social Sciences this has not been a problem, as critical inquiry has been the central concern and this fits well with my own focus on teaching such academic skills as active and evaluative reading, organisation of ideas, interpretation of essay questions and assignments, planning of essay structure, and so forth.

Subject teachers' views of academic skills learning in some cases differed from my own. For example, some saw essay-writing skills as merely technical skills of syntax, punctuation and referencing. Thus they thought my proposals somewhat misguided. Generally they could be convinced, by my descriptions of others' published findings (e.g. Taylor and Nightingale, 1990; Crosling, 1993) and of my own case studies. Otherwise this attitude undermined the skills teaching.

This also raises issues of control. The subject belongs to its co-ordinator; and so which skills are to be addressed and how they are to be taught is basically for the co-ordinator to decide. Therefore I needed to be extremely adaptable: to be able quickly to invent new ways to teach material. This is challenging and I quite enjoy it, but I have sometimes found it quite difficult to let go of my way of doing it. My approach has often gone through many modifications and may have reached a stage I am very happy with, while the subject teachers may be proposing an approach which resembles one of my earlier ones. I have found the best solution is to accept their approach and to include this issue in the evaluation questionnaires and interviews, thus enabling further development in later years. Also the subject teachers know how they actually teach: my approach might be well suited to my own teaching style but not to theirs.

Another control problem arose in the teaching team meetings: who was chair? I tended to assume it was the subject co-ordinator as s/he had called the meeting. Most often the subject co-ordinator did either direct the meeting or visibly indicate that I was to be chair. Sometimes though this did not happen. In such cases everyone became wary of taking the lead and the coherence of the discussion was undermined. I felt it inappropriate for me to take control as I lacked detailed knowledge of the subject.

Even working one-on-one with a co-ordinator presented some of these difficulties. In some cases the co-ordinator had clear ideas about what skills should be taught. In others the co-ordinator wanted me to choose the skills to be taught and how to teach them. Since each sort of case required a quite different response from me, I found it important to be non-committal until I discovered whether the subject co-ordinator had already given detailed thought to how to approach the skills teaching. Any failure to recognise this led to discomfort for both of us and to detailed discussion about why they wanted to do it their way. They also tended to become quite reluctant to consider my variations of their ideas.

I also found I had to be quite alert to the subject co-ordinator's purpose in inviting me to collaborate. In some cases it was simply to improve students' academic skills; but in others it was less obvious and had the potential to confound my teaching goals. One subject co-ordinator wanted to create a subject outline (for tutors to use both this year and in following years and to stabilise subject offerings). My goal was to ensure the development of sound academic skills. These two goals were quite compatible, as this co-ordinator viewed a subject outline in terms of explicit teaching goals and learning outcomes, and wished to ensure that all tutors had the same teaching goals and recognised what were the relevant teaching goals each week.

Another wanted to encourage a number of changes in a subject which had been taught for many years. The introduction of academic skills teaching was thus seen as a vehicle for other changes. With some lecturers and tutors, rejection of this attempt to change the subject also led to rejection of the academic skills teaching.

Large subjects also posed a problem for academic skills teaching. This problem arose, not because of numbers, but because of subject design. Large first-year subjects (enrolments of 200 -450) in the B.A.(Social Sciences) seem to evolve over a number of years. Such subjects are taught by different (groups of) lecturers in different years. They may consist of a number of modules that are reordered each year according to staff availability, or may alternatively have the same structure but with their focus varying according to who is actually teaching in a given year. Such subjects, however they may have begun, tend to lose coherence: they no longer have a clear set of teaching goals. This poses a number of difficulties for designing academic skills teaching strategies. Good

skills development requires the student to recognise the purpose of a given topic and to link it to the broader framework of the subject. This framework can then be used to guide reading and critical inquiry. But if I cannot identify the broader framework, it seems unreasonable to expect the student to do so, and thus skills teaching must be more narrowly focussed on particular skills and therefore does not produce the insights that encourage the student to develop further skills. Likewise students cannot use the broader framework to guide their reading and improve their understanding of texts (which may be difficult to comprehend and whose relevance to the subject may be hidden). Similarly the link between lectures, tutorials, reading, and assignments becomes unclear, and students cannot be taught to use their learning in one to reinforce their understanding/performance in another. One cannot focus on the skills of critical inquiry but must teach note-taking skills, reading skills, writing skills, etc., as if they were entirely independent skills.

### **Some examples**

To illustrate the issues I have raised, I will outline two of the 1994 collaborations in more detail. To assess the academic skills incorporation, I interviewed the tutors and one tutorial group from each tutor. Their responses are included with my comments. I chose these two subjects as they did not simply follow the approach taken in the 1993 pilot but developed new approaches to incorporating academic skills.

#### **Example One**

The first example that I wish to discuss is a fairly large subject with an enrolment of approximately 200. This subject takes a clear theoretical stance and all materials covered are linked to this position; its direction is controlled by the subject co-ordinator. The subject co-ordinator, although concerned about academic skills (having in previous years included detailed discussion of some skills - mostly technical ones, such as referencing), was reluctant to impose an approach on the tutors. It was therefore decided that the teaching team would meet to discuss academic skills issues and possible teaching approaches.

At this meeting we discovered we largely agreed as to which skills students needed and which ones they typically had difficulty acquiring. The needed skills included those of critical thinking and critique, inquiring and questioning (learning to pose appropriate questions and recognise when questions need to be asked), recognising the difference between theory and evidence, recognising the difference between presenting an argument and giving your opinion, structuring an essay, presenting an argument and writing clearly and effectively, and referring to the literature and providing references. But the group would not attempt to formulate explicit teaching goals, so it was not possible to create lesson plans to achieve such goals. It was decided that a two-hour lecture on essay writing taken by an academic skills specialist was required, and that each tutor should have a copy of the tutorial outlines I had written for relevant tutorials in other subjects. They could then use, adapt and modify them as they felt appropriate for their students.

Both the teaching team and I were concerned that students did not use the library adequately and were often disinclined to even enter the library building. I therefore designed a library assignment to be completed in week two of the semester. Its goal was to ensure that students entered the building and located the collections relevant to the subject. The tutorial groups I interviewed both commented on the value of this assignment. It made the library much less 'scary' and much easier to use than had been found by these students' friends in other subjects. Thus this subject basically chose approach 1: an academic skills lecturer gives a lecture on a specific skill. But it also integrated some of my ideas for tutorials.

My suggested approach to the first tutorial for the subject proved particularly valuable. The goal of this tutorial approach is twofold: to aid students to build a framework for the key issues to be addressed by the subject and thus increase their awareness of the links between the readings, the lectures and the various topics covered; and to encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning. All tutors followed my lesson plan for this tutorial in their first class for the subject. They reported that it led to good group dynamics in this and in later classes: students read more than in previous years, asked more questions, and talked more in tutorials. Nonetheless all tutors reported having one problem group - a group less inclined to talk, to ask questions or read for tutorials. Most tutorial groups were thinking and questioning in tutorials - were not simply focussed on "facts" or clarification of the lecture materials - but one tutor's problem group was inclined to look at issues in terms of "facts" and to see discussion as weighing two sides rather than exploring/discovering the issues.

The students' expectations of tutorials matched those of the tutors. The functions of tutorials were seen as being: to expand on the lectures; to explore students' own experiences/ideas in relation to the issues raised in the

lectures; to clarify a topic through discussion of it; to focus students' thinking; and to provide practice in arguing for a position. The tutorial groups I interviewed thought that tutorials achieved these goals. Thus both tutors and students felt the revised tutorial approach developed the critical inquiry skills required.

Transfer of these skills to assessable work was reinforced by a lecture on essay writing, given by a LASU Social Sciences lecturer three weeks before the first essay was due. This lecture covered interpreting the question, guiding one's reading, planning and organising an essay, and referencing. Only one tutor had attended this lecture. She felt it was very useful although she felt students may have misconstrued the lecturer's use of the term 'evidence' interpreting it as facts/data and not recognising that literature can be used to support a claim and thus function as evidence for the claim. All tutors reported that students felt it was valuable and that the quality of the first essay indicated its usefulness.

Nonetheless tutors felt students needed more work on essays and needed the lessons of this early lecture reinforced later in the year to develop/extend their writing skills.

Both tutorial groups I interviewed mentioned how valuable they found the lecture on essay writing. But they noted that even though they had had this lecture and a handout from the lecturer on referencing and on phrases to use, they still needed more on critical thinking, on recognition of different discourse cultures, on how to take notes on the readings and to decide what was relevant, on how to interpret essay questions, and on writing skills. One student also commented that the HUEP (Humanities Use of English Program) lectures on essay writing had been particularly valuable.

Despite the need for further improvement in students' writing skills, tutors reported that students were mostly taking a clear position in their essays, and were providing evidence and argument for their positions. Two tutors reported that students' linking of their arguments needed work, as did their expression. Referencing - both the formal provision of accurate references and the use of appropriate phrasing to refer to the literature - improved throughout the year but still needed work.

### **Example Two**

The second subject I wish to discuss approached the integration quite differently, undertaking academic skills teaching only in tutorials. It was an extremely large subject - a core semester-long introduction to legal studies, that combined two subjects for the first semester. The joint enrolment was around 700. There were four lecturers, each teaching for half a semester, and they each controlled and directed their part of the subject. Due to the particular requirements of this discipline, the focus was on specific skills needed to meet the teaching goals. Students needed to learn how to read and discuss criminal law and statutes, to understand legal argument, and to develop reading strategies which would encourage quality understanding and broad comprehension of the larger issues (not just learning of specific "facts"). Essay-writing skills were not taught.

The co-ordinator and I developed a series of one-page tutorial outlines which outlined the teaching aims for a given week, the learning problems which arise for such aims, and a teaching approach to achieve the aims and overcome the learning problems (i.e. to develop the appropriate academic skills). The whole teaching team (all lectures and tutors) then met weekly for four weeks to discuss these "draft" outlines, propose modifications, and to suggest other skills students might need and other possible tutorial tasks (the modified outlines are provided in the Appendix). This subject is an example of the second approach to collaborating: skills teaching is integrated with content teaching in tutorials, and the actual teaching approach is based on the views of the teaching team.

The first two meetings of the teaching team were extremely successful. The first focussed on student acculturation to the university; a topic which I felt must be addressed in the first tutorial but which had previously not been covered. This resulted in a clear focus for the first tutorial which had previously been used merely for administrative matters and name learning but which now developed good group dynamics and encouraged students to take responsibility for their own learning and to develop a framework to link their growing knowledge about the discipline. Discussion in this first tutorial resulted in students gaining a better understanding of the requirements of university study, and increased tutors awareness of students' (sometimes peculiar) expectations. One of the more valuable outcomes was students became aware of their responsibility for their own learning and their obligations to the other members of their tutorial group.

The second teaching team meeting discussed the remaining draft outlines. The drafts were felt to cover the relevant issues, and a number of variations in teaching methods were mooted.

While it had been intended that the third meeting would discuss the remaining skills issues -reading skills, and essay skills - essay skills were not covered because discussion of the readings raised a number of issues concerning the subject's structure and organisation, and the readings themselves. Readings were not always linked to the lecture topic, and tutors felt it was not clear how to link them to tutorial goals. As it happened, no lecturers were able to attend this meeting, and its focus was shifted to problems created by the lecturers' lack of knowledge of the students' reception of the subject since the lecturers did not tutor and did not ask the tutors (and neither, because of status-type issues, did tutors feel able to raise the issues themselves). These dissatisfactions turned out to be a key problem in my interview assessing the academic skills incorporation, as they were more at the heart of the tutors' concerns than was evaluation of the incorporation.

The fourth meeting developed essay evaluation sheets. The goal was to discuss tutor expectations and ensure common expectations and assessment across the subject. Quite detailed discussion ensued and an evaluation sheet was developed. But come essay time no tutors used the evaluation sheet. Nonetheless it would seem the discussion did lead to greater consistency.

Four tutors chose not to use the tutorial outlines devised by the subject co-ordinator and myself, and four followed them. The value of the outlines (particularly the one for the first tutorial) is quite clearly demonstrated by the contrast in these groups of tutors' assessment of students' tutorial performance. The four tutors who did not follow the tutorial outlines observed no real differences in students' tutorial behaviour from previous years, although one commented that students were more aggressive and less inclined to acknowledge the tutor's authority. On the other hand, the tutors who followed the outlines indicated they had better tutorial dynamics this year: students talked more in most of their tutorial groups; they asked more questions; and more students were thinking and questioning in tutorials than in previous years (although this depended somewhat on the topic and tended to reduce to "facts" just prior to exams). One of these tutors observed that two of his tutorial groups did not show the same degree of improvement as his others. All tutors noted that students were not inclined to do the reading, but as they had criticisms of the materials provided as to their quantity, quality of reproduction, and appropriateness, this may be due to factors other than skills.

To develop students' understanding of legal argument and to have them recognise the strategic and rhetorical manipulation of (legal) truth, two tutorials discussed a number of prostitution scenarios to assess how and whether criminal law would apply. Response to these tutorials differed little between the two groups of tutors. All found the approach appropriate, with students recognising that their object was to learn how criminal law worked, not to learn what the prostitution laws were. The tutors who used the outlines commented also that students approached the task analytically and so improved their skills of analysis.

The academic skills taught in this subject did not directly address the assessable work. But it would seem that the skills teaching did influence the first semester research assignment. In general students from tutorials whose tutor had followed the tutorial outlines produced better research assignments than those from other tutorial groups. However students suggested it would be useful if tutorials discussed/taught how to write legal studies essays, covering such matters as discourse structure and language, as well as technical issues such as referencing. One group suggested having example assignments to review and assess.

The second semester of this subject offered two strands, each with different assignments. The contrast in students' performance on these assignments suggests that the wording and type of assignments affects the work submitted.

One strand had the following essay question:

'Dealing with family violence *is* real police work. The difficulty is convincing police to assume this responsibility.' Discuss. (Your answer should canvas the role of police, their training and attitudes.)

These essays took a clear position, supported by evidence and argument. All tutors commented that, although there was linking within the essays, it needed improvement. Nonetheless, most essays were well-written and reasonably easy to follow. Footnoting and bibliographies were mostly sound. Tutors commented that the essays were much the same as in previous years, although the poorer essays were not so bad as previously.

The essay question for the other strand was quite detailed so I will not repeat it in full here. It required the students to read two cases where the judge decided whether or not to terminate the life support of a PVS patient, and to respond to two questions: 1. What response was taken by the judge in each case and what arguments did

the judges give to support their decisions? and 2. Is the problem 'ethical', 'legal' or 'medical' (use evidence from the British case to illustrate your answer)?

Assessment of this essay was quite variable. One tutor had spent a number of tutorials on judicial reasoning and felt the essays gave good analysis and breakdown of the cases. The writing was linked but generally poor. The other tutors commented that students had difficulty formulating arguments, and that analysis of the cases was inadequate. The essays were unlinked and lacked presentation of the students' own argument.

The first of these two essay questions has encouraged use of the critical inquiry skills developed in tutorials, whereas the second question led the students to report the facts - students did not analyse the cases adequately even though the question directed them to do so. Tutors in other subjects have also noted that some essay questions seemed to promote a "facts" approach. The only thing tutors and I could see in common between questions which promote this "facts" approach is their length and the number of tasks, sub-sections and/or options. The multiplicity of options and/or instructions obscures the question.

### **Conclusion**

The main conclusion to be drawn from all of my collaborations this year seems to be that anything works (possibly because greater status is accorded to skills because they are included in the subject design). In all subjects students' skills improved, and those tutors who had taught in the subject in previous years commented that the improvement was greater than in previous years. This occurred regardless of which skills were taught and whether they were incorporated into tutorials or covered in lectures. Nonetheless significant improvement occurred only in the skills actually addressed in the subject. Subjects which focussed on essay skills got good essays; subjects which focussed on tutorial performance and reading skills got good tutorials; subjects which covered both showed improvement in both. Critical inquiry skills did not extend from tutorials to essays unless this extension was reinforced through teaching essay-writing skills.

The degree of success depends on the teacher's attitude. Tutors committed to skills get more development and better learning than those who reject the skills focus. This was particularly obvious in the second example where a group of tutors chose not to use the skills approach to teaching the content. Students in their tutorial groups did not perform as well either in tutorials or in assessable work as students from the other tutorial groups in the subject. Skills teaching leads to better content learning.

A further conclusion concerns the collaborations themselves, and follows from the above conclusions. That is, any skills teaching is better than none, so it is better to accept teaching approaches which may seem misguided in order to commence skills incorporation. Improvements can be made in later years.

In summary, academic skills are readily learned within subjects. A variety of teaching approaches are successful; and the skills integration not only improves skills but leads to better content learning.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **Appendix A.1**

#### **Tutorial Outlines for Example Subject**

##### *Reflection on student role (Week Two Tutorial)*

**Aim:** *To aid students to develop useful learning strategies.  
To develop effective group dynamics for the tutorial.*

**The Problem:**

Recent research into student learning suggests that what students learn depends more on what **they** expect to learn than it does on what lecturers and tutors aim to teach. This arises because the learners' expectations of the task filter their experience of it. Consequently to encourage appropriate learning we need to ensure students' expectations are appropriate. If they expect to learn facts they will; whereas if they expect to learn not only about the legal system but also skills of problem analysis and evaluation of the system then they are more likely to do so.

**The Solution:**

Explicit discussion of the aims of the subject and the activities of the student can aid students to develop useful learning strategies. One possible approach is small group discussion (3-4 people) of the purposes of lectures, tutorials and readings. E.g. What is legal studies and what do you expect to learn from this subject? What is the difference between lectures and tutorials? What do you expect of the lecturer and tutor? What obligations do students have?

**Rationale:**

Such discussion of university culture is intended to bring students to recognise that they are responsible for their own learning. They must make time to do the work and seek help if and when they need it. It will also help to counter unreasonable expectations students may have developed from VCE - e.g. tutors will read repeated drafts of each assignment; tutors will be constantly available to provide assistance. Moreover, it is valuable for establishing both group dynamics and a global perspective on the subject.

Quality learning is also reinforced by tutorial participation. Students are more likely to speak in tutorials if they have already done so. Consequently starting the year with small group discussion makes it more likely that all students will contribute and thus begin to speak in tutorials.

### **Appendix A.2**

#### **Tutorial Outlines for Example Subject**

##### *Problem Analysis (Weeks Three and Four Tutorials)*

**Aim:** *To develop an understanding of the structure of legal argument and how to construct a legal argument.  
To teach students to apply law to facts (or is it really facts to law?).  
To learn to recognise the strategic and rhetorical manipulation of (legal) truth.  
To understand the workings of precedent and the use of case authority.*

**The Problem:**

- \* Lack of familiarity with the genre
- \* Lack of familiarity with the manipulation and interpretation of "facts" and possibly a belief that "facts" are objective and not open to interpretation.
- \* Lack of practice with:     organisation of key issues;  
  speed of identification;  
  structuring of an argument.
- \* A need to learn to use case authority and "facts" as evidence.

**The Solution:**

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Problem analysis to exemplify and practice these skills. We need to make the formulaic approach of legal argument explicit.

\* What are the issues presented by this problem? (i.e. What is the law?)

(For prostitution:           Is it a public place?  
                                      Is it soliciting?  
                                      Is it for the purposes of prostitution? etc.)

\* Do these apply in this case?

This requires interpretation of the "facts". Use other cases to decide on the meaning of e.g. public place, soliciting.

\* What else do we need to know to decide?

[ When presenting a problem answer, first the issues are specified and then you present your analyses of whether each applies. (Put each analysis under a sub-heading stating the issue under discussion). A brief summing up of your conclusions completes the response.]

These skills are learned through tutorial practice of the cases presented in the tutorial guide. By separating each of the three stages as each case is discussed these steps will become automatic.

Frequently, not only is the technique discussed but also the actual outcomes are critiqued. These two tasks need to be recognised as separate tasks or the critique will interfere with the students' learning of the technique. This separation might be achieved by doing one then the other; alternatively they can be integrated provided the distinction is flagged.

**Rationale:**

Basic problem analysis is a skill they will need through their studies in Legal Studies and Law and it can be generalised to their other fields of study.

## Appendix A.3

### Tutorial Outlines for Example Subject

#### *Reading effectively and efficiently (Week Five Tutorial)*

**Aim:** *To develop reading strategies which will encourage quality understanding and broad comprehension of the larger issues not just learning of specific facts.  
To learn to juxtapose competing argument and competing value positions and to distinguish between arguments and values.*

**The Problem:**

Students' previous encounters with academic reading have most likely been attempts to find information. Thus it is likely that they will view their reading goal as solely 'to find information'. But we want then to have a much broader goal. They need also: a) to assess what they read; b) to relate it to their current knowledge; and c) to be critical of the claims others make.

**The Solution:**

To teach students the distinct steps involved in reading:

- identifying the arguments;
- distinguishing argument and opinion;
- discovering the value positions and assumptions underlying the arguments presented;
- reflecting on what is effective (and poor) use of evidence.

They need to realise that legal reading has two goals: 'fact gathering' and critical evaluation. So they have two questions to ask of their reading: What are the "facts"? (i.e. What is a republic? How is it supposed to work?); and Is it really like that in practice/ Is that the way it should be? (i.e. Do other republics actually work effectively?/ Is it a fair/just system? Use your reading and world knowledge to decide).

Recognition of text types can aid reading. The nature and political content of a document should influence our assessment of it. Newspaper articles do not have the same accuracy as court records; some articles which claim to report "facts" may instead present personal interpretation. These (and other) distinctions should be considered when evaluating a text. So discussing such distinctions in class can be valuable.

- Who was the text written by?
- Why was the text written?
- Who was the text written for?
- Where was it published?

**Note:**

The whole issue of effective reading comes back to global understanding. One must see the links to get the point of the reading. One must understand what the purpose of the reading is to create a useful understanding. (This is somewhat chicken and egg - a beginning understanding is needed to begin to understand the more complex picture.)

## Appendix A.4

### Tutorial Outlines for Example Subject

#### *Statutory Interpretation* (Week Eight Tutorial)

**Aim:** *To become familiar with the structure, layout and terminology of statutes.*

*To learn to read statutes.*

*To gain an understanding of the technical rules of statutory interpretation.*

*To begin to understand how judges manipulate their interpretation of the statute.*

*To begin to understand the politics of legislative and judicial intervention through law.*

#### **The Problem:**

- \* Students often see the statute as having a novel-like structure and thus to be read from beginning to end, whereas its structure is more like that of a glossary or dictionary. They need to learn to access the elements they need, not just to read it.
- \* Students tend to see a statute as technical (as fixed) rather than as political or a document open to interpretation and manipulation.

#### **The Solution:**

Discussion of the Equal Opportunity Act (and where appropriate cross-reference earlier discussion of the Constitution). Our intention is to draw attention to the generalisations; structure and use of the Act; rather than simply to learn all about it. The Equal Opportunity Act is particularly useful for this because it is capable of many interpretations. Understanding of the politics of interpretation can be gained from more detailed study of the *Arumugam Case* and the *Brunswick Baths Case*. Draw attention to the manipulations of the statute and the "facts". Also consider alternative interpretations of the statute and alternative uses of the "facts".

## FINDING AN OPTIMAL LEARNING CONTEXT: INTEGRATION WITH AUTONOMY

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### ABSTRACT

This paper considers approaches to learning assistance within the context of the current practice of a centralised system at Waikato University. The arguments for retaining an independent learning centre are presented and the limitations of structural independence are outlined. The discussion suggests that ideas about appropriate working structures are linked to different philosophical conceptions about the role of the learning assistance tutor. Finally, the ideal of integration with autonomy is proposed and a model for collaboration with academic departments is assessed.

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### **Introduction**

The practice of learning assistance is now well established in tertiary institutions in Australasia, but there is still considerable debate about the optimal way of providing this support. For some writers the primary concern is the special character of the relationship between the learning assistance tutor and the student (eg Peelo, 1994; Mitchell, 1994; Harris, 1985). Other commentators focus on functional literacy and argue cogently for discipline-specific learning assistance (eg Griffin, 1983; Parry, 1989; Taylor, et.al. 1988). The debate is further complicated by the problematic issue of the relationship between the learning assistance tutor and the general academic community, both staff and students (eg Olson, 1984; Pemberton, 1992). The search for an optimal context for learning support must take account of all these issues: the personal, the pedagogical and the association with the academic community.

This paper examines these different and sometimes conflicting pressures on learning assistance tutors, and makes some suggestions about reconciling them in the effort to create an optimal learning support context. In the first part of the discussion, I will outline the arguments for an independent learning unit within the framework of current practice at Waikato University. In section two I will discuss some of the limitations of separate learning assistance for our relationship with staff and students and for our own pedagogical effectiveness. Finally, I will look at some of the ways in which the Waikato Unit is bridging the gap between learning assistance and academia and argue for my personal view that collaboration needs to be refined and extended. I suggest that the long term aim of joint ventures should be the formalisation of a system that retains a separate centre, but provides for regular, systematic work within the different schools.

#### **(1) The case for a separate unit – the unique relationship between the learning assistance tutor and the student**

The commitment to an independent learning unit is closely linked to a belief in the special nature of the relationship between the learning assistance tutor and the student. Varvara Richards of the Waikato Unit, for example, sees her learning assistance work as “the counselling edge of teaching” (August 1994). This counselling model requires an atmosphere of confidentiality where students can seek help without fear of assessment or judgement. This is a widely held view of learning assistance and is seen to be especially appropriate for students who have already tried institutionalised solutions, “after everything they know about study has let them down” (Peelo, 1994). At this point, Peelo insists, neutrality and distance from academia are vital:

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For me, individual meetings about study problems have always taken place in a student counselling service, away from the pressures of appraisal and assessment in teaching relationships (1994: 2).

At Waikato university, the counselling emphasis may also be rooted in the history of the unit: learning assistance tutors were formerly part of the student services team and at one stage they were housed in the same area as the counsellors (de Luca, 1986).

There are other important features of the unique relationship between the independent learning assistance tutor and the student. Varvara Richards believes that independence is vital for her role as 'advocate' for students in their dealings with the academic community; a function she believes could be jeopardised if learning assistance was located within the disciplines (August 1994). Andrea Mitchell of A.N.U also values her privileged relationship with students and believes that it offers significant pedagogical advantages:

Because advisors are focussed on the student's academic development generally, often in several disciplines concurrently, and over a number of years, we have a broad and long term perspective on the student writer which has several advantages. Because of our overview of academia we really come into our own when students are failing to pick up the different disciplinary writing conventions (1994: 2).

Certain approaches to writing difficulties are also more likely to succeed in the warm, supportive environment of a separate unit. Varvara Richards contends that limited knowledge of the disciplines is beneficial: learning assistance tutors are less likely to slip into the role of authority on a subject. Instead, tutors can empower students by listening and asking appropriate questions. A similar stance is taken by John and Tilly Warnock who claim that "writing center teachers honor their own ignorance" and must operate very differently from the traditional academic:

The teacher is not a traditional teacher-evaluator but a person who assists writers by listening and reading, by helping students imagine an audience, form intentions and realise them (1984: 18).

The non-traditional teacher in a supportive, independent environment is also well placed to experiment with specialised student-centred methods of teaching writing. For example, the use of "speak aloud" protocols when a student verbalises as he or she writes and commentary is recorded for subsequent analysis, is best suited to an environment of trust and distance from academic assessment (Harris: 1988). The counselling model of learning assistance is also compatible with the view that students need support which is similar to therapy to overcome writing blocks and apprehension. For this to happen, the learning assistance tutor needs to see students in the context of their lives, and look at the needs of the person as much as at the subject matter. Lynn Bloom uses two cases to illustrate the importance of personal context in determining writing success or failure, and argues that writing teachers must try to be sensitive to this context:

Too often teachers or writing researchers focus on only a single context (such as the school-based timed writing task) rather than on the multiple frames of reference in which the writer is operating. The more thoroughly that teachers, researchers, or the writers themselves get to know these contexts, which are nevertheless susceptible to change, the greater the chance not only to understand the difficulties but to resolve them (1988: 119).

The pressures of modern day university teaching make it almost impossible for the traditional university academic to offer the sustained support to an individual student which would facilitate such sensitivity to personal learning contexts.

It is in this respect that the learning assistance tutor, in the non-threatening atmosphere of a separate unit, can offer the student a rare form of support. Here the tutor is able to consider the needs of the whole person and be sensitive to the pressures of practical circumstances or emotional factors such as past history or family expectations which may impinge upon a student's ability to learn. Independence and separation facilitate and enhance the learning assistance tutor's capacity to offer what Andrea Mitchell terms "individually tailored academic support" (1994).

## **(2) The drawbacks of independence - distance from the academic context**

While the holistic response to a student's needs in an independent context is essential in some cases, it is not always ideal when one considers student learning within the broader academic setting.

For the learning assistance tutor, working for the most part at a distance from academic departments, there is a danger that he or she will lose a sense of the dynamics of the university classroom. Learning assistance tutors may misjudge the context in which students are being required to learn and write, and there is always the possibility that distance and separation will distort our vision of mainstream academia. It is vital that we are sensitive to these dangers and maintain regular, ongoing and systematic contact with the experiences of students in the different departments and schools. Personal support for students must be complemented by our up to date familiarity with the academic setting in which their learning is taking place.

If learning assistance tutors were visible in the disciplines on a more regular basis, students might also have a clearer perception of their services. Their separation from the academic mainstream, and perhaps the original proximity to counselling services, leads some students to have negative ideas about learning assistance: such students do not want to be seen in the unit for fear of being stigmatised or labelled. This is certainly an attitude I have encountered in conversations with students, and which is documented in research, notably in American articles on writing centres. Gary Olson, for example, observes:

Evidently, it is all too easy for the center to acquire the reputation of existing solely for instruction in so-called bonehead English (1984: 160).

If some students have jaundiced notions about learning centres, these attitudes can be reinforced by the outlook of certain academic staff. In this respect too, distance and separation can encourage categorisation and stereotyping. Bereft of any immediate sense of the day to day practices of learning assistance tutors, academic staff may have fuzzy notions about tutors' work. In an entertaining article about staff misconceptions of the work of writing centres, Michael Pemberton argues that a lack of precise knowledge means that staff are prey to destructive metaphorical views. He identifies three metaphors which, in his opinion, contribute to academic misjudgments of writing centres: the prison, the hospital, and the madhouse (1992). All of these metaphorical constructs suggest a place for treating conditions that don't conform to some recognised norm; by operating outside the mainstream of academic life learning assistance tutors are perhaps reinforcing these assumptions. By contrast, close rapport with academic staff and involvement at the centre of students' learning could foster the belief in learning support as part of intellectual well-being and development as opposed to treatment for disease.

These perceptual problems are important disadvantages associated with a separate learning support unit. Equally significant are the pedagogical limitations of working with students outside the framework of their disciplines. The close relationship between competent writing and the grasp of a disciplinary sub-culture has been well-documented. Clanchy and Ballard, for example, argue persuasively for the recognition of "the distinctive modes of analysis" of different disciplines as well as "disciplinary dialect", the language peculiar to each discipline (1988: 14). In similar vein, David Bartholomae looks at the complex pressures experienced by a student each time he or she engages in a piece of writing and struggles to find the appropriate mode for a particular branch of study:

Every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion - invent the university, that is, or a branch of it, like History or Anthropology or Economics or English. He has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding and arguing that define the discourse of our community. Or perhaps I should say the **various** discourses of our community, since it is in the nature of a liberal arts education that a student, after the first year or two, must learn to try on a variety of voices and interpretive schemes - to write, for example, as a literary critic one day and an experimental psychologist the next, to work within fields where the rules governing the presentation of examples, or the development of an argument are both distinct and, even to a professional, mysterious (1985: 134-5).

The emphasis on functional literacy is part of a broader belief in the intermeshing of content and form (eg Taylor, 1988; Nightingale, 1988). Correspondingly, if learning to write involves understanding the specialised nature of a discipline, we can best learn a discipline by writing about it (Griffin, 1993; Raines, 1980). In our own unit we do attempt to recognise this inextricable relationship between content and form by focussing on students' ongoing course assignments. At the same time, learning assistance tutors cannot possibly manage to mediate the precise nature of each discipline to students. If learning to write and writing to learn are part of the same continuum, it makes sense to work towards optimum collaboration between the students' learning experience in the disciplines and those who support them in their writing and learning endeavours.

### (3) Finding a balance

I have argued that there are two broad considerations that have to be accommodated when designing an optimal learning assistance context. On the one hand there is a need for a confidential independent environment; this should be available to all students who choose to use it as a support on their journey towards self-discovery as learners. In this context it is the counselling, pastoral model of the learning assistance tutor that is most appropriate. On the other hand, it is vital for learning assistance tutors to have an ongoing awareness of the demands of the different disciplines and the dynamics of the university classroom. To this end, learning assistance tutors need to strengthen their contact with the academic community and work more along the lines of the traditional academic tutor. It is my view that these two models of the learning assistance tutor do not have to be, nor should be, mutually exclusive. Instead we need to strive for ways of working that incorporate both approaches and be available to students in the contexts they find most helpful.

In our own university, the tradition of an independent unit and a counselling style seems likely to continue as the predominant way of working. At the same time, there are a number of features of the unit's current procedures and structures that acknowledge the importance of collaboration with the Schools. Significantly, the unit is now linked with teaching development and the overall director has responsibility for the professional development of academic staff. Some learning assistance tutors are specialists in particular areas. The maths support person, for example, has a half-time position in the unit and a half-time position in the Maths Department. The preparatory maths class is taught by this tutor under the auspices of the unit. Another learning assistance tutor has a science background and works closely with the School of Science in planning resource materials, orientation programmes and workshops. In addition to these personal links, Schools or departments invite learning assistance tutors to give talks about the unit's services, provide sessions on writing or train tutors.

All of these practices provide a good foundation for collaboration with academic Schools, but they do not go far enough. Usually, it is only academic staff who are already conscientious about student writing and interested in learning support who invite learning assistance tutors to work with their students. Collaboration is often on an ad hoc basis and is not regular or systematic enough to be perceived as part of the students' routine academic programme. We are still a long way from the optimal situation when students will see learning to write about a discipline as an integral part of mastering the discipline itself.

Different ways of fostering the connection between writing and learning need to be explored. In this respect, a project in which I was recently involved with an academic colleague provides an interesting model of collaboration. The project was initiated by a lecturer in Leisure Studies who was keen to improve the quality of student writing. His course was already well tailored to this goal, as a number of short written assignments were designed to consolidate key course concepts. In addition, in the first semester students were given the opportunity to have draft essays marked before submitting the final copy. We aimed to continue this emphasis on draft reworking, but hoped to do this in a more economical fashion and with lasting benefits for the students. A programme of three tutorials offered to four different groups of students was designed; importantly we collaborated on the teaching of all three sessions. Session one was a more general session on writing, focussing particularly on topic analysis, using the assignment examples. Working with the lecturer, I was able to elicit student ideas about the topics and suggest modifications. In session two, we discussed techniques for draft revision, with students revising sections of their own drafts. Session three was a peer editing session: here students used editing sheets to comment on the work of their peers, while we acted as facilitators.

The Leisure Studies project had a number of noteworthy features. The joint input of lecturer and learning assistance tutor signalled to students that writing was intrinsic to the course and not a peripheral extra. As Samson and Radloff have noted, such discipline-centred writing support has strong symbolic value:

Support, offered in context and related to the subjects students are studying, acts as a powerful symbol to both students and staff that the department is concerned to raise standards of general literacy and writing in particular (1994: 5).

This symbolism was strengthened by the scheduling of the writing class within the course tutorial programme, and the allocation of a percentage of the marks for the inclusion of drafts, peer editing sheets and evidence of substantial revision (5% of 30%).

The student appraisal of the project was very positive. 82% of the students who completed course evaluation forms assessed the programme as excellent or very good, while 92% gave these ratings to the peer editing

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session. Of particular relevance for this study was the student assessment of the joint involvement of lecturer and learning assistance tutor. 96% of the students rated the collaborative feature of the programme as excellent. In addition to this formal evaluation, there were other encouraging student responses. A noteworthy point is that a number of students followed up the class sessions with individual appointments; in this way discipline specific support and individual counselling were complementary.

## CONCLUSION

The Leisure Studies project was experimental and needs to be refined and adapted to the needs of other disciplines. Collaborative projects should be widely publicised so that academic staff are aware of the available options and an ongoing colloquium between learning assistance tutors and academic staff could find models to suit varying course and subject demands. I look forward to a time when many academic staff will include writing support programmes in their course outlines and offer these programmes in conjunction with learning assistance tutors. The benefits would be immense: students would see learning to write as a normative part of their University experience and academic staff could enter fully into the goals and process of learning assistance work.

At the same time, there should always be the option of individual support in the non-judgemental atmosphere of an independent unit. One context should not preclude the other; instead learning assistance tutors must adapt to many different languages. They must be in close contact with the languages and special demands of the disciplines and yet still be able to answer the personal language, unique needs and aspirations of the individual student. There is no **single** optimal context for learning assistance; tutors have to be as broadly based as possible if they are to help students learn in the multiple contexts of their different academic studies and their personal lives.

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**COLLABORATIVE, DISCIPLINE-RELATED, ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUPPORT. A  
MODEL FOR ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN  
ACADEMIC DISCOURSE**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper reports on a collaborative project undertaken by the Accounting and Finance Department and the Centre for English as a Second Language at the University of Western Australia, to improve the use of English in academic discourse during study, and ultimately the professional language use of graduates. It details the context, the process of development, the linguistics, and the research aspects, and the progress, trials, and pitfalls of this collaboration. Tentatively, it offers for discussion a model for possible adaptation to other contexts.

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This paper reports on work in progress, and also presents a case study and an object lesson in the changing contexts and circumstances which often beset projects of this sort.

**Background:**

In 1993, the Accounting & Finance Department (A&F) at UWA approached the Centre for English as a Second Language (CESL) for help in addressing the issue of the academic and professional writing of its students. The circumstances which led to this approach are described in the following background briefing. An appreciation of the circumstances is helpful towards an understanding of how the collaborative project evolved and its likely outcomes. In particular, the background briefing emphasises the importance of political pressures and resource implications in the development of the collaborative project. These factors were at least as important as the "ideal" or pure academic concerns in motivating the project.

The ability to communicate effectively is a skill highly valued by the business community. Surveys of professional accounting firms find that they rank it among the top two attributes sought after in potential employees. The finding that job advertisements for professional business appointments routinely stress "ability to communicate effectively" as vital to the success of an application confirms the validity of the surveys. Universities, in contrast, promote "theoretical knowledge in professional field" as the most important objective for their students to pursue. A survey undertaken by the Business-Higher Education Round Table found that "communication skills" ranked number seven in a list of twelve attributes promoted by universities to their students.

Notwithstanding the significant divergence between universities and employers in their ranking of the importance placed on various desirable attributes in tertiary graduates and the widespread acknowledgment of this divergence, it is likely that business schools within universities would not have begun to adapt their curriculum to take into account the need to develop "communication skills" without the emergence of an important development in the accounting profession. This was determination by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia (ICAA) to take matters into their own hands and promote a professional post-graduate education program that would attract graduates from a variety of disciplines (e.g., law and engineering) and train them to meet the needs of the accounting profession. Implicit in the ICAA's proposal (described in a White Paper titled "Chartered Accountants in the 21st Century") was the view that graduates from business schools are seriously

deficient in communication and interpersonal skills. The ICAA White Paper envisaged that attracting the "best and brightest" graduates from other disciplines and giving them a two to three year part-time training in the technical aspects of accounting was a convenient way to meet the needs of the accounting profession.

Notwithstanding the feasibility of the ICAA's proposal, the White Paper did have the effect of sending a clear signal to the various university business schools in Australia that finding ways to develop "communication skills" in students was important if they were to continue to play a pre-eminent role in the tertiary education of accounting professionals. While the nature and effectiveness of "communication skills" training that could take place remains unclear, there is a clear understanding that any such training must be seen to be at least as systematic and rigorous than that offered by the ICAA in its professional training program. This was the substantive circumstance which motivated the A&F's approach to the CESL at UWA.

From the discussions which followed the A&F approach to CESL, it appeared that staff in A&F perceived students, particularly some ESL students, to have less than satisfactory writing skills, both in terms of the execution of academic assignments and in terms of their potential as job-seekers. A collaborative pilot project was proposed. This project was conceived in two main stages, each with a number of steps, as follows:

#### **FIRST STAGE: Needs Analysis**

As part of the process of problem identification, the marked assignments of 45 anonymous Accountancy 100 students (all the papers from 4 out of 48 tutorial groups) were collected and a simple error and discourse analysis was carried out. Grades given were not revealed.

The sampling was opportunistic but sufficiently random to give confidence that the results revealed a substantial number of non-standard, ESL-type features in the students' writing, and that the proposed pilot program would be dealing with an area of concern to those in the Department who might wish to take some responsibility for the quality of the professional writing of their graduates. In addition, the analysis revealed problematic discourse and genre features which were not specifically ESL related.

In addition to information about student writing, the analysis revealed considerable apparent variability in the responses and kinds of comments from the four tutors marking the assignments. A further indication of variation in staff attitudes towards responsibility for the language of the discipline was obtained from 16 returned questionnaires asking for responses to general academic and discipline specific vocabulary items.

The texts analysed were part of a larger assignment, and consisted of a memo to a superior explaining forms of inter-company investment. The nature of the assignment did not stretch students' writing skills and the very similar chunks of text produced by different students suggested considerable use may have been made of textbooks and a cooperative approach to the task.

Following the first text analysis, a meeting between A&F and CESL staff was held. It was agreed at this meeting, that, as a matter of principle and of sound practice, the broad scope of the English language support proposed would not distinguish between native speakers and non-native speakers of English, though at the point of actual tutorial provision there would be streaming according to the pattern of text features found in students' writing.

It was also agreed at this meeting that, in addition to the immediate objective of improving students' writing skills in a particular assignment, the project would aim to help develop a professional-language pedagogic skill pool within the department, to maintain and further the focus on the development of students' professional communication skills.

Following this meeting a project proposal was prepared and funding for the project was sought from the International Office which had given support to other CESL activities in assistance with English for matriculated international students. Funding was obtained to undertake further analysis on texts produced under examination conditions, and in-principle support for the further stages of the proposal to be undertaken and funded in the following year was also obtained.

The second text analysis was carried out on the texts produced by third year tax students under exam conditions. Errors found in the first text analysis of first year students seem to persist into third year. These included problems with lexis, conjunctions, articles, prepositions, adjectival forms, punctuation, sentence structure, noun group structure, verb group structure, subject verb concord, set phrases, spelling and general coherence. Due to

the paragraph length of the exam responses the analysis was by necessity a micro-linguistic one. Had students' writing skills been stretched, other macro-linguistic areas of concern would probably have surfaced. These areas have been identified by research carried out in other Accounting Faculties ( Webb, English and Bonanno, 1994 ) and include critical reading and use of source material; focus on topic/task; logical and well-structured argument and presentation in appropriate academic style.

At this stage, the circumstances for the project changed dramatically. Gerry Meister, who had principally been involved in the original project design, in the discussions with the head of A&F, and in seeking funding from the International Office, left UWA to take up a position at La Trobe University. There was a change in the headship of A&F, the International Office was no longer willing to fund the project, and its director turned his attention to an academic position at another university. The connection between A&F and CESL was nevertheless strengthened at a personal level, and the project looks as though it will be able to be continued, though at a much scaled down level.

Some of the features of the original proposal which might be of interest to others involved in such collaborations are outlined below:

### **The Original Proposal SECOND STAGE: Program Development, Implementation, Evaluation**

It was proposed that in 1994 the first assignment with a writing component in an Accounting and Finance first year subject would be marked for writing quality as well as for content, and that a notional mark for the writing quality would be awarded. The marking of writing quality would be done by an ESL Centre staff member, in consultation with interested A&F staff.

At the same time, the CESL staff member, in collaboration with A&F staff, would begin work on the development of a marking scheme for professional writing that could be used by tutors in marking assignments, and a set of criteria and self-correction tips that would eventually be included in the A&F guide for students' professional writing. The criteria and tips would include, in addition to ones based on the text analysis conducted in steps one and three above, criteria arising from a CESL/A&F collaborative analysis of model assignment texts, these texts to be identified and made available to collaborating personnel by the Department.

The marking of writing quality in this assignment would have had two purposes: the first, to provide a base line of comparison for a part of the evaluation of the tutorials to be provided; the second, to draw students' attention, through the notional mark, to the quality of their writing so that they could make decisions about whether to register for the writing tutorials.

The department would announce, seven or eight weeks before the due date for the second assignment with a major writing component, that 50% of the mark for the assignment would be for content and 50% for the quality of the writing. It would also be announced that a limited number of optional tutorials would be available for development of writing skills, and the Department would make provision for the registration of students wishing to follow these tutorials.

Based on input from the text analysis and the model texts identified in 4.2, CESL staff would prepare objectives, materials and teaching procedures for a series of 6 tutorial sessions, providing for about 20 - 25% of the students in the course, to be conducted in the weeks leading to the due date for the nominated assignment.

It was proposed that the first tutorial session would be devoted to a more detailed needs analysis of the students in the group. The needs analysis would include, as well as a writing test, a record of full details of students' language and educational backgrounds. It was expected that, as a result of this needs analysis, some students would be referred to the Study Skills adviser who would run parallel tutorial sessions on aspects of discipline specific writing skills.

At the same time it was proposed that the CESL person in collaboration with Department staff would continue the development of a moderating marking scheme for the professional writing component of the assignment. This original proposal provided for the development of evaluation procedures to follow the marking of the assignment, including comparative measurement of gains, and questionnaires to assess student and staff satisfaction with the program. It also provided for a reporting scheme appropriate to a piece of action research.

Of course, many parts of this project had a political background. The research aspects, in many ways were a political response to a typical university context. It is questionable whether significant findings would be made, but a research form was more likely to find funding. The actual intervention in the form of tutorials was perhaps less likely to have a significant effect than the very fact of the Department's signalling that it considered writing quality important. A possible strong benefit from such a project might have been from the opportunity for discipline staff to discuss academic discourse and professional writing with language specialists, giving both parties insights into their respective views and understanding of these matters. But without provision for discipline tutors to be paid for their involvement, would the project have affected sufficient staff on either side to have a major effect?

The fact that the project appears likely to continue, though in considerably scaled down form, seems also politically grounded. Quality assurance, and the funding available for it, is its current propellant, and the project is still likely to have beneficial outcomes from the dialogue between the staff involved, even if the possible outcomes of the intervention are questionable.

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## LEARNING ABOUT DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC ACADEMIC DISCOURSE FROM COMPUTER-HELD COLLECTIONS OF TEXT

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### ABSTRACT

Recent developments in the ways in which large collections of computer-held text are built and can be accessed by means of concordancing software have important implications for those involved in teaching and learning about academic discourse. The resource of a readily accessible corpus of academic text can provide new insights into issues such as how academic discourse differs from non-academic discourse, and what differences exist in the discourse of different academic disciplines. In this paper I will describe ongoing work at the University of Birmingham, England, on the exploitation of a specialised corpus of written language from the field of Business Administration. Its potential in teaching students about the attributes of discourse in this field will be illustrated in a study of problems in students' writing which derive from an incomplete understanding of typical patterns of collocation.

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In recent years, developments in the storage of large collections of text on computer and in ways in which such data can be accessed have had a growing impact on linguistic studies. The motivation for much of the work has been lexicographical, as dictionary writers have sought to investigate the evidence of language in use rather than depend on their own intuitions in compiling dictionary entries. One of the fundamental procedures in such work involves calling up examples of a particular lexical item, in context, from a selected corpus of language using a concordance-generating program. Figure 1 gives an illustrative example of concordance lines for the word *little* from a corpus to be described below.

1 ,000 to f2 million. They had very little competition; they protected ali  
2 ing, at least on first reading. A little critical reflection, and a closer  
3 amination will, I hope, reveal no little glibness, and a glossing over of  
4 ple. Network analysis offers very little in terms of context, beyond the  
5 olitans as maintaining relatively little integration in either the formal  
6 arly true when foreign firms have little knowledge and confidence in the  
7 ffective, that which was left was little more than vacuous rhetoric. Of  
8 ir nose in, even if there is very little on Japan. The author does, however  
9 tion. I would like to elaborate a little on the process and outline the  
10 able I). As Table I indicates, little research has been conducted

Figure 1: *Sample concordance lines for "little" as search word.*

The product of such work includes the *COBUILD* series of publications; for example, the *Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary* (Sinclair *et al.*, 1987), the *Collins COBUILD Dictionary of Phrasal Verbs* (Sinclair *et al.*, 1989) and, more recently, the *Collins COBUILD English Grammar* (Sinclair *et al.*, 1990) which has been written using similar investigative procedures. (For a discussion of corpus-based approaches to the writing of pedagogical grammars, see Owen, 1993 and Sinclair and Francis, 1994.)

The potential for the use of corpus data accessed through a concordancer in the teaching and learning of second and foreign languages, both as a resource to be studied by students and as a tool for research and materials development for teachers, has been recognised for some time (eg Johns, 1986 and 1988; Windeatt, 1987; Johns and King, 1991). However, it is only relatively recently that software able to produce concordances from large corpora and designed with the specific requirements of the language learner and teacher in mind has been made available (Scott and Johns, 1993). This software, *MicroConcord*, is able not only to provide a list of concordances on screen, but also to sort the concordances in various ways to allow investigation of contexts left and right of the search word, to provide information about collocation, to allow editing of concordances on

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screen, blanking out key words, and downloading of concordances to a wordprocessor for further editing and printing.

In this talk I wish to consider the use of large collections of text accessed by a concordancer in the study of discipline-specific language at a tertiary level. To begin, I will outline the compilation and composition of a corpus of written text taken from the field of *Business Administration* and then consider generally the value of such a resource. I will then illustrate what can be done with it by focusing on problems in students' writing which appear to derive from an incomplete understanding of typical patterns of collocation in written text in the discipline. Finally, I want to look ahead to some potential uses of discipline-specific corpora.

### **Compiling a discipline-specific corpus**

The corpus I want to work with here is a collection of written text being compiled by myself and Chris Kennedy, a colleague at the University of Birmingham, England. The criterion for including texts was that they should be representative of those recommended for reading by students studying for a Masters in Business Administration. We hope eventually to have available 14 textbooks in the fields of Accounting and Finance, Personnel and Human Resource Management, General Management and the Organisation of the Firm; copies for one year of 7 academic journals in similar fields; and copies for one year of 4 magazines aimed at the general business community and not necessarily an academic audience. The corpus is still being compiled and presently (November 1994) stands at around 2 million words, comprising 7 textbooks, annual volumes of 2 academic journals and various copies of 3 general business magazines.

There were a number of stages in the process of getting the material into computerised form. After selection, we contacted the publishers to request copyright clearance. This was required because in the long term *COBUILD* could have access to the corpus, but may not be necessary for smaller scale teaching and research projects. Some publishers made texts available on disc in computer-readable form, while remaining texts were input using an optical scanner. For most textbooks and journals this last is a relatively straightforward, if time-consuming, procedure, but has proved problematic for magazines with complex layout and varying typeface. The resulting text is stored on a personal computer and accessed using the concordancing software referred to above.

A growing number of publications are available in computer-readable form which should remove some of the difficulties of compiling corpora. The *MicroConcord* software is accompanied by a series of corpus collections, each of which consists of around a million words of continuous text from specific genres, including newspapers and academic writing. A number of Australian publications are now available on CD-Rom, including the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Age*, the *Financial Review* and *Business Review Week*, and an increasing number of reports, magazine, journals and other publications can be obtained on computer disc. The compilation of genre-specific and even discipline-specific corpora could soon become a relatively simple procedure.

### **The use of a corpus of discipline-specific text**

While corpora of general academic writing are of some value, particularly when comparing how academic writing differs from non-academic writing and in looking at academic language common to all disciplines, it is the potential of discipline-specific corpora that is of most interest here. To take perhaps the most obvious reason for this, each discipline has its own set of typical vocabulary, including technical terms, and evidence of how such vocabulary is used will be at best limited in general corpora or corpora of texts from other disciplines.

In addition, a discipline-specific corpus is most appropriate for investigations of vocabulary generally thought of as "academic", but whose use is not confined to particular disciplines: vocabulary, such as *process*, *procedure*, *concept*, and so on. Perhaps I could illustrate this by considering the use of the word **process** in two collections of text: the first, the business administration texts described above, and the second, texts taken from the magazine *New Scientist*. It should be noted that the comparison is not entirely valid for two main reasons: first, the *New Scientist* corpus is considerably smaller than the business administration corpus - a quarter of a million compared with 2 million words; second, *New Scientist*, as a magazine directed at an interested lay audience, is perhaps more representative of journalistic rather than academic writing. However, despite these limitations, the point I wish to make seems to be adequately supported by the evidence.

If we consider words which co-occur with **process** up to a distance of three words to the left of this search word (the span fixed by *MicroConcord*), and exclude grammatical words such as *the*, *a*, and *this* (as in *the/a>this process*) we find that the four most frequently-occurring words in the business administration corpus, in descending order of frequency are *planning* (as, for example, in *planning process*), *decision*, *decision-making*, and *production*. In the *New Scientist* corpus they are *part* (as in *part of the process*), *random*, *acid* and *acetic*. Not

surprisingly, perhaps, we find that such general academic vocabulary appears to contract different relations in texts from different disciplines.

#### **An example: a brief study of collocation**

I would like now to give a brief account of one type of information that might be retrieved from a specialised corpus of text. First, I want to identify a number of problems in the writing of students which appear to derive from an incomplete understanding of typical patterns of **collocation**, a term which I take here to mean the occurrence of words within a short distance in text (for a discussion of collocation, see, for example, Carter, 1987; Sinclair, 1991). I will then go on to present evidence from the corpus described above which might suggest what the students *should* have written.

#### **Collocation: problems in students' writing**

The examples discussed below are all taken from essays and drafts of theses by students working in fields concerned with financial analysis, mainly accounting and economics. They were collected in an *ad hoc* manner and selected simply on the basis that, while they were not grammatically incorrect, the juxtaposition of words struck me as being inappropriate in some way in this type of writing. I make no claims, therefore, for either the systematicity of collection of the examples or their representativeness. From a collection of some 80 examples, 15 are presented below. My present focus is on items in bold face. Errors, of various kinds, occur in other parts of the examples but are not of concern here.

- (1) ...the current position of company might not indicated **a fit situation**...
- (2) The existence of audit committee gives the committee **more understanding** of the importance of financial and operating controls.
- (3) An audit committee is usually establish as a committee of the board of directors and **tremendous responsibilities** assigned by the board of directors ...
- (4) ...foreign exchange generates **spectacular profits** might indicate the effectiveness of directors.
- (5) The task is to discover what is really happening is **slightly difficult** for non-executive directors.
- (6) ... in order to **carry out** its **potential**.
- (7) ...the relationship between audit committee and internal audit is **really important**.
- (8) The operation of the foreign exchange markets is a **really difficult** concept for those common investors to understand.
- (9) As the company's diversification programme was **extremely outstanding** ...
- (10) It has **lots of benefits** if it is to operate in a effective manner.
- (11) It [an audit] **achieves** its **duty** by investigating and reporting to the society.
- (12) ...characterised...by a double-digit rate of economic growth during the period 1987-1990 with a relatively **mild inflation rate**.
- (13) ...this had **serious impacts** on the economy.
- (14) The resulting **high competition** between firms...
- (15) **Plenty of resources** alone is insufficient.

Most of the problems I identified were related to consecutive collocation (1, 2, 3, etc) or near-consecutive collocation (6, 11). Typically, but by no means exclusively, problems concerned nouns and adjectives and their pre-modification. This may be either that this is where students have most difficulties or that these were the most obvious problems to me as I read through the texts. Either way, it suggests perhaps that this should be a focus for remedial action.

Some of these collocations would probably be unusual in any kind of text, whether spoken or written (e.g. *a fit situation*, *carry out...potential*, *high competition*), while others seem to be more likely to be found in informal writing or speech than in academic writing (e.g. *slightly difficult*, *lots of benefits*, *plenty of resources*). What concerns me here, rather than a precise classification of such examples of inappropriate collocation, are the sources of information that students can turn to to help them avoid such infelicities.

#### **Sources of information**

In general, dictionaries offer little substantial help on collocation. For example, if we take the example of *fit situation*, we find that *The Macquarie Dictionary* (1981) defines *fit* in a number of ways, including "well adapted or suited ... proper or becoming" and *situation* as "manner of being situated ... condition ... the state of affairs", none of which really helps in deciding whether a *situation* can be described as *fit*.

Reference material designed to give advice on recurrent word combinations appears also to have limited value. *The BBI Combinatory Dictionary of English* (1986) does suggest that *profits* might be *handsome*, *large*,

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*exorbitant* or *excess* (but not *spectacular*), and that *potential* is *realized* or *developed* (but not *carried out*), but offers no help on how to modify, for example, *situation*, *important*, or *difficult*.

A third source of information, and perhaps the most effective is the advice of an "expert". An expert working in the field of language and literacy will be able to point out, for example, that *high competition* is at least an unlikely combination, but may not be able to offer sound advice on an alternative to *high* appropriate to the discipline. An expert within the specialist field is perhaps a more reliable source. However, the availability of either kind of expert is likely to be highly restricted and probably not a long-term solution to problems of this type.

Perhaps the conventional response would be to advise wider reading on the subject so that, by a process of osmosis, students will become aware of typical patterns of collocation. Undoubtedly, this does take place and is the way most students become aware of the characteristics of academic discourse generally and discipline-specific discourse more particularly, but perhaps there are ways in which the process can be speeded up.

One way to do this, I want to suggest, is through the interrogation of a specialised corpus. To illustrate, let me present what information can be gleaned from the business administration corpus I have described above about some of the problems listed. Here I focus on just four of the examples: (2) ...**more understanding** ...; (4) ...**spectacular profits** ...; (5) ... **slightly difficult** ...; and (14) ...**high competition**... .

...*more understanding*...

The corpus provides 306 instances of *understanding* and, in these, no examples of *more understanding*. A number of words are used which modify *understanding* in, apparently, the way intended by the student: *better* (11 instances), *greater* (6) and *deeper* (5). In addition, we might note that there are 7 instances of *thorough understanding*. This information is summarised in Figure 2.

better +	greater +	deeper +	thorough +	more +	understanding
11	6	5	7	0	306

Figure 2: Collocates of "understanding"

Samples are given in an edited list of concordances from the corpus in Figure 3.

- 1 ive that depart- ment a better understanding of the cost consequences of
- 2 Our aim is to obtain a better understanding of the reasons for and
- 3 rget, (2) it provides a better understanding of the reasons behind a given
- 4 assist them in better understanding the current costs of
- 5 t advertisers to gain a better understanding of visual component
- 6 s can provide a richer, deeper understanding of job requirements than
- 7 in itself lead you to a deeper understanding of the project. And once
- 8 broader thinking and a deeper understanding of communication struc-
- 9 countries will provide greater understanding of exporter selection and
- 10 ther research lie in a greater understanding of internationalization

Figure 3: Sample concordances for "better/greater/deeper understanding"

...*spectacular profits*...

Comparable information for *spectacular profits* is given in Figure 4, and sample concordance lines from the corpus for frequent collocates of *profits* are given in Figure 5. In addition, there are a number of ways of modifying profits in a similar way which occur only once in the corpus, including *healthy*, *high*, and *higher-than-normal*. We might also note that while there are 13 instances of *spectacular* in the corpus, the only word it modifies with any degree of regularity is *success*.

increased +	high +	greater +	large+	spectacular +	profits
5	4	4	3	0	791

Figure 4: Collocates of "profits"

1 market. In order to reap greater profits from these markets, foreign  
 2 and thus achieve greater profits, assuming that the higher level  
 3 rship will lead to greater profits. At the same time, economic  
 4 in a competitive world high profits do not last forever, and  
 5 oreign operations, unusually high profits can-be brought down so that  
 6 ould probably have generated high profits, but that was outweighed  
 7 tive environment, these increased profits may exist only in the short run.  
 8 many companies reported increased profits arising from their treatment of  
 9 ins from having seem- ingly large profits by paying a subsidiary high  
 10 s just because it is making large profits on its currency position. Let us

Figure 5: Sample concordances for "greater/high/increased/large profits"

...slightly difficult...

While there are 548 instances of *difficult* in the corpus, there appear to be none in which the degree of difficulty is said to be "low" in the way apparently intended by *slightly difficult*. There are, however, a number of fairly frequently occurring collocations to express a **high** degree of difficulty. Information is given in Figures 6 and 7.

very +	extremely +	particularly +	slightly +	difficult
39	9	9	0	548

Figure 6: Collocates of "difficult"

1 organization makes it extremely difficult to recognize the assumptions tha  
 2 e plant in 10 years is extremely difficult to estimate, and Aviva is  
 3 t is, on the contrary, extremely difficult to create a setting in which  
 4 ons have found MNCs particularly difficult to deal with in terms of union  
 5 the 1980s have been particularly difficult as a result of factors such as  
 6 ces." This can be particularly difficult in the international allocation  
 7 are coping with some very, very difficult teaching conditions. We have to  
 8 goes into it,"it is still very difficult to come up with a black economy  
 9 to emulate my father. It is very difficult for children of financially

Figure 7: Sample concordances for "extremely/particularly/very difficult"

We might also note that it is common to express a similar meaning by referring to the regularity of difficulty: *always difficult* occurs 5 times, *often difficult* 14 and *sometimes difficult* 6. The evidence of the corpus would perhaps suggest that the student should have written *sometimes difficult*.

...high competition...

Comparable information for *high competition* is given in Figure 8, and sample concordance lines from the corpus for frequent collocates of *competition* are given in Figure 9.

increased +	greater +	intense +	tougher +	fierce +	high +	competition
14	5	4	4	3	0	382

Figure 8: Collocates of "competition"

1 can survive with fierce competition and avoid "bleeding exports"  
 2 e. The very existence of fierce competition for admittance to enclaves of  
 3 f isolation; most think greater competition a price worth paying for a  
 4 with the consequences. Greater Competition The recession of the late  
 5 ry was also blamed on increased competition at home in the international  
 6 sified as a result of increased competition and government encouragement.  
 7 industrial insureds, increased competition can only mean good news.  
 8 ch, although now facing tougher competition than ever before, has not been  
 9 business expectations, tougher competition, government ineptitude in

Figure 9: Sample concordances for "fierce/greater/increased/tougher competition"

There are no instances of *high competition* or *high degree/level of competition* in the corpus. The meaning presumably intended by the student is expressed most frequently by comparing a previous level of competition with the present level (*increased, greater or tougher*) or using the descriptors *intense* and *fierce*.

### Uses of discipline-specific corpora

A number of potential uses of discipline-specific corpora might be suggested. First, it is convenient to distinguish between uses of such a corpus as a resource for the teacher and for the student. For the non-specialist teacher, a specialised corpus provides a readily accessible source of information about discipline-specific language use, particularly about lexical relations and grammar. This might be used as a research tool, focusing perhaps, as here, on differences between the writing of students and the writing of published experts in the field. In addition, it might be used by the teacher as a source of examples and items for language teaching material. *MicroConcord* has a facility for blanking out search words which allows slot-and-fill type exercises to be produced rapidly. See, for example, Figure 10 which shows a concordance set that students might be asked to complete, in which either *raise* or *rise* is omitted from the search word space.

1 or depreciation of the dollar will \_\_\_\_\_ a U.S. exporter's profits if  
 2 he ease with which the company can \_\_\_\_\_ capital. The proportion of  
 3 cted in actual share prices. If a \_\_\_\_\_ in value could be predicted,  
 4 mpany. This 'associate company' can \_\_\_\_\_ cash and distribute it  
 5 s in international commerce and the \_\_\_\_\_ of multinational enteArises  
 6 ally forces the cost of capital to \_\_\_\_\_. Second, in Table 2, the  
 7 non-subsiary, it can be used to \_\_\_\_\_ finance through borrowing  
 8 gests that if managers want to \_\_\_\_\_ motivation, they need to  
 9 As the assets acquired, which give \_\_\_\_\_ to the negative goodwill,  
 10this rise would cause the price to \_\_\_\_\_ until no such advantage

Figure 10: Concordance lines for "raise" and "rise" with search words omitted

The alternative is to allow student writers themselves access to a corpus of specialised language in order to compare patterns in their own writing and in published writing within their field. With a little training it is possible to switch fairly rapidly between a wordprocessor and a concordancer, so the potential exists for students to have immediate access to answers to many of their questions about the use of language in a particular discipline. Clearly, students cannot be expected to be able to ask the right questions without some prior instruction; the student who wrote *fit situation* perhaps did not realise that there was any problem. It would be necessary to have an intermediate stage in which teachers take responsibility for focusing attention on possible problems in a student's writing, which the student might then go on to investigate in the corpus. In this way, students can become sensitised to the kind of information that is available to them. Finally, a future development might be the creation of discipline-specific parallel corpora of student and professional writing, again for use both as a research tool and a resource for learning about written text which can be made available to students.

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## CONSTRUCTING A DISCOURSE POSITION: QUOTING, REFERRING AND ATTRIBUTION IN ACADEMIC WRITING

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### ABSTRACT

Becoming proficient in academic writing can be theorized as entry/apprenticeship in the ways with words of a discourse community. It follows from this perspective that the writing conventions which students learn will be specific in many ways to their discipline area/discourse community. As Bartholomae puts it "The student has to appropriate (or be appropriated by) a specialised discourse" (Bartholomae, 1985: 134)

One set of conventions that the student must acquire are those for quoting and referring to the work of others, primarily published academic sources. Acquiring these conventions can be seen as one of the ways that the student learns to take up a discourse position in a text. This paper reports on a study of quoting and referring practices in three undergraduate areas: Information Studies, Humanities and Nursing. Through a variety of methods (text analytic and critical ethnographic) the study investigates the role of quoting and referring practices as student writers learn to construct an appropriate discursive position within the text.

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### **Introduction**

This paper reports on a research project currently being carried out with internal research funding from the University of Technology, Sydney. The researchers are two members of the Centre for Language and Literacy in the Faculty of Education and two members of the ELSSA (English Language and Study Skills Assistance) Centre. In this paper we begin by sketching the background and context of the research, outlining key research questions and the methods of investigation we have adopted. Then we explore some of the issues concerned with the theoretical model we are developing with reference to the analysis of a small segment of the data. Finally we draw out some implications and future directions in our data gathering and analysis.

We were interested in investigating how students incorporate the words and ideas of others into their written assignments. In particular we were interested in investigating this issue from a number of complementary perspectives: looking at academic writing as text, at the process of text production, but also at academic writing as social practice, in particular the embedding of writing practices in particular disciplinary formations. We saw the issue of incorporating the words and ideas of others (wordings and meanings in the Hallidayan formulation) as being one of the most complex and yet fundamental features of academic writing, one which has received, until recently, relatively little research attention, in Australia or elsewhere. From the perspective of academic writing as text, a number of researchers (Thompson & Yiyun, 1991; Pickard, 1994) have examined issues such as the incidence and functions of reporting verbs in academic writing. Others, such as Bazerman (1989), have examined the issues involved in incorporating the words and ideas of others in the process of text production. Others (Ivanic, 1993, 1994; Pennycook, 1993) explore aspects of academic writing as social practice.

In addition to the theoretical issues raised, there were practical issues related to the teaching of academic writing in the university which engaged our interest in the topic. Many academics setting and assessing assignments want students to be able to produce essays which integrate the materials of the courses they teach and produce well referenced, well supported arguments. However they have few tools readily at hand to theorise just what it is that they are asking students to do.

The absence of agreed knowledge about this matter is illustrated by the large range in understandings encountered in discussing questions of referencing and attribution with academics at the University of Technology, Sydney. These range from on the one hand a quite wide-spread lack of interest and concern for what is perceived as merely a matter of the mechanics of referencing, and hence a simple skill that can be imparted by someone like a study skills adviser (on a kind of deficit model). On the other hand and at the opposite extreme there are high levels of concern about these mechanics and problems of plagiarism.

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Accompanying this are views articulated with widely varying degrees of theoretical sophistication about so-called 'originality' in student work and notions of students' 'own voice', their 'own argument', their 'own opinion', and taking up a position in the text. These concepts sit in an uneasy relationship with the requirement in an academic essay to engage the words and ideas of others, the published scholars in a field and to engage in critical analysis. There is a need to explore the relations between these different requirements: to read, discuss, quote, attribute and reference the texts of others and, in doing so, to author a new text. Complicating this still further are perceptions deriving from professional experiences, that these issues take on different forms and have different salience within different disciplines.

Our first question was: what literature could we assemble which offered ways of exploring what happened in a text when other texts and fragments were incorporated? This led us to collecting the empirical research in the field but also to exploring theoretical and analytic models for understanding what 'attributing' might actually mean. This work includes Bakhtin (1986) with his notions such as 'voicing' and the work of critical linguists such as Norman Fairclough (1992) with his particular formulations of the notions of 'intertextuality' and 'interdiscursivity'.

Our second set of questions concerned the issue of disciplinary differences. We began to investigate ways of illuminating a range of issues and ways of talking about them across the faculties of the university. We were mindful also of something we wanted to call institutional culture, which included the specificity of UTS as a particular kind of university, where many long-established areas of professional practice are facing issues of recent 'disciplinisation'. These issues often focus on questions of scholarly research and writing, and we have found questions of referencing and attributing to be of considerable concern. In fact this concern appears almost to be a hallmark of the new disciplines, while the lack of interest in these questions has come from more established disciplines such as the Humanities.

We chose three fields: Gender Studies in Humanities, Information Studies and Nursing. These were fields where particular academics expressed interest and concern about referencing and attribution in student writing. We do not make claims for the representativeness of our data in any quantitatively reliable way. Rather, we wanted to explore in depth the specific disciplinary concerns of these three fields, in order to map practices of attribution and referencing as they constituted the particular discourse practices of that community.

### **Method**

We have a principal co-operating academic contact in each of the three subjects, who is a co-ordinator for that subject. One complete set of assignments for that subject in Semester 1 was collected, together with the study guide and reading materials. The assignments had been marked as we were concerned to relate the marker's assessments and comments with our own textual analyses. In each subject we selected three assignments for in-depth analysis. We are not so much concerned with being systematic in terms of selecting typical or representative texts. Rather, we are plumbing the texts to find ways to describe different practices of incorporation of secondary material.

We are at present in the process of following up the analyses of our initial data set with interviews with the subject co-ordinator and the other markers who are all tutors in the subject, in order to elicit their views on the assignments, including general criteria for assessment, and specific criteria concerning referencing and attribution. One point of interest has been to compare the different markers in terms of the different feedback they gave students, specifically with respect to questions of referencing and attribution. As a consequence, we are also considering having the assignments double marked. Another point of interest is in getting the academics to reflect on their own writing practices. Students will be interviewed about their assignments. The focus is on how they went about the process of writing the assignment and their understandings of the requirements of the task, specifically with respect to attribution.

### **Data analysis**

This part of the paper considers excerpts from two highly valued texts in the Humanities subject, Gender, Culture and Power, and discusses the position the writers are taking up in relation to the sources and theories they are drawing on (our criterion for highly valued in this context being that the assignment was assessed as Credit or above on a Fail, Pass, Credit, Distinction scale). This analysis makes use of the notion of intertextuality as it is outlined by Norman Fairclough. He states that the term intertextuality was coined by Kristeva in the late 1960s in her accounts of the work of Bakhtin. Although Bakhtin does not use the term himself, the development of an intertextual approach to texts was a major theme in his work. For Bakhtin, all utterances, both spoken and written, are constituted by snatches of others' utterances. He writes:

our speech .... is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness and varying degrees of "our-own-ness", varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and reaccentuate (Bakhtin, 1986: 89).

Thus utterances or texts are inherently intertextual - that is they are constituted by elements of other texts. These other texts may be explicitly marked, for example in an academic essay, through citation, or may not be traceable because they have been so thoroughly integrated into a text. When a text explicitly marks the presence of another text or texts through citation, Fairclough uses the term **manifest intertextuality**. Manifest intertextuality may involve a direct quote, a grammatically embedded quote, or a paraphrase. When the text or texts are so integrated that no trail of their 'origin' is left, Fairclough uses the term **constitutive intertextuality**. Of course, within a theory that says that all texts are constituted intertextually, there can be no origin. That is, in Fairclough's terms, while all texts are constitutively intertextual, some are manifestly intertextual. In academic writing, students must learn to manage the relationships between these.

In this analysis we are trying to plot instances of intertextuality on a continuum from manifest at one extreme to completely integrated at the other. In analysing students' writing it is easy to identify examples of manifest intertextuality but it is more difficult to track the constitutive intertextuality as an outsider to a field. That is, considerable insider knowledge of the literature in a field is needed to recognise the echoes of the ideas and wordings of other writers which have been integrated into a text.

The question of insider knowledge required to read this constitutive intertextuality raises interesting methodological questions both for the researcher who is a disciplinary outsider and the teacher of academic writing at university level, who may also be required to come to terms with disciplinary knowledge in a hurry and with little prior information. We hope to explore these questions as the research progresses.

In the texts considered in this paper, both writers skillfully interweave the words, ideas, theories and positions of other writers creating a dense and complex texture. This makes it a difficult task analytically to differentiate between something which may lay claim to being a student's 'own voice' and the voices of others. The successful writer seems to be incorporating or trying on (to use a metaphor derived from Ivanic and Roach, 1990) different voices, while at the same time assembling and maintaining a distinctive authorial voice which evaluates and comments, creating distinctive subject position(s) in discourse. Within the terms we have set up here, we have to ask what is the constitution of this student's writing voice?

The two texts considered below demonstrate interesting differences in the ways they incorporate source material. The writer of text one, Barbara, adopts a traditional academic strategy. She puts forward a strong argument and takes up an authoritative position in relation to the theories she discusses and contrasts. In doing so she creates a very smooth and homogeneous text in which she seems to have erased the traces of her sources except where she explicitly cites them.

Her text presents an analysis of socialist/Marxist feminism in which she argues the limitations of this approach by contrasting it with radical feminism. In her introduction she states:

This essay examines the compatibility of the two with a focus on an early second wave influential socialist feminist, Juliet Mitchell, and views the strengths of the theory along with its obvious limitations.

Thus from the outset Barbara takes an authoritative position in relation to her material. She develops an agonistic relationship to the work of others, pitting one theory against another to argue her position. This paragraph is typical of her text:

Radical feminists did not see economic class as the centre of their lives. Rather, they perceived history as patriarchy, where the struggles have been those between the sexes. Where the determining relations of Marxism are those of production, in radical feminism they are those of reproduction. They believe that women's oppression commences not with private property but with a psychological power struggle that men win.<sup>5</sup> Thus they position themselves at the opposite end of the spectrum to Marxist feminism. Kate Millett, an early influential radical feminist, centred the argument around the concept of patriarchy, identified as the institutionalised rule of women by men that is historically, not biologically, created.<sup>6</sup>

5. Mitchell, Juliet. *Women's Estate*, Pelican, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1971, p94.
6. Curthoys, *For and Against Feminism*, Allen and Unwin: Sydney, 1988, p 84

This very competent paragraph illustrates exemplary academic practice within a particular adversarial tradition (cf Bazerman, 1994 on the agonistic nature of academic discourse within the sciences). It could be argued that Barbara is participating in a masculinist form of textual practice within a patriarchal academic tradition. She positions herself as an objective analyst who contrasts the views of radical feminists and Marxist feminists. In the third sentence, for example, she shows a degree of control of highly discursive writing, summarising one theory and juxtaposing it against the other one. The final sentence in the paragraph contains a standard attributed definition. We read this as evidence of this degree of control of a form of intertextuality which is manifest and yet grammatically integrated into a logical argument.

The writer of text two, Valerie, on the other hand, creates a more complex and mosaic-like text in which she brings together and experiments with different discourses and genres - ranging from the narrative, to the exposition and to a range of literary genres including an allusion to the who dunnit. Thus the text she creates is a hybrid. Her work has more in common with feminist and postmodernist discourse practices and textual forms, which revalue the personal and allow for generic diversity. Ivanic (1994) talks about ideologies of knowledge making. It would seem that in the texts we examine in this paper there are different ideologies of knowledge making and text production at work, which we plan to explore in more depth.

Valerie presents an analysis of the main assumptions, ideas and arguments of Gay Liberation theory. This paragraph comes from page 5 of her text :

This fear is particularly interesting in that it came from a group of people who almost revered lesbians as the living, breathing proof that women were able to love each other, rather than be in competition over men and therefore, rivals. Many straight women, at the time, were creating theory, or redefining existing theory, that examined patriarchy, the domination of men over women, and the way that historical process had set women up in opposition to each other. Another way of saying that men would divide the women and conquer them.

The first sentence seems to draw on journalistic rather than traditional academic discourse traditions. Valerie also defines patriarchy but, whereas Barbara's definition is an example of manifest intertextuality - with a footnote to her source - Valerie's *seems* to be constitutive. She integrates the definition into a clause through apposition thereby making some sort of claim to it - that this is not a citation but a definition produced by her. Immediately after this she makes a noticeable mode shift from the nominalised forms of the definition '...the domination of men over women' to the more congruent and spoken 'men would divide the women and conquer them'. This may be as a way of reiterating, thereby amplifying and endorsing the definition, linguistically producing a degree of investment in the proposition.

What is interesting about this example, though, is that five paragraphs later, we discover that Valerie has actually appropriated Burgmann's definition of patriarchy because she directly quotes and references it:

A final point about the women's liberation movement brings us back to the importance of radical feminism (the analysis of sexism and the family structure) to gay and/or lesbian politics. The point is summarised clearly by Burgmann (1993:173):

The women's movement confronted **patriarchy, the domination of men over women**, but not sexism, 'organizing people according to sex and sexual behaviour': it had to acknowledge the relevance of sexism to both the oppression of women and the persecution of homosexuals, and fight both.

We are thus able to track Valerie's intertextual reference back to its source.

We began by talking about problems of tracing intertextuality in terms of a reader's position as a relative insider or outsider to a field. There is a further set of issues concerned with the writer/reader relationship in student academic writing. These issues have specifically to do with the dual nature of the writing task, where the student has to strike an appropriate balance between a private one-to-one correspondence and the performance of a more public scholarly dialogue.

Whereas Barbara positions herself as a public analyst, Valerie's text presents an ambivalent position. Is she constructing an insider or an outsider position within Gay Liberation politics? Take for example in sentence two, 'Many straight women, at the time...'. By the choice of the term 'straight', there is a suggestion of an insider position which is on one hand an intertextual reference to a spoken form of identification within a subculture (Halliday's notion of 'antilanguage'). On the other hand, this can be read in terms of a complicit shared position with the tutor (evidenced by dialogue the tutor sets up in response to the student's text in the margins).

This data raises interesting questions in terms of academic writing as text, as text production and as social practice in particular disciplines. In terms of academic-writing-as-text, we have interesting differences between the apparent homogeneity and heterogeneity in the texture of Barbara and Valerie's writing. This relates to issues raised by Fairclough (1992: 104) when he writes:

texts vary a great deal in their degrees of heterogeneity, depending on whether their intertextual relations are complex or simple. Texts also differ in the extent to which their heterogeneous elements are integrated, and so in the extent to which their heterogeneity is evident on the surface of the text.

As far as issues of academic-writing-as-text-production are concerned, through our analysis, in particular through interviews with student writers, we hope to develop ways of plotting stages students go through in the process of becoming competent as writers within particular disciplines. In particular how they develop the more complex accentuations of writer's 'voice' and subject position which we have noted in these highly valued texts. Further, we are identifying differences within one subject in terms of the positions the students are taking up in dialogue with the work of others. So, we are not just interested in what we are starting to term 'interim literacies', that is, more or less successful approximations to 'proper' forms of citation and attribution. We are also concerned to explore the ways in which students experiment with different forms of discursive practice and what these differences mean within different discourse communities.

Finally, in terms of academic writing-as-social-practice, it is intriguing that two such very different texts emerge as highly valued by the markers. What does this say about the disciplinary politics of the discipline within which these students are writing?

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**INTEGRATING LANGUAGE AND LEARNING SKILLS IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES:  
THE ADVANCED ESL COURSE IN THE BA MULTICULTURAL STUDIES AT RMIT  
COBURG**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper will outline the Advanced ESL course offered as part of the BA Multicultural Studies degree. This course draws much of its content from the tasks and topics in the core studies area of the course. Examples of units of work and task types will be given. It will be argued that it is vital to integrate language and learning skills with subjects in the disciplines for three main reasons:

- 1) the bewildering array of task types and the terminology used by lecturers to describe these tasks often confuse learners at the outset
- 2) students will be more motivated if LAS teaching is linked to their course work
- 3) LAS and ESL teachers need to collaborate with subject lecturers in order to ensure that their teaching is relevant, and to promote awareness amongst other academics as to strategies they could use to assist students.

## DISCOURSE PATTERNS IN THE WRITING OF HISTORY UNDERGRADUATES

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### ABSTRACT

History is a discipline with few technical terms and high levels of abstraction. It is about judgements, and the historical dialectic is the procedure to ground these judgements. In the writing of undergraduates, knowledge in history is often created independently of an empirical data base or an explicit theoretical framework, and linguistic manipulation is fundamentally important. An examination of history undergraduate texts that have been evaluated by teaching staff can uncover some of the linguistic features that contribute to successful historical discourse.

This paper reports on an attempt to determine some of these features through a study of 140 essays from the Australian History unit, an annual first year course at the ANU. The paper re-affirms the central significance of the notion of relevance. It shows that control of different levels of abstraction is necessary in order to anchor relevance in historical discourse because only then can appropriate generalizations be made. Abstraction is commonly achieved through metaphor. How language is manipulated through metaphor relates more to the specialized knowledge of university literacy teachers than the professional concerns of departmental history tutors. Explicit guidance in this area can, however, be critical to the process of giving students control of the voice of the discipline.

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In this paper, I attempt to elucidate how certain linguistic features of historical discourse contribute significantly to the value assigned to history undergraduate essays by those within the discipline. I do this to differentiate our pre-occupations as study advisers from the concerns of discipline tutors in that we make more concrete the importance of the control of language in academic literacy. By this I do not propose to veer to 'sentence level correctness', which quite rightly pre-occupies ESL or secondary school English teachers. Rather, I use Halliday's notions of participant, process, and, most importantly, metaphor to reveal how certain specific uses of language allow the construction of what is judged to be legitimate historical discourse. I also confirm the suggestion of Eggins, Wignell and Martin that history is a 'shunting' along the scale of abstraction. My aim is to underline the difference in input between literacy advice and discipline advice to undergraduate students, and I use what is valued within the discipline as my criterion of correctness.

In the evaluative comments of discipline tutors, interventions focussing on errors of fact, on the appropriacy of evidence and on the sustainability of conclusions tend to be much more explicit than comments on the use of language. Where the metafunction of discourse does become the subject for comment, it is usually limited to cases where extensive narrative or description has taken the place of argumentation. Injunctions such as 'rewrite' or 'make your prose crisp and clear' suggest a concern with appropriate language, but they offer little guidance about the means of achieving improvement. Academics acknowledge that there is a requirement in writing tasks set for students for a discipline appropriate voice, though few pursue the question of whether language can be divorced from considerations of content and argument. For us, this question is central to the sort of help we offer students and to the sort of professional relationship we have with discipline teachers. Much of our own work with students deals with the construction of argument, but we are seldom duplicating the work of discipline tutors, because our concern is to make available to students tools to manipulate language. Discipline tutors call for relevance through choice of content; we concretize relevance through choice of language. One will not work without the other.

The choice of history as the discipline for this study was not random. Historical discourse is not achieved through technical terms or explicit theorizing. The few technical terms employed, such as *socialism* or *imperialism*, are usually borrowed from other disciplines and overt frameworks, such as materialist determinism or feminist theory, tend to be seen as markedly ideological rather than fundamental to historical discourse. Rather, as in the humanities more generally, it is the level of abstraction which distinguishes the voice of

history. History is constructed through judgements and the historical dialectic is the procedure which grounds these judgements. Historical exposition produced within universities foregrounds generalisations and depends on elaboration to give them credibility. Classifications, recounts or factual detail are legitimate only to the extent that they account for a truth or, more honestly, an interpretation. In undergraduate historical texts, sophisticated linguistic manipulation is particularly important as knowledge is often created independently of an empirical data base.

The material studied for this paper consisted of 140 essays from the Australian History unit, an annual first year course at the ANU. The essays had been graded by six academics who had tutored in the course, ranging in rank from the professor through to PhD scholars in the Department. At the time of marking the tutors were not aware that the essays were going to be the subject of any study. The essays had gradings ranging from High Distinction to Fail.

The essay assignment was the first extended and assessable exercise in the course. For most of the writers it was the best piece of prose they could produce at that time. Although some essays did show the hallmarks of rushed first drafts, most of the essays' discourse features and presentation suggested that they were the painfully crafted results of considerable effort. The assessment loading of 20% of the final grade would have contributed to this input of effort. The infelicities of argument and expression were therefore more likely to be competency errors rather than performance slips. The undergraduate writers were grappling with a new discipline dialect.

The essay question the students were addressing was crucial in shaping the discourse patterns that emerged in the essays. It also made for a highly controlled exercise particularly suitable for our study. The question ran as follows:

*What do you learn of Australian politics, economy and the general texture of colonial society by referring to at least six entries in the Australian Dictionary of Biography, Period 1, Volumes 1&2 (1788-1850)?*

This exercise directed all students to the same issues. There was a marked consistency in the resources the students accessed. All used the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, as instructed, and then turned to a handful of general histories of early NSW, among which were Geoffrey Blainey's *Tyranny of Distance*, Robert Hughes' *The Fatal Shore* and John Molony's *History of Australia*. These source texts employed various genres, ie the lexico-grammar of different fragments of text reflected their different functions. These genres, in turn, were reflected in the undergraduate essays with varying degrees of success. Since the research material was highly controlled, there was relatively little opportunity for factual error. The variations in the value ascribed to the essays by the markers stemmed from the writers' intellectual processing and their use of language.

### **The introduction as the anchor of relevance**

To many students grading by academic tutors seems to depend on idiosyncratic criteria but successful attempts at setting categories of common concerns have been made. From myriads of comments on essays, Clanchy and Ballard have distilled a number of recurring preoccupations that tutors display when grading social science and humanities essays. An important concern relates to the notion of relevance, i.e. that the essay must have a clear focus which is directly linked to the trigger question. This expectation is particularised by criteria of what constitute legitimate issues for discussion that have been forged both by the wider cultural context and by discipline specific socialisation.

In the grading of undergraduate students' essays in our sample, the centrality of the assessment criterion of a clear and relevant focus was confirmed. The tutors' preoccupation with legitimate hypothesizing or the 'significance of the topic' related to the choice of relevant issues which illuminated the 'politics, economy and the general texture' of early New South Wales society. Many of the positive comments referred to an 'effective central theme' or 'interesting and apt choice of issues'. The less positive comments ranged from the bald 'irrelevant!' to the discomfiting 'what are you arguing?' The tutors explicitly encouraged the student writers to orient the reader to the focus of the paper and to the issues which preoccupied the writer.

The tutors invariably commented on the introduction. There were major differences in generic structure of the introductions between the highly graded essays and the less successful essays. The highly graded essays all included an orientation to the major issues within the first two paragraphs. The successful introductions established issues and the position of the argument. These introductions performed two functions; they both

oriented and they justified, ie they affirmed the relevance of the choice of issues. Some of the orientations used the question form to set up the dialectic, others organized sub-themes which needed to be addressed. At times the orientation took the form of a pedestrian overview of the structure of the essay. But the success of the introduction depended primarily on the setting up of issues which the tutors deemed relevant. The successful student writers and the tutors shared the same understanding of what were acceptable issues.

*A study of a number of entries in the Australian Dictionary of Biography of an Aboriginal, an emancipist, a parson, a currency lad, an attorney general and a philanthropist is of definite historical value. Though small in number they reveal much about an open, experimental and expanding society, characterised by social divisions and novel opportunities. The chosen biographies, while not touching on the lives of the majority of ordinary people, record material success as well as political conflict. They also reveal much about the importance of the pastoral industry, prevailing prejudices or individual vision in the making of colonial Australia.*

This writer has included both generalisations and reference to individual human participants. She has afforded herself the following possible themes: an open society, an experimental society, an expanding society, social divisions, novel opportunities, material success, political conflict, the pastoral industry, prevailing prejudices and individual vision. Through the essay these themes supplied the controlling nominal constructions, through repetition and synonymy.

A substantial number of introductions, which attempted generalizations and introduced human participants, and were approved of by the tutors, proved to be misleading when the themes were not developed throughout the text. The introductions set up structural expectations which were not fulfilled, eliciting irritated comments like 'the central theme of your introduction seems to be contradicted by almost every example you chose to discuss....the exception sometimes proves the rule but the irrelevant should be plain'. This inconsistency, once noted was invariably predictive of a low grade.

The introductions which took on a chronological view, often the pattern in stories or journalistic accounts, were deemed to be 'pointless narrative'. An example of a fluent but inappropriate introduction is the following:

*On the 27th January 1788 a Military Despotism was established at Sydney Cove. Two thirds of the people present were in bondage. The 'Botany Bay' settlement was chosen because the English Government considered that it was commodious, conveniently distant and, it was hoped, cheap. It was thought that prison labour driven by prison discipline would surely be able to keep itself. There was not much thought given to the idea of free settlers wanting to go to this colony. No thought seemed to have been given to establishing other settlements on the continent until reports of French expeditions being sighted were reported to England. These reports led to the establishment of Hobart, after a failure at Port Phillip Bay. The people I have chosen as examples of those whose Political, Economic and General Texture assisted not only themselves but also the colony to advance.*

This writer had no opportunity to develop productive themes. At best he located the reader in time, an important orientation function in stories. His potential themes of despotism, bondage or reasons for exploration were not pursued possibly because they did not easily fit in terms of the question. Rather chronology continued as the schematic organiser and the generalizations drawn from the factual detail proved to be facile and not illuminating of the 'politics, economy and the general texture of colonial society'. Apart from the last infelicitous sentence, this writer held to content relevance. His pre-occupation with the settling of Botany Bay actually reflected the concerns of the first set of lectures in this course. Yet the marker asked 'What are you arguing?'

The other common form of unsuccessful introduction was the piece of text which diverted from the rhetorical conventions of an introduction by allowing clauses with vocabulary, lexical metaphor or collocations from other genres. This is exemplified by the following first paragraph, where a number of the clauses are from an anti-colonialist polemic genre.

*By the 1850's the authoritarianism of the British government rule was finally beginning to subside as the colonies of Australasia set forth to blaze trails in pursuit of their destinies. The colonisation of Australia had been as diverse as the lands that were settled and*

*the harshness of the land proved to be one of the major obstacles that needed to be overcome. There had been a general lack of forethought put into planning as the seed of British imperialism became fairly embedded in the lives and ways of the new society in Australia. It would, however, be unfair to say that everyone was happy. The politicisation of the colonists soon brought out their desire for a degree of self-determination amongst many. For too long Australia had been governed as a penal settlement and reforms were urgently needed. The colonies that had struggled so hard in infancy felt the triumphs and tribulations of adolescence, were by the end of the 1840's, maturing and well on the way to adulthood.*

Apart from the much criticised historical perspective of presentism (as carried by the metaphor of infancy, adolescence and adulthood), this introduction sets up themes from a mixture of genres. Whereas *By the 1850s* or *The colonisation of Australia* sit well within the set of legitimate themes for this exercise, *The politicisation of the colonists* and *For too long* suggest a different function for this introduction. So again, we have a case of content relevance failing to legitimate the introduction because the voice is inappropriate.

### **How metaphor actualizes history**

The voice of history is recognizable as a distinct academic genre. The work of J. R. Martin, in particular, has contributed to an understanding of the role specific lexico-grammatical structures play in establishing this voice. Mature historical discourse, like all academic discourse, has relatively high lexical density but low grammatical intricacy. With lexical density being the ratio of lexical items to the number of clauses in a text, a high density translates into language with low levels of expectedness. Unlike in speech, clauses are not replete with grammatically predictable function words and complex clausal co-ordination and subordination which define, elaborate or establish relationships between participants. Rather sentences may have one or two finite verb clauses compensating for this with large numbers of lexical items of low probability, often of Latinate etymology and highly specific meaning.

*Both Bennelong's submission, and the hostility of some of his peers, point to important variations in the political response to the coming of the white man.*

The lexical items may also be used in a metaphorical sense. Some easily recognized collocations like *fluid nature*, or *newly forged society* depend on lexical metaphor. Grammatical metaphor, ie the shifting of a concept from its natural part of speech to another part of speech (commonly verbal or conjunctive concepts into nouns), peppers historical discourse with nominalisations like *social elevation*, *provision of employment* or *of great significance*. This renders mature historical discourse particularly dense.

The reasoning is realised within these dense clauses, rather than between clauses (Martin). Much of the reasoning is buried within the nominalised constructions, rather than being performed by such explicit conjunctive structures as exemplification (*an example of how fast the economy was expanding*) or restatement (after a number of sentences detailing Macquarie's problems with the Exclusivists, a sentence begins with *In the face of such direct opposition...*). In historical discourse even the relations of time (*during the period of the Rum Corps' influence*) and comparison (*the contrast between the two men*) are often internal to nominalisations. But it is the nominalising and verbalising of causal modality which contribute so much to the synthesis of history, so that the historian writes about *the causes of dissension* or *the breakdown in relations originated in Macquarie's domineering attitude and bearing*. This grammatical metaphor, where events, activities and processes are nominalised as participants and where the logical relations between them are verbalised, allows writers of history to summarize and generalize.

How much of this linguistic sophistication is expected in undergraduate essays is open to question. The lexico-grammatical features of high lexical density and grammatical metaphor did not prove on their own to be predictive of the essay's grade. The highest valued High Distinction essay had a lexical density of 3.5 through most of the essay, often foregrounding the author with ubiquitous *I would argue* and *in my opinion* and had a grammatical intricacy more characteristic of spoken discourse. In contrast, the second High Distinction grade essay had a lexical density of 8.5, extensive use of nominalisations of processes and a sophisticated use of embedded modality, which allowed for high levels of abstraction. The average density among the more highly valued essays was 5.5. Since the standard reference texts for this exercise, such as the *Fatal Shore* or the *Tyranny of Distance*, had extensive passages with lexical densities of 8.5 and 11.5 respectively, we can speculate whether the early nature of this exercise caused the markers to be particularly lenient in their reaction to what must have seemed a colloquial style. There was also major inconsistency in the lexical density in many essays.

At times this was a reflection of the extensive dependence of particular sections of the texts on the actual language of the sources; more fundamentally, however, it related to the interweaving of the report genre and the narrative genre.

A particularly salient feature in distinguishing genre is the choice of the lexico-grammatical theme, or the first item in a clause. This often coincides with the subject of the clause but not necessarily so, as the theme can take the form of an adverbial or prepositional phrase. The process that the clause represents also affects the level of abstraction of the clause. In our undergraduate essays, the choice of clausal theme directly contributed to how clear and relevant the focus of the essay was. The report genre clauses commonly had nominalised themes with non-human participants and relational or existentialist processes. These often referred to causality (*the reasons for this expansion were varied*), a major pre-occupation in history texts; to time or chronology (*the 1830s became known as...*), a major organizing framework in history; or to the nature of the evidence (*Further evidence of the emancipists' will to succeed is apparent*), a central concern of this particular exercise. These heavily nominalised clauses often occurred at the beginning of sections or paragraphs as the controlling generalisations. The narrative genre clauses were much more likely to have human participants or non-nominal time phrases as themes and/or subjects of the clause, and many more exemplifications of material and mental processes.

*Macquarie and Bigge were socially incompatible, with totally opposite views on most aspects of the colony. Bigge was critical of Macquarie's building program...He considered...He was influenced by Macarthur and Blaxland...*

*Bigge listened to the emancipists' plea for trial by jury, but did not recommend it. He wanted land grants to emancipists to be abolished...Bigge wanted convicts separated...*

*Macquarie despaired at Bigge's unjust report...At the end of 1820 Macquarie left for England. He was highly regarded by most of the colony and was cheered... He spent his remaining years trying to vindicate his name.*

There was also a clear differentiation in the way different writers organized their clauses. The lowly evaluated essays often had long stretches of human participants as lexico-grammatical themes and/or subjects such as the paragraphs on Macquarie and Bigge above. By choosing human participant themes, the writers limited the opportunity for high level abstraction, which was reflected in low levels of metaphor. The highly valued essays followed the pattern of a generalisation with metaphoric constructions, followed by elaborating clauses with similar lexico-grammatical patterns. The generalising clauses would then be supported by narrative clauses, often with the human participant as clausal theme. There would often be a concluding generalisation, the crafting of new knowledge.

*The initial abundance of land grants, coupled with the supply of convict labour, formed the basis of the growing wealth of many settlers. Access to the two became increasingly restricted in later years. Consequently, conflict arose between the settlers and the administration concerning the distribution of land and labour. Marsden and Macarthur, both wealthy landowners, predictably supported the use of convict labour for private interests. They encouraged free immigration in the hope of creating a colonial aristocracy of 'men of real capital'. They believed transported convicts should be kept 'landless and in proper subjection'. Their views on the future of the colony later became central to the question of convict status which was to reach every facet of colonial life.*

Essays with intermediate grades had stretches of text of mixed genres, but the clauses were not related according to a schema that the tutor found recognizable. The clausal themes had little lexico-grammatic cohesion, either through the absence of correspondence between the clausal themes and the clausal subjects or through reference inconsistencies. Apart from stretches with a human participant, the themes were simply not linked in a recognizable chain. Occasionally these inappropriate linkages showed a misinterpretation or ignorance of accepted historical evidence. The much more likely reason for the incoherence was the misordering of different levels of generalization.

*Batman received more official favour when he petitioned the Governor for Sydney Blacks to make contact with the rioting tribes of Van Diemen's Land and persuade that much injured and unfortunate race of beings to surrendering alive. There was a grant of 2000 acres as payment. The excessive cost and overall failure of the 'Black Line' was an example of the government inefficiency and lack of suitable organisation prevalent in the period.*

**Generalisation ranking - the scaffolding in history**

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For a text to be interpreted as legitimate, the elaborations of the macro-theme (or topic of a passage) and the supporting detail need to conform to the historian's inherent sense of generalisation ranking. Generalisations in historical discourse are formed at different levels of abstraction, in effect the differences in the distance between a statement and the reality it reflects. The ranking of these potential abstractions draws both on the unconscious grammatical understandings of the educated English speaker and the professional consensus within the discipline of history. At the lexico-grammatical level, the level of abstraction, and therefore the generalising potential of the clause, often translates into the choice of metaphor that is used in the nominal constructions, particularly the theme and/or subject of the clause, and less often in verbal phrases.

Generalisations in history text clauses range along a continuum from the specific (a single human participant as subject with a material or mental process in the verbal group) to the highly abstract (metaphoric participants engaged in a relational or existential process). Along that continuum, there is an ever greater distancing from actual experience which is the basis for the ever higher levels abstraction and, therefore, higher levels of generalisation. This is reflected primarily in the nominal group. In our essays, examples from different points on that continuum included the following nominal groups:

*Elizabeth Macarthur continued to buy up sheep* (individual human participant)

*the Exclusivists wrote defamatory letters* (generic human participant in plural constructions)

*By 1796 wool was competing with whaling as the big export earner* (non-human metaphoric participant)

*the colony's economic development was assured* (nominalised process as participant)

*the capacity of the Rum Corps to tarnish gubernatorial objectives* (nominalised modality as participant).

In historical discourse, lower level generalisations support higher level generalisations, with the grammatically congruent constructions functioning as evidence for the arguments constructed. In the highly valued essays, the metaphorical constructions, without the one to one correspondence between action and statement, were grounded by narrative evidence, with human participants. The congruence between the lexico-grammatical and the epistemological was not perfect. It is entirely possible in English to present high level generalisations in clauses with singular, human participant themes as in *the small farmer was not adequately protected in his dealings with the Rum Corps*. But it would be inappropriate to conduct all historical argument thus.

This acknowledgement of different levels of generalisation complicates the traditional grammar view that there is a clear dichotomy between the specific and the general, particularly evident in the grammar of article (*the v a(n)*) usage, and that abstraction is a feature of certain nominals. History texts demonstrate that there are different levels of abstraction and that for an expository text to be successful it cannot function with one level of generalisation. If the text errs on the specific side and abandons higher level generalisations, it is interpreted as narrative and, therefore, not history but merely a story. If the text errs on the side of generalisations, it is judged as unsupported, non-conclusive and, therefore, not persuasive. If generalisation rankings are violated, the text is deemed incoherent and unpersuasive.

### **Why do student writers mishandle generalisation ranking?**

The incoherence which the mishandling of generalisation ranking brings about may be the result of different writing strategies. At its most crude and most damned in the academic culture, is the resort to cobbling. The inclusion of clauses from source texts without intellectual reprocessing often results in inappropriate linguistic reprocessing. With non-native writers these collage texts are generally marked by morphological error in agreement, tense or referencing.

*Referring (sic) to John Macarthur, much of this wealth was created by Elizabeth alone after John was exiled to England for his part in the Rum Corps revolt against Governor Bligh in 1808. She take care of the holdings, she make decision about farm, she look after many children, she wrote the optimistic letter and still found time to court the establishment. John work for wool in England and when returning found a flourishing pastoral empire.*

With native speakers the error is more likely to be of a higher linguistic rank with non-cohesive themes, misleading referencing and clumsy clausal embedding:

*A large number of the convicts had an aversion to hard labour, having resorted to crime in preference in England. They obviously caused many problems for a colony which was reliant on this labour. Also the famine and drought which prior to 1790 brought the colony to the brink of starvation and the heavy floods in the Hawkesbury Valley in 1806 which brought losses to many meant that things were not good. Despite this Ruse was seen as an 'enlightened farmer' displaying the fact that the majority of colonists had little or no knowledge of agriculture.*

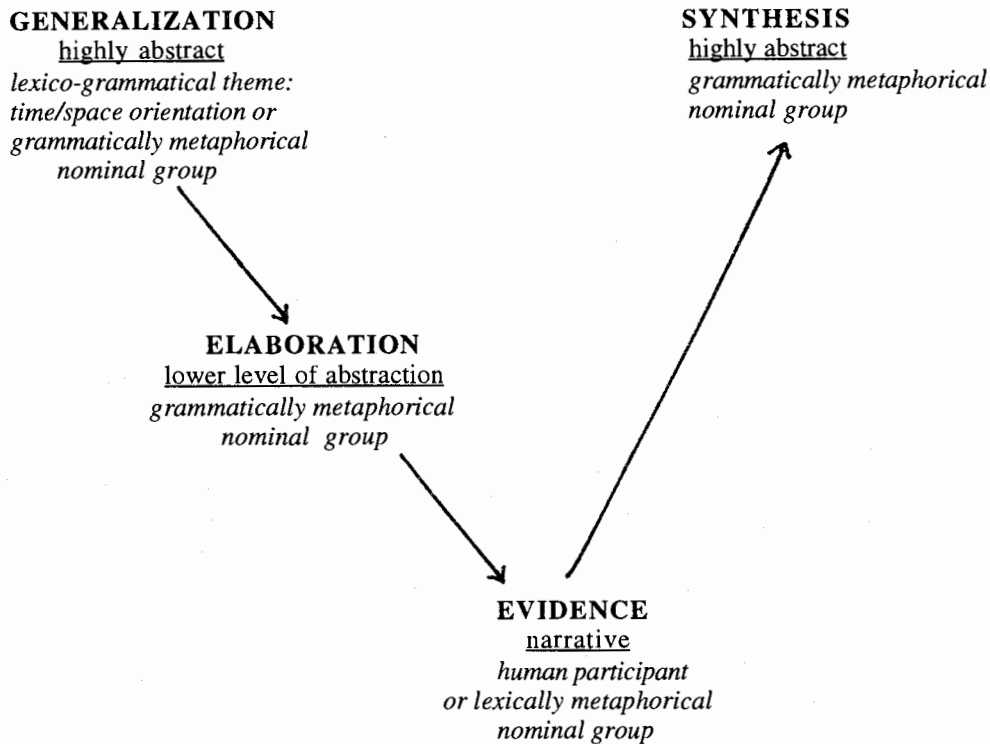
However, not all convoluted sentences with unsuccessful embedding and torturous subordination can be blamed on plagiarism. Taylor rightly argues that 'inadequate English is often the product of an insecure understanding'. This is particularly problematic for student writers who so often write at the edge of their knowledge, who rely on a narrow, second-hand recount of the evidence and who are all too aware of the inadequacy of their own capacity to contextualize their argument. Writers in such a predicament face the constant temptation to lapse into 'dependably factual' material or to use generalizations formulated by other writers as dependably factual. Few students constantly monitor the validity of these generalizations, particularly as often the same source text supplies them with both the detail and the conclusion. The apprentice historians, pre-occupied with content relevance and with the respectability of their sources, will often show little sensitivity to the language used, and so their notionally relevant but incoherent discourse meets with the criticism of being 'poorly argued'.

#### **What are the implications for study advisers?**

At first year level, discipline teachers show a condescending tolerance of linguistic looseness. In our essays, surface lexical and grammatical considerations appeared to be substantially less operational in the assessment than questions of relevance to the macro-issues of the essay. I would suggest that third year students would not be so indulgently treated. Tutors prioritise their expectations, but they do not see relevance only in terms of subject matter. They object to 'woolly style' and explain '(this essay) falls down because it's so badly written'. They are not asking explicitly for the relevance of one clause to another, but they react against the absence of generalisations, their haphazard ordering and the borrowing from different genres.

Understandings about the nature of the historical dialectic are rarely made explicit in either the history texts that students read or in the lectures and tutorials where it is modelled. The sort of textual analysis that we have engaged in here is not in the province of most historians. It more appropriately falls within the ambit of academic support with its pre-occupation with the potential in different language forms. Lack of control of appropriate forms rebounds on the meanings that students can successfully create. Specific discipline literacy involves knowing what may be said; in history, if the language of generalisation is not controlled it is close to impossible to create the interpretations which are so basic to the discipline.

For teachers of academic literacy, an understanding of metaphor, both lexical and grammatical, as a powerful tool of generalisation can be highly productive. When we explain historical argument to students, we can offer them discourse patterns and a sensitivity to what different language choices produce. The topping and tailing model of many of our highly valued paragraphs may become a template for beginner writers, somewhat like Swales' scientific introduction moves.



This topping and tailing model is, of course, a simplification of historical discourse patterns, but it can be useful to beginner historians. Similarly, other academic discourses have characteristic patterns which could be usefully explicated to students. By alerting students to such potentially useful patterns, by explaining how participants, processes and relationships can be linguistically manipulated and the potential meanings created, study advisers can productively complement the work of discipline tutors. Within academic courses, students are advised on what to ask, what evidence is legitimate, what conclusions are consistent. We can offer them options on how to realize those questions and judgements.

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## ACADEMIC AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS TAUGHT IN SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING COURSES

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### ABSTRACT

Academic and communication skills which are essential for all courses are often not explicitly taught within those courses. One of these skills is written communication. We propose that the teaching of these skills can be integrated into mainstream science and engineering courses. Three examples are presented here. They range from a one-off lecture / seminar and follow-up tutorials to all students undertaking study in either of the first-year Biology subjects, to a series of workshops for Psychology students, to a 13 week compulsory course on the use of language for Engineering students. The success of these courses on the professional and academic use of English within a science context can be attributed largely to the integration of the teaching within mainstream courses and the subsequent value placed on them by the teaching staff and the students.

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### **Introduction**

The tertiary system has often been likened to a foreign country where, though English is the principal language, it is often spoken and written in unusual ways. Furthermore, there are traditions and customs which are unfamiliar to the newcomer. In order to communicate effectively in this "new country" the student is required to assimilate and adapt to these new cultures (Brugger, in Beasley, 1985). The acquisition of this new language and associated communication skills may be seen as part of the hidden curriculum of tertiary education and as such is not normally made explicit. The inherent difficulties associated with tertiary study may be further exacerbated when assumptions are made by the teaching staff as to the level of preparedness of their students. This is particularly the case for those students who have gained entrance to university Science courses by means other than the traditional route. There are external pressures on universities to produce the highest quality science graduates (Stockwell and Associates, 1992). Within a professionally directed discipline such as Engineering the profession insists upon a high level of literacy and communication.

This report will focus on the teaching of academic and communication skills within mainstream courses by academic learning advisers in the Language and Learning Unit at Flinders University. The objective is to facilitate the progress of students through their courses while also providing them with the necessary skills to become effective members of the scientific community, effective communicators generally and participants in life-long learning.

It is clear that three elements are necessary in the adoption of any integrated skills programme. They are:

- *the active participation of the discipline.*  
The discipline must make the skills programme an integral element of the course by supporting it at the planning, teaching and evaluation levels;
- *the use of authentic materials*  
A programme should be directly relevant to student needs;
- *the incorporation of student-based strategies*  
Understanding should be developed by leading students to discover the better approaches themselves.

In varying degrees these approaches are incorporated in all the work presented. A review of three Science and Engineering programmes at Flinders will highlight where these elements are most evident. The subsequent

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sections will describe the programmes, show the integration of skills within the mainstream subject and indicate the evidence of success.

## **ENGINEERING**

### **Description of Programme**

The most tightly integrated programme with which the Language and Learning Unit has been involved within an award course is the first year Engineering topic, Engineering Systems I. There are four components of this first year subject: Introduction to Engineering, Engineering Project, Application Software and Language in Use (Downing, Notley, Priest, Trigg, Walker, 1993). Central to the topic as a whole is the Engineering project. Students work in multi-disciplinary teams on a project orientated towards a feasibility assessment, such as waste water management, the extension of an airport runway or nuclear waste disposal. For each project group this culminates in a combined written formal report and a seminar presentation. Introduction to Engineering provides the students with a broad and general introduction to theories, ideas and concepts related to Engineering and Application Software introduces the students to computing and in particular to software which they can use in their project. The unit has sole responsibility for the teaching of Language in Use.

Language in Use consists of a weekly two hour seminar for groups of twenty students. This part of the topic aims to develop students' awareness of language as a basic form of communication. It aims to improve the skills of logical thinking, critical reflection and the use of language for a range of professional purposes.

It is an interactive course in which students are encouraged to participate in several ways. They are asked to reflect on past communicative experiences and to evaluate those areas which need further development. They are required to interact with other members of the group and lecturers in order to appraise and evaluate issues of communication. They observe others and become participants in the process of different forms of communication.

### **Integration**

The emphasis is development of the students' written and oral communication skills within the context of Engineering. Students are required to complete the following tasks: an article review, a memo and letter, an individual formal report, an oral presentation and a written academic argument. Most of the work (content and skills) is directly related to the other components of the topic and in particular to the group project which forms a large part of the assessment for Engineering Systems I. For example, the articles for the review are selected from current Engineering journals, the memo, letter and report are related directly to the project and the oral presentation and written academic argument are based on Engineering topics. Skills learned are directly linked to requirements in the other components of the topic and communication skills needed as future Engineers. Engineering materials and examples are used in the teaching of this component.

### **Evidence of Success**

The success and strength of this teaching experience is due to the close integration of the Language in Use component with the Engineering course. The central project holds the four components together. Formal evaluations have been done on two levels: a review by staff and students of the whole topic and student evaluations of the teaching of Language in Use.

Staff and a group of students met to evaluate the whole topic. Overall they were very happy with the progress and success of the topic. Downing et al. (1993) in a review of this topic commented that, 'Students appreciated its real world relevance, and the opportunity to work in teams and develop communication skills'.

A Student Evaluation of Teaching, a formal questionnaire used by the University of Adelaide and Flinders University of SA, was given to all Language in Use groups. The evaluations were favourable and in response to a question about the best aspect of the course the three most frequent comments made by students were:

- Language in Use provided an opportunity to learn and practise writing styles which are used in the real world, are relevant to engineering in general and to other parts of Engineering Systems I.

- Students liked the way this part of the topic was presented. In particular they liked the group work and the relaxed atmosphere of the class which encouraged participation and built confidence. One student commented that 'the method of lecturing of read, discuss and try was an effective and enjoyable way to learn'.
- Students found the preparation and presentation of oral talks very valuable.

## **BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES**

### **Description of programme**

There are two first-year Biology subjects, Biology 1 and Perspectives in Biology, which are targeted at different audiences, though the content is very much the same. The first mentioned is for students enrolled in a BSc program and the latter for students in a BA program. Both groups of students can major in Biology.

For both groups, a one-off lecture / tutorial was given in an afternoon or evening 3 hour laboratory session with approximately 40 students in each group. The general topic under discussion was scientific writing and in particular, aspects related to the writing of two essays which account for 17% of the total assessment for the subject.

For the students enrolled in Perspectives in Biology two follow up tutorials were run. The first of these was an exercise in de-construction of two representative student essays written in a previous year. In the final session other academic staff members were invited to speak about their approach to a specific essay topic. The ideas presented were then summarised.

### **Integration**

This programme was integrated into the mainstream in two ways. It fulfilled the direct needs of the students using authentic materials and it developed student based strategies.

During the initial session specific topics were discussed which were directly related to the task at hand. Examples came from previous years and also from the current essay questions. The topics discussed were: analysis of the essay question, reading and analysis of scientific literature, construction of an argument, use of language in a scientific context and use of reference material.

For the exercise in essay deconstruction two student essays from previous years were chosen. The essays were selected such that one had a minimal passing grade ( possible fail ) and the second was at the level of credit to low distinction. In each case this grade was unknown to the students in the tutorial. They were asked to read the essays before the tutorial and to grade the second of these, and also to defend their assessment. Firstly the students were asked how they would compare the two essays. Most, if not all, of the students rated the second essay as the superior ( as indeed it was ). However most students also found the first to be a " good essay ". Their assessment of the quality of the first essay was based on the following aspects that they thought were well done: length and format, diagrams and illustrations, reference list, headings and sub-headings, the question answered, main points summarised and a conclusion.

This de-construction assignment was most illuminating. During the group discussion on the points raised above the students began to realise that each of these "positive" factors was in fact poorly or superficially done. Apart from initially starting the dialogue, little input was required by the group leader as the students began to discuss more critically the content of the essay.

### **Evaluation**

The effectiveness of the program was evaluated in several ways from both the teaching staff and student perspective. Firstly, students were encouraged to seek help or advice during the preparation of the essays and to discuss any aspects of the programme which were not clear to them. Both the presenter of the programme and Biology staff responsible for marking were available for consultation. Secondly, a statistical comparison of the

essay results for 1994 and 1993 was made. For both essays the mean raw score for 1994 was higher than the corresponding score for 1993 with a statistical significance for only one of the essays as shown below:

Essay 1 :  $t(614) = 2.58^*$ ,  $p < 0.005$   
Essay 2 :  $t(520) = 1.90$ ,  $0.05 < p < 0.10$  .

Thirdly, a survey of comments made by the essay markers was conducted using as a reference the pro-forma marking sheet. This gave a clear indication as to the types of things that the students did well and also those areas that were not well done. For example it was found that students used reference material successfully, compiled reference lists, used figures and data and subdivided their essays suitably. That is, they performed the more mechanical tasks adequately. What was found to be less well done was the analytical evaluation of the reference material and its use in the construction of a coherent argument, a clear and concise statement about the aims of the essay and a conclusion relating back to the aims. The final form of evaluation was a debriefing session with the markers and course coordinators and concurrent planning for 1995.

The strength of the programme was its immediate relevance to both staff and students. The staff feel that the teaching of a series of related skills is important to future biologists in particular and to scientists in general. The students know that essay writing skills are regarded as an important part of the subject because they are an assessable component and are of value to them in other areas of study.

The input from each of the evaluation experiences has led to a suitably modified version of the program which will run in 1995. This will include extra formal teaching sessions, greater emphasis on those areas of perceived weakness and a different time frame for running the programme.

## PSYCHOLOGY

### Description of programme

This project began in 1993 when a Psychology staff member, who had been given major responsibility for the first year workshop programme, surveyed his students and found many were anxious about their study skills. Consequently he spoke with the Unit about his results and a skills programme within the first year course was suggested.

At a discipline meeting we discovered no opportunity existed to include skills in the teaching programme as it was scheduled. So four workshop sessions covering lecture noting, reading, library research and exam preparation were organised for the mid semester break. Attendance was voluntary with between 20 and 30 students attending each session. Feedback was favourable and a further, more integrated, skills programme was planned for 1994.

Over several staff meetings elements were designed to be included in a revised psychology curriculum. The discipline decided to make one of the three weekly lectures a focus on techniques and methods and to put more workshop emphasis on skills for beginning students. This was where the Unit was to be involved.

The Psychology Discipline at Flinders University accepts students enrolled in the BA and the BSc degrees and works on a lecture and workshop basis. Four hundred students attend lectures and are divided into groups of about 20 to attend weekly workshops. The discipline runs an *initial workshop* early in the week which consists of a student group as well as all tutors who will be leading workshops later in the week. Different expert staff take responsibility for elements of the initial workshop which fall within their areas of expertise. In an initial workshop one staff member may talk about the ethical principles behind data collection while another shows how to use statistical models. The Unit's involvement with Psychology was to lead parts of the initial tutorial directed to lecture noting, reading and comprehension, and (later in the semester) exam preparation.

After the initial tutorial all first year tutoring staff debriefed over lunch, discussing how the initial tutorial could be improved and how they might adapt the material and its delivery for their groups later in the week; handouts were distributed and other matters discussed. The tutoring staff then taught the material of the initial workshop to their own workshop groups.

## **Integration**

This programme was linked to the discipline's requirements in two ways: by close liaison with teaching staff at all stages and by the use of authentic materials.

The liaison with staff has been described above. Briefly, discussion occurred at staff meetings before implementing the programme to understand staff requirements; sessions were planned in collaboration with academic staff; material was presented to all workshop teaching staff; and a debriefing session was held.

In all sessions in which the Unit participated authentic materials were used and students were introduced to learning strategies appropriate to the topic. The subject matter for the first session was lecture material from the introductory lecture the previous week. The set task was for students to produce notes from the following lecture that would be comprehensible so that in the next workshop they could interpret and reconstruct the lecture as a group activity.

Several readings were selected from the text book for close reading and comprehension. The first year coordinator assisted by developing the comprehension questions. Comprehension skills were practised several times before a comprehension competency test was undertaken in class as a compulsory non-graded task. In all reading exercises Psychology I text book material relevant to the current lecture programme was used so that work done on comprehension skills development contributed also to the understanding of course lecture content. In the examination workshop discipline staff were asked about their expectations for students and indicated some common student difficulties in writing examination scripts. The focus was on the style of questions used in Psychology examinations.

This programme was characterised by involving discipline staff at all stages, using relevant course materials and having students learn through direct practice about better learning.

## **Evidence of success**

The benefit of this method of collaboration is that discipline staff see Unit learning strategies and teaching methodology which they can adapt to their own teaching. With work linked so closely to course content, skills development was easily integrated. The Psychology discipline already puts much effort into providing its first year students with skills for a demanding degree programme. The potential exists for the discipline to "own" its skills development entirely, incorporating the Unit's approaches and materials and reducing the Unit's involvement because all first year teaching staff watch all the workshops.

No formal student evaluation has as yet been undertaken of the Unit's skills elements in the Psychology I programme but success can be measured in less tangible ways. Good collegial relations with staff have been established. This is essential to promote learning strategies based on a developmental educational model. Staff have expressed satisfaction which can be measured by an invitation to be involved again in 1995. For the Unit another indication of success is a lessening of individual consultations with Psychology I students. The indirect contact with 400 students through a handful of skills workshops is a better utilisation of Unit staff considering our limited time.

## **CONCLUSION**

In work with Science and Engineering disciplines communication and academic skills have been integrated successfully into mainstream courses. The reason for the success of these programmes is due to the direct relevance to both teaching staff and students. Staff are consulted, authentic materials are used and students participate actively in the programmes.

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## A CASE STUDY OF AN ADJUNCT PROGRAM: ENGLISH FOR FIRST-YEAR ENGINEERING STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

This paper describes *English for First Year Engineers*, a course developed in conjunction with Engineering Communications staff, which has been running since 1991. The program was initiated in response to the perceived communication needs of Engineering students at all levels of their course, particularly NESB students. It was thought desirable to target first year students, both to improve their skills, and to raise their awareness of the communication demands of their chosen profession. Although the course takes place in first year, the rationale of the program is to expose students to some of the communication demands of graduate engineers, as well as assisting them to understand the demands of academic discourse. Over the last three years, we have worked at integrating the content of the Language and Learning Services program with the content of the mainstream subject, but providing a more language oriented focus and timed so that, each week, students have the language class before the mainstream class. We require students to produce a writing folio and an oral presentation, as well as contribute to discussions. The program recognises the heavy workload of Engineering students, and participation and achievement are rewarded in the form of a percentage of marks towards the subject. The advantages and disadvantages of this approach to the teaching of the discourse are pointed out.

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### 1. Rationale

The course was initially developed in 1991 in response to a request from the then co-ordinator of the first-year subject, Engineering Communication (ENC1001). He asked staff of Language and Learning Services (LLS) at Caulfield campus to identify those students who would most benefit from a supplementary or adjunct program linked to the mainstream subject which would develop the writing and speaking skills required to pass the subject. There was, and still is, a wider concern expressed by Engineering staff with regard to students' communication skills, specifically in oral work and report writing. Allied to this was a staff perception that students have a limited understanding of the role of an engineer and the significance of effective communication. This was registered by LLS staff as a need for students to become initiated into the engineering discourse community in order to understand and use its modes of communication (Harris, 1983; Matelene, 1989; Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993). There was also an awareness of the importance placed on communication by the Institute of Engineers, together with evidence from a number of surveys of employers that there is dissatisfaction with the communication skills of many graduates from professional disciplines. Added to this was anecdotal evidence that a number of non-English speaking background engineering graduates seeking employment had difficulty progressing past the interview stage.

### 2. Structural constraints

The success of the *English for Engineers* program has largely been influenced by the interest and commitment of the participating students. Therefore, structural constraints which affect student motivation have been considered and are integral to the program design. For instance, the heavy workload of first year students means there is little time available during the day for non-credit bearing programs, regardless of the students' desire to improve their communication. Collaboration with Engineering staff has thus been vital in ensuring the *English for Engineers* classes did not clash with other classes and that they were held at the most suitable time for the students.

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In dealing with first year students, we realised that some form of incentive would be useful to encourage the students to value such a program as the work-load from other subjects increased. Therefore, participating students were eligible for a bonus towards their final result for the mainstream subject.

### **3. Program focus**

With a new co-ordinator of the subject in 1993-1994, it was possible to integrate the adjunct program even more closely with the content of ENC1001, but focussing on language and communication issues in relation to both academic and professional needs (Mathes & Stevenson, 1976; Woods & Feuerstein, 1980; Williams, Swales & Kirkman, 1984; Young & Fulwiler, 1986). This took the form of explication of key written and spoken discourse types for engineering such as writing up experiments, writing case study reports, interviewing, working in a team. In each class there were both a spoken and a written component, usually linked: for example, devising a dialogue with a partner which acted out some part of the case study "narrative", using colloquial language as appropriate, followed by instruction on introductions for case studies with students discussing how the interactions could be incorporated into the written form, then drafting the "moves" which would then be completed for the next session.

### **4. Implementation**

There is no compulsion for any student to attend the *English for Engineers* program. However, attendance is highly recommended to particular students, and recommended to others. These recommendations are made following a screening test (involving reading and writing) given in the lecture for the mainstream subject to all students in the second week of the semester. In 1994, 21 students were recommended, while 9 were highly recommended. In all, 31 students attended one of the two groups at least once. Twenty students completed the program, of whom 12 were international and 8 local NESB.

Of the 10% towards the final mark for the mainstream subject awarded by the *English for Engineers* program, 2% was allocated for attendance, 3% for the oral presentation, 2% for contribution to discussion in the classes and 3% for the writing folio.

### **5. General description of program**

The two classes ran for one hour over a period of eight weeks. Each class included both speaking and writing segments and these were co-ordinated with the topic. In this way, speaking and writing had a purpose and the students were able to appreciate this in the engineering workplace. Therefore, students were developing communication skills as well as an appreciation of the professional role of an engineer.

For speaking, topics included oral presentations where students gave short presentations to the class. These were also peer evaluated. Colloquial language was also featured in the context of a case study the students studied in the mainstream subject. We are aware that students, particularly international, must contend with colloquial language in lectures and in conversations with Australian peers; it is vital that the local NESB students are familiar with it in preparation for the workplace. Role play was a useful pedagogical tool.

Students were given team situations and asked to devise appropriate language. In so doing, they became aware of group dynamics, the need to maintain harmonious working relationships, the unequal power relationships of supervisors and workers and the effects of these features on use of language. Students were given the opportunity to practise "thinking on their feet" as well as influencing and persuading others. Discussion of group dynamics and meeting procedures prefaced activities on speaking in meetings.

For writing, areas covered included memo, minutes and report writing, writing dialogues, writing up experiments, critiques of articles, and forming arguments. Students were also required to keep a folio of the written exercises completed in the program for assessment at the end of the semester. We asked the students to present the folios with contents page, introduction, conclusion and recommendations.

## 6. Pedagogy

Pedagogically, the program is based on, first, the need to develop student awareness of the importance of sound communication skills and, second, the need to integrate the content tightly with the mainstream subject. Regular consultation was conducted with subject lecturers to ensure material was kept relevant. In addressing the issue of developing students' awareness of the relevance of communication skills, we realised that students should enjoy the program. This also served another purpose in that it tended to negate the structural constraint of heavy student workload. If students enjoyed the classes, they continued attending. At the same time, however, we were careful to maintain standards and the focus was therefore not on lowering our objectives but on using appropriate pedagogy.

Classes were made as verbally interactive as possible. Our initial impressions of the students' oral communication were that they often responded in key words only, rather than using longer stretches of discourse. We emphasised group and pair work as a means of encouraging more extensive communication. As Webb (1990:48) has pointed out, group discussion provides a situation where the students can talk "between equals". This is important to counteract the impositions on students' use of language that can occur in educational contexts where there are unequal power relations between teacher and students.

There are other pedagogical benefits of group work. Research has indicated that co-operative learning/collaborative effort has positive effects on student learning. (Humphreys, Johnson and Johnson, 1982) As Ramsden (1992:102) has also pointed out, group work fosters independence and control in students and is the type of teaching that permits "control by the learner". He comments that "the students not only learn better, but they enjoy learning more" (p. 102). Clearly, in a communication subject, the form of the sessions should complement the content: that is, the classes should enable communication.

In keeping with our objective of improving students' communication skills, immediate feedback from the lecturer on student efforts was important (Leki, 1992). Assessment thus incorporated formative and summative measures. Students could also "peer comment", thus encouraging less confident students to contribute and gain constructive feedback. Groups were also invited to choose a group member who presented a summary of responses to the class. Responses were thus constantly shaped/corrected by group and class members and the teacher.

Our presentation of material was influenced by what we took to be the cognitive preferences of engineering students: the visual was therefore emphasised as much as possible. For example, in discerning the structure/organisation of ideas of a piece of writing, tree diagrams were used. Videos were often used to elaborate on non verbal and prosodic aspects of communication.

## 7. Role of course in relation to engineering communication

The *English for Engineers* program and the materials generated from it are becoming well-known in the School of Engineering. Booklets produced in conjunction with Engineering staff, *Oral Presentations for Engineering* and *Report Writing for Engineering Students*, have been designated as recommended texts in the Engineering Handbook, have been distributed to all students and are on Reserve in the Library. Each year these texts have been revised with input from Engineering staff. In 1994, both adjunct program lecturers attended ENC1001 staff meetings and were markers for the examination.

## 8. Evaluation

Students attending the adjunct course succeeded well in ENC1001: 13 PASS; 7 CREDIT. None who attended more than two of the sessions failed the subject.

*Quantitative:* 62.5% of the students rated the course at 6 or 7 (out of 7); the rest rated it at 5.

*Qualitative:* all who completed the evaluation form indicated interest in attending further sessions. Some commented that they would have liked more on exam strategies.

## 9. Future

The program is to continue in 1995 and there is talk of the possible development of a text book from the booklets in conjunction with engineering staff.

Staff development sessions on dealing with NESB writing have been suggested by the head of School. These could cover 1) *Assessing Oral Presentations*; 2) *Teaching International and NESB Students* (staff/student expectations, differing learning patterns and styles, interacting/consulting with international students, language and levels of formality, dealing with non-standard spoken English); 3) *The Writing of International and NESB Students* (designing assignment tasks, providing style sheets/standards of presentation, attitudes to knowledge and authority, acknowledging sources, critical thinking, different varieties of English, annotation of assignments).

## 10. Advantages and disadvantages of this approach to the teaching of the discourse

### *Advantages*

- Σ Motivation assisted by bonus marks for subject.
- Σ Focussed teaching: program targeted at those ESL students whose comprehension and written English is weaker. This does not indicate any academic weakness as such, merely that these students may have difficulty with a subject which evaluates expression.
- Σ High staff-student ratio and emphasis on interaction enables intensive teaching and learning.
- Σ Some input into assessment which can influence assessment issues in relation to ESL.

### *Disadvantages*

- Σ Additional time required from students.
- Σ Occasional difficulties in achieving understanding with mainstream lecturers re objectives, methods, assessment.
- Σ Difficulty in getting sufficient and timely information from mainstream lecturers.
- Σ Time required for planning and administration.

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## **STUDY SKILLS ASSISTANCE TO FIRST-YEAR ENGINEERING STUDENTS AT JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY OF NORTH QUEENSLAND**

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### ABSTRACT

Concern at the high failure and dropout rates among first-year Engineering students resulted in the development of a joint project between the Faculty of Engineering and the Academic Skills Advisers. As part of this project students who were deemed to be at-risk were offered assistance in developing effective study skills during the first year of their course.

The project was open to all First Year Engineering students but a target group of 27 students were particularly encouraged to attend. Selection for this target group was based on matriculation results. The program consisted of a series of lunchtime study groups held throughout the year. The sessions covered such things as motivation, time organization, Maths problem solving and effective notetaking techniques.

Twenty students attended at least one of the group study sessions and of these ten were from the target group. Two questionnaire surveys were carried out during the year and these indicated that those attending found the assistance useful. The surveys gave some useful feedback about some of the First Year courses and these were passed on to the lecturers concerned. Another useful spinoff from the project was a significant increase in the number of Engineering students seeking assistance from the Academic Skills Advisers.

The project confirmed what we already suspected - that at the beginning of the year many First Year Engineering students have no idea of what University study involves. Many students need assistance with things such as study organization and notetaking.

The major recommendation from the study is that next year teaching of study skills be incorporated into one of the First Year Engineering subjects.

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This paper describes a joint project between the Academic Skills Advisers and the Faculty of Engineering to provide study skills assistance to First Year Engineering students. There are three Academic Skills Advisers at James Cook University (all half-time appointments) covering three target areas of Sciences, Humanities and English as a Second Language(ESL). Over the past four years the Academic Skills Advisers (ASAs) have become more pro-active in their approach. The ASAs have endeavoured to identify areas where students are experiencing difficulties and have organized study groups to address these needs.

Past experience has been that Engineering students do not readily seek assistance with their study skills. In recent times there have been high failure and dropout rates in First Year Engineering. The joint project described in this paper aims to address this situation.

Three goals were established for the project in 1994. These were

1. To provide appropriate assistance to First Year Engineering students in 1994 who, from their academic record on entry, were deemed to be "at-risk".
  2. To monitor the effectiveness of this assistance over the year and carry out an evaluation at the end of the year.
  3. To ascertain at the end of 1994 what assistance it would be appropriate to offer these students in subsequent years of their programs.
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The assistance given to students was in the form of a series of lunchtime sessions on study skills conducted by Peter Hanley, the Academic Skills Adviser for Sciences. It was decided that the evaluation of the project would take the form of a questionnaire survey carried out towards the end of each semester.

### **Implementation of the project**

Before the commencement of the project it was agreed that the study skills sessions be open to all First Year students but that a target group of "at-risk" students be particularly encouraged to attend. The project commenced with the presentation of two sessions on study skills to the entire First Year group. An invitation was then extended to all First Year students to attend the lunchtime sessions which commenced the following week. A list of "at-risk" students was made based on matriculation results and these 27 students were given special invitations.

Twelve students attended at least one of the lunchtime sessions in Semester 1 and of these five were from the target group. Average weekly attendance was between four and six. Topics covered included motivation, time organization, Maths problem solving and effective notetaking techniques. Most of the regular attenders were mature age students who found that the sessions provided a good opportunity for the group to come together to discuss study problems.

In Week 8 a questionnaire was given to students and some interesting discussion followed on their experiences to that point in time. All shared the experience of feeling overwhelmed by the volume of new work and reported that on occasions they found it difficult to get motivated.

The students gave feedback on a number of their subjects. No course overview had been given for several of their subjects. Several complained that the lack of an overview prevented them from reading ahead in preparation for lectures.

In one subject the practical sessions were so packed with content that students felt there was no time to make sense of what they were doing. They found as a result that they were going through the motions without really understanding the material being given. In several other subjects students had the distinct impression that staff had not adequately prepared for their lectures. This feedback was taken by the Dean and verbally conveyed to relevant staff members where appropriate.

It was decided to continue the lunchtime study sessions into Semester 2.

The numbers attending the sessions in Semester 2 were similar but the make-up of the group was quite different. Most were school leavers who had done badly in the Semester 1 exams and who were attending on the strong recommendation of the Dean. The six regular attenders were all in the category of "at-risk" students. The content of the sessions in Semester 2 was decided by the students and included such things as problem solving, notetaking, summarization and exam preparation.

A questionnaire was given out to participating students in Week 8. The purpose of this questionnaire was to get feedback on the study sessions and to find out what these students found most difficult about University study.

All students found the study sessions to be helpful. The responses to the questionnaire and the subsequent discussion confirmed something that we already suspected - many first year Engineering students at the beginning of First Semester had no idea of what University study involved. In the words of one student "In Week 1 we were told that we should be doing 40 hours work per week - but doing what?"

Students suggested a number of areas in which assistance would have been useful. These included strategies to help them cope with the workload and manage time, help with setting goals and planning, notetaking skills and assistance with understanding some of the concepts introduced in lectures.

### **Conclusion**

The project resulted in a much greater exposure of First Year Engineering students to study skills than has ever occurred before. The twenty students who attended the lunchtime study sessions indicated that they found the assistance to be useful. Another useful spinoff from the project was a significant increase in the number of Engineering students seeking individual assistance from the Academic Skills Advisers. The collaborative interaction between the Advisers and teaching Academics was also viewed as beneficial.

It was disappointing that only ten of the target group of "at-risk" students attended the lunchtime sessions as others in this group would have benefitted from study skills assistance. A decision has yet to be made about continuing assistance for this group next year.

**Recommendations for 1995**

Based on this year's experiences it is recommended that in 1995 study skills be incorporated into one of the first year subjects.

There are several ways this might occur. The first would be to have the direct input of an Academic Skills Adviser into the first year lectures. The second approach is for one of the subject lecturers to teach the study skills with assistance from the Academic Skills Advisers. The second approach is favoured as the study skills material can then be integrated into the course and will then be less easily seen by students as an optional extra.

It is also recommended that weekly study sessions be held next year for First Year students deemed to be "at-risk" and that people in this target group receive a letter from the Dean strongly recommending that they attend.

## PANEL DISCUSSION: BRIEF CONTRIBUTIONS

(Note: Each of the following seven panel members had five minutes to speak. Since questions were allowed, the pace of this one-hour session was very fast. It attracted over 80 conference participants and comments at the end indicated that this sort of session - perhaps one and a half hours long - is appreciated for the range it covers and, as one person put it, the 'sense of dynamic energy' it engenders. What follows are presentation notes, left in their informal form in order to convey some of the flavour of the session. -- Valerie Burley, Chair)

### THE DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC LIBRARY ORIENTATION TOUR

( *Panel Session* )

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#### ABSTRACT

The library tour with passive students following a librarian around a large library has evolved into a 'do it yourself' activity for some students at La Trobe University. Students are provided with a printed tour guide and a number of questions directed at locating and examining resources related to their course, e.g. subject dictionaries, key journals etc. A survey of one group of students has indicated a positive response to this method of orientation to the library's collections and services.

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#### **Introduction:**

Students tag along on a 'generic' library tour because they have been told to do a tour (by whom?)

Many students : -are overwhelmed with information from everyone during the first few weeks of the semester  
-have already bought the 'necessary' textbooks  
-have no reading list to work from  
-have attended few, if any, tutorials or lectures.

#### **PURPOSE OF LIBRARY TOUR:**

We 'do it' to: -familiarize students with a new environment - the culture of the university  
-create a 'comfort zone' and reduce anxiety.

Librarians have often been guilty of using the captive audience to tell them everything you want them to know over three years, or even maybe make librarians out of them.

#### **EVALUATION & RESULTS**

At the end of 1988, a review was made of the practice of 'what we do or should do to orientate students to the Library'. We considered what we wanted them to know, what they needed to know, what they wanted to know, what we could do effectively with limited resources, especially lack of staff and their ability to cope with the computer catalogue (translating reading list references into the computer).

The conclusion was that students wanted:

- to see what they needed for their own courses
- to explore the 'things' they were interested in (evident from their questions).

We wanted to assist all students with:

- catalogue use
- differences between book and journal article references
- coping with the referencing e.g. typographical errors, uncommon conventions, abbreviations which are used or NOT USED in the academic discourse (not yet known by first year students) and are not recognised by the computer catalogue.

WE WANTED THE FIRST EXPERIENCE IN USING THE LIBRARY TO BE SUCCESSFUL (A MARKETING EXPERIENCE - CREATING THE SATISFIED USER; THEY RETURN!). We recognised that using a large university library represented a culture different from public libraries and school libraries to most of the students.

The result was to:

- roster librarians at catalogue terminals daily for the first weeks of the semester ensuring success and help on their first visit
- offer demonstrations of using the computer catalogue for students who were willing to attend a class
- provide a 'do-it-yourself' tour for those students who wanted a tour and for the academic staff who wanted their students to do a tour.

These options enabled librarians to:

- assist more returning students (remember the first weeks in March at a university are like the Christmas sales - everyone arrives at the same time!)
- prepare for classes related to specific assignments or follow-ups to the 'do-it-yourself' tours at a suitable time - before essays are due
- prepare handouts such as those which relate to finding book reviews, manuals available for referencing and subject inclusive material
- have the opportunity to observe how students used our catalogue - difficulties encountered (this provided us with information for improving the catalogue and for improving classroom instruction in the library).

#### **and the discipline specific library tour - what has happened to it?**

The printed 'do-it-yourself' tour is generic - walk around and find collections and services. Hopefully it motivates students to ask questions.

The tour with option of assistance in preparing an exercise was offered to academics who had used library exercises to assist students or who had required students to do a tour first (1989) and later to all academic staff. This was the result of the experience of librarians who had students actively involved in using the card catalogue to find call numbers, titles, but felt that something had been missing -

#### **RELATION OF THE TOUR TO THE DISCIPLINE CHOSEN BY THE STUDENT.**

The questions to be answered while doing the tour required students to:

- find subject dictionaries
- find books at several different call numbers in the collection
- find journal articles
- write references according to the stated convention (example provided)
- find other material as dictated by the course.

The tailor made interactive library tour evolved. The questions are preferably devised in collaboration with the academic staff. The tour is tailored to the immediate needs of the students and to making the task useful without being time-consuming. Some academics devise their own series of questions without consultation; others have us comment on their questions to avoid bottle-necks; and still others use our exercise which they check.

Findings of continuous evaluation include:

- students concentrated on answering questions (product) not doing the tour (process)
- majority found tour useful
- better & brief instructions are needed (they don't read them - concentrate on answering questions)
- none wanted a personal tour
- useful for other subjects
- some wanted to find call number in the catalogue (this was avoided because it does not relate to goal; and unnecessary queues would occur at catalogue terminals in addition to making the 'tour' longer)
- introduction of tour and/or exercise by librarian or tutor and a follow-up, to answer questions, clarify policies and procedures is recommended
- useful for quality assurance.

### **PITFALLS (BACKFIRE)**

- Using the same title for all students to answer a question means the book is not available after a short time; it is damaged or it is hidden.
- Questions such as counting how many computer catalogue terminals are in the library may encourage students to walk around the building but will discourage them from using the library!
- Doing a tour/exercise for every subject enrolled in indicates the popularity of the concept can produce negative reactions from students who are required to do the tour/exercise more than once. The primary goal is to reduce anxiety and provide exposure to different resources. Some academics will not accept the familiarisation tour/exercise completed for another subject meets the primary goal and the secondary goals will not be met for some students.
- Academics may never do the tour/exercise themselves to determine if there are too many questions, how long it takes, how difficult it may be for a first year student, if collections have moved, if procedures and policies have changed.
- Consultation with subject librarians would overcome such problems.
- Carrying the tour guide and question sheet and books is awkward.
- Students concentrate on product not process. (Does it matter for an orientation exercise?)
- In an effort to inform students too much explanation is often mixed in with instructions and questions.
- Many students need examples of referencing conventions included in exercise. Some are able to cope using a style manual.

### **CONCLUSION**

The interactive, tailor made 'do-it-yourself' tour can work for both students and staff, especially when done in consultation. Highly motivated students find such an exercise valuable to their orientation to the university library.

Students who have completed the tour participate more in follow-up library classes. They know locations and collections, they can verbalize the problems they have encountered and they can ask questions for clarification.

### **SURPRISE!**

We have never stopped providing the good old tour. We use it when it suits the need - e.g. mature age students who are highly motivated and respond well to personal attention; international students who need just that little bit extra.

As a result of continuous evaluation of the orientation program for 1995 - the option of doing the library tour (students following the librarian) will be added to the list of library orientation activities. The reason - we are meeting the demand - it is being requested.

Someone may get it right, some day.

## "DO YOU SPEAK ACADEMICALLY?"

(Panel Session)

Alex Barthel, English Language and Study Skills (ELSSA) Centre, University of Technology, Sydney

### ABSTRACT

This presentation will examine some of the difficulties in spoken English faced by university students. Particular emphasis will be placed on the problems of students from differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds. A range of informal and formal academic contexts where spoken language is the main communication channel will be examined, including seminar presentations, tutorial participation, casual conversation and 'administrative negotiations'. The role of formal tuition in spoken communication (at discourse, suprasegmental and segmental level) and several options to integrate spoken discourse into courses will be discussed.

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### **Contexts where spoken language is the main means of communication in a tertiary institution**

- \* administrative negotiations:
  - enrolling into courses
  - changing subjects, etc.
  - making examination arrangements
  - applying for funds, allowances, etc.
  - making appointments (over the counter, on the phone, etc.) with admin staff to see academic staff
- \* semi-formal negotiations:
  - seeking clarification about assignments
  - explaining/justifying written assignments and arguments
- \* formal academic situations:
  - tutorial participation
  - seminar presentations
  - debating/discussing

### **Oral discourse skills required to perform effectively in a tertiary institution**

#### *a) interactional discourse skills in formal, semi-formal and informal academic contexts*

- \* initiating (opening) oral discourse:
    - how to initiate the discourse (elicit, inform, direct, etc.)
    - how to introduce a new point (using verbal and vocal cues)
    - how to introduce a topic (using appropriate micro-functions such as explanation, hypothesis, question)
  - \* maintaining/developing the discourse:
    - how to respond (acknowledge, reply, give feed-back, loop, agree, disagree, etc.)
    - how to continue (add, exemplify, justify, evaluate, etc.)
    - how to adapt, as a result of feedback, especially in mid utterance (amplify, omit, avoid, clarify, reformulate, etc.)
    - how to turn-take (interrupt, challenge, inquire, dove-tail, etc.)
    - how to shift the topic
    - how to mark time (stall, 'breathing-space' formulae, etc.)
    - how to repair in discourse
-

\* terminating (closing) the discourse:

- how to mark boundaries in discourse (verbal and vocal cues)
- how to come out of the discourse (excuse, concede, pass, etc.)
- how to conclude a topic (using appropriate micro-functions such as substantiation and verbal cues for summing up, etc.)

*b) interactional skills at paralinguistic levels*

\* recognising and using non-verbal codes in communication

- gestures
- facial expressions
- proxemics
- eye contact
- posture
- physical contact
- appearance

*c) interactional skills at suprasegmental levels*

\* interpreting and expressing attitudinal meaning through:

- pitch height
- pitch range
- pause
- silence
- speed

\* understanding and producing intonation patterns (distinguishing between 'norms' of English intonation patterns and expressions of variations of attitudes through usage of different tones)

- falling tone
- rising tone
- fall-rise, rise-fall tone

\* recognising and manipulating the use of stress in connected speech

- for emphasis, contrast
- variation in stress, etc.

\* discriminating and articulating stress patterns within words (meaningful accentual patterns, etc.)

*d) interactional skills at segmental levels*

\* discriminating and articulating sounds in connected speech

- strong and weak forms
- reduction of unstressed vowels
- modification of sounds, especially at word boundaries, through:
  - assimilation
  - elision
  - liaison

\* discriminating and articulating sounds in isolate word forms

- phonemes, especially phonemic contrasts
- phonemic sequences
- permissible phonemic variations

**Types of courses available at UTS to develop these skills**

- a) *courses in formal spoken skills:*  
**seminar presentation** (award and non-award)  
**tutorial presentation** groups etc.
  
- b) *courses in semi-formal spoken skills:*  
**speaking workshops** where students are put in situations where they need to transfer written texts to spoken texts and *vice-versa*. The development of students' spoken arguing skills is emphasised.
  
- c) *courses aimed at developing skills at paralinguistic, suprasegmental and segmental levels:*  
**pronunciation classes** which focus on perception and production of paralinguistic and suprasegmental features of spoken English.

## ADAPTING CINEMA STUDIES COURSEWORK TO NESB STUDENTS

*(Panel Session)*

Chris Berry, Cinema Studies, School of Arts and Media, La Trobe University

### ABSTRACT

I teach Japanese Cinema and Chinese Cinema in alternate years at La Trobe. Cross-listing of both subjects in Asian Studies and the latter in Chinese Studies has steadily increased the enrolment of NESB students to the point where as many as half were NESB last time I taught Chinese Cinema. These students have special problems in a subject where nearly all assessment is based on either demonstrating comprehension of readings or writing critical essays on films. To begin to tackle the problem, I added an assessment option, allowing students to choose between a book review essay and filling in a sheet giving short answers to questions on readings each week. In the presentation I will discuss the advantages and pitfalls of my experience, and how I plan to improve on it next year.

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1) I would like to start by observing that there's a certain irony in teaching Cinema Studies, in that our object of study is so visual, yet our mode of study is almost entirely verbal.

2) This is a considerable problem for NESBIAN students and also the growing percentage of English as First Language students with considerable difficulties:

-Almost all assessment in our department is in the form of essay writing. This is particularly difficult for NESBIAN students from educational cultures which stress conformity and reproduction of the text over originality and analysis.

-Preparation for class requires reading 50 pages of what are often highly abstruse theoretical articles per week. I worry about these students' ability to comprehend the material.

-Class instruction itself occurs in the form of one-hour lectures, which supplements rather than repeats the reading materials, stretching their listening comprehension abilities.

3) I teach Japanese and Chinese Cinema as a 2nd/3rd year level subject in alternate years. These classes are cross-listed in other disciplines and now almost 50% of enrolment is NESBIAN students, many of them with less than 3 years experience of instruction in English.

4) Therefore I decided to begin to address these problems in my Chinese Cinema subject earlier this year:

-First, I decided to make extensive use of overheads to summarize and signpost my lectures.

\*This seems to have been helpful in improving listening comprehension.

\*Ideally, I would like to supplement this with more group work in tutorials as a way of getting all students involved and actively making sure they understand what they are learning from week to week.

However, so long as my tutorial consists of 45 students, it will not be possible to do more than a version of the Donahue show.

-Second, I decided to work on the reading comprehension and essay writing difficulties together by adding an option to the first assessment item.

\*Before, this consisted of a review essay in which students were asked to compare two of their readings.

\*The new option allowed students involved converting reading guides which I had already been writing and issuing in the past as a way of helping NESBIAN students.

\*Students were asked to fill in the guides week by week and hand them in for grading at the beginning of the relevant class. Ten guides were issued (I've passed some of them round) and the final grade was an average of their six or seven best marks, which allowed them to make some mistakes at the beginning.

There were definite advantages to this:

- \*It kept NESBIAN students more involved, because the question sheets still functioned as reading guides directing them through the texts, but also because it made them feel they could improve from week to week, rather than allowing them to get lost in the readings, give up, and basically drop out.
- \*It also appealed to many English as First Language students who also have difficulties with the readings.
- \*It ensured a much larger proportion of students had done the readings each week.
- \*Finally, because the question sheets had to be handed in at the beginning of class each week, it meant a larger proportion of students turned up regularly.

However, there are still some problems to overcome:

- \*Students sometimes tended to answer the questions with long quotes from the text in tiny handwriting. I think the answer to this is actually to move towards one-word answer questions and even multiple choice to test reading comprehension.
  
- \*The existing question sheets do not require students to be very critical or analytical in their reading, as they were derived from guides to help comprehension. This develops fewer skills than the review essay option requires, and will have to be addressed with more questions that require independent, short critical answers.
  
- \*I think that if I do this, I can drop the review essay option, and that will gain me the other benefits of this procedure across all students, not just those opting for this item.
  
- \*At this stage, I still have not worked out how to change the second assessment item, a research essay of 3,000 words in a way to help NESBIAN students acquire essay writing skills. The bulk of NESBIAN students are Chinese in background and so I can read what they write in their first language, but that not only doesn't help them improve their English, but it also doesn't help them acquire essay skills they never learnt before

## EMANCIPATORY DISCOURSE IN A LAW PROGRAMME

*(Panel Session)*

Kate Cadman, Language and Learning Unit, Flinders University

### ABSTRACT

A "Language in Law" course run at Monash University as integrated support for International LLM students was initially designed to focus on genre and text: deconstruction of legal language, descriptive grammar, cohesion, the written assignment in law. In practice it emerged, however, that this approach had to be modified to focus on the students themselves: their learning styles, their perspectives, their voices. Their empowerment in this discourse community was not to be facilitated by only teaching about the language; the critical perspective which is vital to this discipline had to be addressed through personal development in written and spoken performance.

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Language in Law was a course which I ran for the Monash University Faculty of Law on behalf of the Monash English Language Teaching Centre, initially to meet the needs of a group of mixed South East Asian AIDAB sponsored students who were proceeding to the degree of Master of Laws by coursework and mini-thesis. Gradually numbers increased to include also PRC, ROC, European and Pacific Island students.

This course was aimed to address the learning processes and course materials demanded by two specific topics in which the students were enrolled and it was designed by myself in consultation with the staff of the faculty. I had a great deal of help from the Dean in charge of International students who specified that the language course consisting of six hours per week should be a compulsory component of the students' timetables. Furthermore he arranged that an 'Interim Task' should be designed jointly by each topic co-ordinator and myself, to preempt major assignments and to be assessed by the topic lecturer. I was asked to design formal assignments and an examination to assess what I had taught.

Course content was initially broken down into three areas, Language Structures, Reading Skills, and Writing Skills; research and library skills were taught by a Law Librarian at a different time. I planned to base assessment on the students' folios of written work employing note-taking from readings, genre-based deconstruction of model assignments with reconstruction after the process writing model using drafting and conferencing techniques.

Despite a great deal of application to all the tasks by both the students and myself (I am not a lawyer!), I began to realize that the skills and, above all, the increased confidence which we were working towards, were not developing as quickly as I had hoped. Gradually I was led to feel that we were concentrating too much on the structures and the discourses of law, and not enough on the personal development of the students as users of English, as initiators of viewpoints from which salient argument could develop.

A typical assignment question from the Insurance Law topic will expose the situation:

**"The purchaser of a house in Victoria is advised to insure the property immediately the contract is signed."**

**Is this advice as true today as it was ten years ago?**

No matter how much reading the students did, how much they played and replayed tapes of the lectures, quizzed the lecturers, plagued the Law Librarians, made endless notes, they could not begin to write. Then when they did (only because they dare not face me any longer), their texts were composed of pages of background material which failed to get down to the business of addressing the question. Extended discussion revealed where the problem lay: simply, they did not know the answer. Coming from a reproductive learning environment and from codified legal systems whose practitioners are experts in memorized knowledge, they were dumbfounded to be advised that a question like this is especially chosen because it has no 'right' answer, in fact that excellence

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and intelligence in writing about the law are assessed on criteria which they had never imagined, much less put into practice.

My own learning curve was of course as great as theirs. The deconstructions of text which we had done, and followed up with writing, had been interpreted by them as tasks to be modelled using consciously applied strategies. When they had to create personal text which depended upon taking up a position and using all the epistemological as well as linguistic processes required to defend that position, those strategies let them down. My course changed in mid-stream. I initiated debates, brainstorming activities, student-run discussion forums, concept mapping and legal role-plays, integrating reading, speaking and writing as much as possible. The primary focus moved from the discourse to the student, and the development of a critical consciousness which was comfortable operating in English became a goal for everyone. We laughed, and despaired, a lot more openly than before but the results began to be apparent. Word of mouth spread the good news around so that student numbers increased substantially and when the course finally closed because the financial juggling became too difficult for our leaders, we had all learned a great deal.

## **ENGLISH IN USE : A SECOND LANGUAGE PERSPECTIVE**

(Panel Session)

Lorraine Bullock, English Department, Monash University

### **ABSTRACT**

This is an undergraduate subject in the Arts Faculty at Monash that has been created exclusively for second language users. I believe there is a need, or more accurately, an imperative, for institutions such as Monash, where there is a large number of both international and resident second language students, to go beyond offering English as a range of necessary skills to be acquired. Fundamentally, it is a point of equity that these students have at least one course, taught for full credit, that recognises their second language. *English in Use* offers a course based on a systematic, functional approach to English that encourages second language students to explore a wide range of forms, structures and functions through their own unique perspective; that of the second language user.

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This paper is an introduction to the three year undergraduate degree course in the Faculty of Arts, at Monash University, that has been developed specifically for second language users.

As it is impossible to accomplish anything except the broadest of overviews of the *English in Use* course, I will highlight one of the features that I consider to be fundamental to the course: the position of the student as a second language user of English. This course offers these students a study of the English language as a social process. The particular theoretical basis for the course begins with the Halliday and Hasan (1985: 5) definition of language as a social-semiotic.

Knowledge is transmitted in social contexts, through relationships, like those of parent and child, or teacher and pupil, or classmates, that are defined in the value systems and ideology of the culture. And the words that are exchanged in these contexts get their meaning from activities in which they are embedded, which again are social activities with social agencies and goals.

The point this definition makes is that communication in English involves the user of English understanding the language as a system and that creating meaning within that system comes from the user making choices. These are choices which are conditioned by the culture that generates the language. If the second language user is to effectively function in that culture and use that language then they must first crack the codes, they must have access to the choices that form the system.

*English in Use: A Second Language Perspective* first of all recognises the student's second language situation and offers these students an opportunity to analyse, examine and explore a range of communicative theories, language structures and cultural perspectives that form the basis on which choices are made to effectively communicate in English.

The course takes as its prime focus the communicative and cultural concerns which are particularly relevant to a second language perspective. These concerns form its fundamental aims:

\* To provide students with a broad conceptual understanding of the English language, the cognitive and cultural attitudes it engenders and the communicative framework it supports.

\* To provide a practical learning environment that gives second language students not only the opportunity to learn from the body of knowledge available but to be active participants in their learning process as they extend their knowledge of English patterns and structures, their understanding of the socio-cultural dimension of English and their skills in manipulating the language and its use.

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\* To study some of the ethical and theoretical issues of English forms, functions, structures, genre and culture through discussion, critical analysis and individual research.

\* To provide an equitable option for second language students that acknowledges their second language perspective through a study of the cultural as well as the structural frameworks that influence and provide meaning in English.

While skills-based courses, which are also necessary for second language students, instruct **how** to use English across a wide range of different functions, *English in Use* offers second language users more than a functional knowledge, it offers **empowerment**. For second language students empowerment is the ability to be in control of their language use, to negotiate choices that suit both their individual needs and the needs of the discourse community in which they must participate as equal members in language. Students, in their investigation of language theory and function, examine the way in which culture influences language choice and how choice affects the construction of meaning.

On a broader level, students investigate how language choice subtly incorporates a particular world view. The importance of understanding how different world views and the culture that patterns them can influence language is identified by Louise Damen (1987:120) in her description of the relationship between culture and language:

Languages are related to the world views of their speakers. Language is not only a means of communication; it is also a powerful tool available to human beings in coping with reality ... These realities are the culturally constructed worlds of perception, meaning and practice that members of any culture take to be absolutely correct and genuine.

*English in Use* combines perception of the implied as well as the surface messages of English, it looks at how meaning is formed in a wide variety of texts and it provides practice in the use of all aspects of English in each of the units that form the course. Students go beyond concentrating on **how** to use English for specific purposes to investigating why the choices are made and understanding the range available for any situation. If second language users are to operate effectively in the language they must understand why English functions as it does. They need to manipulate the forms and structures of English from a position of understanding all the options and influences. These are choices more subtle than the technical level of formal versus informal, or standard language versus technical jargon. These are choices that incorporate wider, textual concepts such as the writer's perspective and the obvious involvement of the writer in the text.

Finally there is the need for equity. First language speakers are well served in humanities and social science faculties as they can study a large variety of language-based courses for credit in their degree structure. While teaching language acquisition these courses also teach something of the social mores and the cultural traditions that influence the language. Students that take these courses, while not being native speakers, can have some pre-knowledge of the language and through the course deepen their language abilities and their understanding of the culture. There is no suggestion that these language courses should not be taught for full credit and also there is no suggestion that they are regarded as anything but content-based courses. Second language speakers of English deserve the same consideration. *English in Use* is not a study skills course, it is a theoretically based, practical examination of the English language from the special perspective of the second language user.

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## DEVELOPING WRITTEN COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS OF BACHELOR OF MEDICAL RECORD ADMINISTRATION STUDENTS

*(Panel Session)*

Dianne Simpson, School of Health Systems Sciences, La Trobe University, Carlton

### ABSTRACT

Since 1991 the Assistance with English Unit (AWE) has been involved with providing assistance to students and staff of the Bachelor of Medical Record Administration. In 1991 AWE reviewed short essays written by second year students to identify those who required special support. In 1992 and 1993 this practice continued, with students receiving detailed individual comments from AWE, followed up by four hours of lectures given by an AWE adviser. 1994 saw another expansion of the program. Students submitted a 'final draft' of an essay assignment and received comments from AWE on their communication skills. The students then revised and resubmitted their assignments for assessment purposes. This process was evaluated by questionnaire during 1994, and we are planning further expansion and transfer of the unit to the first year program for 1995.

(Dianne Simpson was indisposed and was unable to deliver her paper. Valerie Burley, the AWE adviser involved in the course, made the following points.)

- 
- Students in this second-year course came predominantly from English-speaking backgrounds. A few were already working as health care professionals.
  - The request for AWE involvement in the communications skills component followed discussions on language related matters at a departmental meeting which an AWE adviser had been invited to attend. Prior to 1993, the course lecturer had given the lectures for this component.
  - Students were given advance notice of the topic for the 15-minute class exercise, but were not told the purpose. The aim was to ensure that their written style was spontaneous. The course co-ordinator commented on content. The AWE adviser typed up the scripts (omitting names) and provided comments on key language points at the end of each piece of work. Each student received a complete copy of the texts and comments, and these provided the focus for the lectures on language.
  - The lectures aimed to provide students with an appreciation of the core elements of formal English appropriate for both professional and academic writing. Since lectures lasted for two hours, it was important to vary activities as much as possible: short expositions by the lecturer; feedback from the class; group work; reporting back; individual exercises; question time. Students participated well, but their staying powers were stretched to the limit. The course lecturer attended all the lectures.
  - In 1994, an additional element was added. The AWE adviser read the 'final draft' of students' essays and provided brief written feedback on language, in terms of what had been discussed in lectures. Scripts were then returned at the final language lecture, together with a typed class summary of areas still needing attention. These points were then discussed. Thereafter, students had the option of re-writing their essays before submitting them (together with the 'final draft') for assessment.
  - Informal student feedback in 1993 and a formal student course evaluation questionnaire in 1994 made the following points on the communication skills component:
    - \*Students found it helpful; many said they wished it had been offered in First Year.
    - \*The issue of relying too closely on the wording of sources, although briefly discussed in the lectures and in comments on essay drafts, needed to be dealt with more thoroughly.
    - \*Feedback on the language of essay drafts was considered useful.
    - \*Students still clearly perceived the language component as "apart" from the course.

- In 1995, the communication skills component will be moved to First Year. Current activities will continue but such issues as referencing and appropriate use of sources will now be included. The number of lectures will increase to accommodate this increased content but will be spread across the year at appropriate points in the course. Each lecture will last for one hour only. The course handout will be designed to reinforce the point that communication skills are an integral part of the course.

- 1995 will be an interesting year as the both First and Second Year students will have to take the communication skills component and students will be asked to evaluate the course. This will provide a unique opportunity for the co-ordinator and the AWE adviser to assess the merits of providing detailed instruction in communication skills at different stages in the degree.

## **WRITING AND SPEAKING EFFECTIVELY : TEACHING NUTRITIONISTS TO BE COMMUNICATORS**

*(Panel Session)*

John Coveney, Nutrition Unit, Department of Health, Flinders University  
Pat Kelly, Language and Learning Unit, Queensland University of Technology  
Kate Cadman, Language and Learning Unit, Flinders University

### **ABSTRACT**

This course is a module of the topic 'Nutrition in the Community' and it is designed and taught by staff of the Nutrition Unit of Flinders Medical Centre and the Language and Learning Unit. It comprises a series of two hour workshops on the varieties of language used in the general community as well as in the academic context so that students are able to design a pamphlet for a specific user group in the community in addition to improving their formal academic skills in speech and writing.

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Nutritionists and dieticians are communicators. They have to be. Unlike a number of other allied health personnel, eg physiotherapists and occupational therapists who work 'with their hands', dieticians work with language. They have to communicate nutrition and dietetic facts to patients, doctors, the media and a whole range of others. So dieticians have to learn to communicate on a number of levels. One of the most crucial things for students of nutrition and dietetics to understand is that they are totally reliant on language. They are discourse dependent. They also have to understand the nature and power of discourse.

But how do you make students in nutrition and dietetics training programmes aware of this? Especially when they are mainly science graduates who have been taught that language is 'neutral'? Moreover, like most science graduates, nutrition and dietetics students are reproductive learners. The notion of critique - taking a position (a political position - heaven forbid!) on an issue - is very new and even threatening to them.

To help address these problems one of us (JC) a lecturer, in conjunction with a member of staff (PK) from the Language and Learning Unit, Flinders University, developed a series of eight workshops on 'Writing and speaking effectively' for students undertaking the Master of Nutrition and Dietetics.

The workshops comprised sessions on the nature of discourse: language constructing reality; writing for an audience (professional and non-professional); critique and report writing; and large group presentations (videod for feedback purposes) to develop public speaking skills.

The workshops were structured in order that they be as interactive as possible. After an initial briefing about the nature of the specific task in hand, students were guided and supported in practical sessions of writing or presenting.

Evaluation of the workshops, mainly undertaken through self or peer evaluation, revealed that the students found them challenging and engaging. They were especially enthusiastic about the improved confidence they gained in both writing and presentation skills. The benefits of the workshops have for many students been enduring. In a recent post-mortem of the Master of Nutrition and Dietetics with graduands some remarked specifically on the usefulness of 'Writing and speaking effectively'.

## **AN ACADEMIC SKILLS PROGRAM FOR NEW INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT**

Linda Thies  
Student Services  
Deakin University

### **ABSTRACT**

Students who come from overseas to study at an Australian University typically experience problems with spoken and written English, adjustment to a new culture and adaptation to a culturally different style of teaching and learning. This paper describes an academic skills program which provided learning experiences aimed at assisting international students in the Faculty of Management adapt more quickly to a foreign learning and teaching style. The central focus was on study and language difficulties new students perceived they were experiencing, and generic academic skills were integrated with content of Commerce units. Academic staff and the Skills Adviser collaborated during the planning stage, but much of the material used was generated by five third year students. The program was delivered by these students in a 'team teaching' situation with the Study and Language Adviser. The program was based on 'the communicative approach' with students learning through discussion with their peers.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Students who come from overseas to study in Australia have one major objective : to gain a qualification which will enhance their chances of success in the future. (Ballard, 1988) Many of these students are funded by Government scholarships or by their extended family and feel obligated towards those who support them. Academic performance is of overriding importance to these students, and failure is seen as a disaster which would cause a 'loss of face' for the students, his/her family and friends. Along with these pressures students from overseas frequently encounter problems associated with living and studying in a foreign country. These may be many and varied but most common difficulties will be related to mastering spoken and written English, adjusting to a new environment or culture and adapting to a different teaching and learning style. (Ballard and Clanchy, 1988)

Students from overseas who enter an Australian University will have experienced a culturally different education system to that of local students. Different cultural traditions shape the educative process and these influences will be seen in attitudes towards knowledge and learning and in expectations of the roles of teachers and students. (Ballard and Clanchy, 1991) Many overseas students will have experienced an education system which places greater emphasis on 'the conserving of knowledge' rather than critical or independent thinking. Also in many Asian traditions the teacher is a respected authority whose responsibility is to know what is to be learned and convey this clearly to the students. The student's role is to show respect and learn thoroughly what the teacher has presented. This attitude contrasts with the assumption held by academic staff in Australian Universities that students will rapidly become more independent and that they will openly question and challenge ideas being presented.

### **ACADEMIC SKILLS PROGRAM**

The aim of the academic skills program which was offered to all new international students in the Faculty of Management was to accelerate students' adaptation to a different style of learning and teaching. Each year about 60 students commence study at second or third year level of the Bachelor of Commerce/Business degree at the Warrnambool campus, Deakin University as part of a 'twinning college' arrangement. These students face similar problems to those experienced by all overseas students. However, these problems are exacerbated by the relatively short time which the 'twinning college' students have to adapt to a foreign education system, and the expectations academic staff have of a high level of independent learning needed for final year subjects. Frequently teaching staff are not aware that these students are new to the University, although studying at the final year level.

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The central focus of the program was addressing the difficulties students perceived they were experiencing both in their approach to study and in content areas. The learning skills presented were integrated on two different levels: by relating all skills to effective learning and to the content of units being studied. Recognition was given to learning skills students already possessed and emphasis was placed on the purpose of study and recognition of individual learning style. (Smith and Smith, 1990)

The objectives of the program included :

- \* Providing self confidence by confirming/recognising learning skills already possessed and past academic success
- \* Students learning more about how to learn
- \* Students gaining increased understanding of the expectations and roles of teacher and students at a western University.

All new international students from the Faculty of Management attended an introductory class which gave an overview of the program. During this session students were required to register their interest in the on-going academic skills classes which consisted of a one hour class each week for an eight week period. There was also an offering of 25 hours of small group discussions (2 - 5 students) which students could elect to attend. Five third year students were involved in 'team teaching' with the Study and Language Adviser. These students became well-known to the international students through attendance in the large class, although each week only one student assisted in the delivery of the study skill content. If particular content problems were identified, students were encouraged to attend a small discussion group, which would be conducted by one of the five students involved in the delivery of the program. On average there were 3 - 4 of these small group tutorials conducted each week, covering the content of six different units.

When asked to establish objectives for the unit, the students asked for assistance in the following areas:

Priority given :

1.	Contributing to tutorial discussion	14
2.	Examinations - preparation, 'exam room' strategies	11
3.	Reading for meaning	9
4.	Listening and Notetaking	8
5.	Motivation and time management	7
6.	Seminar presentation	6
7.	Assignment writing	3
8.	Approaching tutors and lecturers for assistance/ feedback	3
9.	Listening to current affairs programs	3
10.	Other areas	0

The content of classes focused on the first seven study skill areas with all the material used being based on the content of accredited units being studied by the students. The students who were selected as peer tutors were carefully selected not only on the basis of their academic ability, but also on assessment of their ability to establish rapport with students from overseas. Each week the peer tutors met with the Study and Language Adviser to plan learning activities. They became very skilful at identifying cross cultural issues which arose in lectures and tutorials, and which may have caused confusion for overseas students. They also generated a variety of content specific material to be used in the class.

## EVALUATION

### Feedback from Students

Students were asked to rank their abilities in four main study skill areas during the initial class.

	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Excellent</u>
Reading Skills	51%	49%	
Organising Study Time	51%	45%	4%
Listening and Notetaking in Lectures	72%	28%	
Tutorial Participation	75%	25%	

They were asked to repeat this exercise at the end of the eight week period.

	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Excellent</u>
Reading Skills		100%	
Organising Study Time	12%	88%	
Listening and Notetaking in Lectures	6%	94%	
Tutorial Participation	32%	68%	

Comments by students :

- "It helps me very much."
- "This is a beneficial program."
- "It is very simplified and easy to understand. However, some information given is not detailed enough."
- "The course would contribute to a student's success if he/she conscientiously follows every class."
- ". . . helps giving me a guide in my studies."
- "I am now able to distinguish the type of notes to take during lectures."
- "I can read faster, understand better."

This intensive study and language program had value in a number of areas. The students perceived an increase in certain skills required for successful study. The small group discussions promoted the adoption of an active approach to learning as these groups were generated by students identifying specific areas of content to be discussed. The student tutors did not prepare material for the small group sessions, and thus, international students were required to initiate questions for discussion. The groups were less threatening than traditional tutorials because all students were from overseas, and the student tutor was not seen as having any role in the evaluation process. Students could also use these sessions to 'rehearse' their answers to tutorial questions in a very supportive environment. Again, the international students' traditional approach was challenged by contact with a group of highly motivated and achieving students who had an open and co-operative approach to the sharing of knowledge.

There was an 'existence value' in the program for the Faculty of Management, as even those students who did not choose to attend were aware that the Faculty funded this program, and therefore, recognised the difficulties faced by international students when beginning their study in Australia. Also it was observed that students who attended these classes readily accessed counselling services offered by Student Services. It seemed that they were more likely to seek individual assistance from someone they had weekly contact with in a classroom situation. There were also gains for the peer tutors. The small group discussions helped them revise content of units being studied, but most importantly they became very aware of cross cultural communication issues.

There were, however, a number of difficulties associated with offering this academic skills program. These included timetabling of additional classes for students who are studying different units, choice of content specific material for students who are studying different units, and the lengthy preparation time involved in generating relevant resources. Maintaining attendance for the last two classes after the Easter break was also a problem, which could perhaps be overcome by having longer classes over a six week time period.

The peer tutors in this program could be likened to 'cultural guides' who provided a model of behaviour and valuable information and direction on how to survive in new and difficult terrain. However, as stated by one student on her evaluation sheet, "sometimes knowing is not adequate". This support program did attempt to go

beyond the mere provision of information, firstly by relating all study skill material to subjects being studied, and secondly by facilitating small group discussions where students were compelled to adopt a more active and questioning role.

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## INFORMATION LITERACY: TOWARDS A CREDIT POINT SUBJECT

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### ABSTRACT

The University of Wollongong Library aims to incorporate information literacy programs across all curricula to promote the philosophy of independent lifelong learning. Reviews of current library literature and the authors' experiences provide evidence that curriculum-based instruction is the most effective method of teaching information literacy skills. In this paper the authors discuss recent successful developments in their own subject-specific, course-integrated library instruction. They stress the importance of collaboration with academic staff, emphasise the role of librarians as educators and trace the progressive expansion of their own teaching program. They end on the high note that their efforts have contributed to the introduction of a curriculum-based, credit point subject incorporating information literacy skills which will be offered in the Arts faculty in 1995.

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For some time now library staff at the University of Wollongong have been working towards incorporating information literacy and lifelong learning skills as part of curriculum-based instruction. Librarians have long believed in the philosophy of lifelong learning but only recently have had the opportunity to combine their efforts with academics on a set of common goals. Although much of the impetus for this development was provided by the proactive approach of librarians, collaborative efforts were accelerated by the publication of the University's objectives for its graduates. Information Services library staff found that they could easily link their own goals to the institution's wider aims stated in the University's 1992 document, *Towards 2000*.

This paper chronicles the progression and expansion of library instruction in recent years at the University of Wollongong by highlighting significant initiatives and achievements. In order to provide a setting for the Library's role in the educational process, the authors begin at the institutional level.

### **GRADUATE QUALITIES - THE UNIVERSITY VIEW**

In 1992 the University of Wollongong published *Towards 2000* as a plan for the direction of the University. It states that the mission of the University is "to produce graduates and research of international distinction especially in the development, critical evaluation and application of science and technology for industry, commerce and society". (University of Wollongong 1992)

This mission statement is followed by a list of the Attributes of a Wollongong Graduate. The attributes are further defined as particular competencies and attitudes a graduate should have acquired by the completion of a degree. These were compiled by surveying staff, graduating students and a cross-section of employers of graduates. The list was refined in two progress reports published in 1993 and 1994 respectively and is reproduced below.

#### **Attributes of a Wollongong Graduate Competencies**

- Is equipped for continued learning, intellectual development, critical analysis and creativity.
- Has coherent and extensive knowledge in a discipline.
- Communicates clearly and fluently in writing.
- Has capacity for team work.
- Has ability to solve problems and make decisions.
- Is self confident and orally articulate.
- Reasons logically and distinguishes fact from opinion.
- Is computer literate.
- Is statistically literate.

### **Attitudes**

- Has the desire for continuing intellectual development and creativity.
- Is willing to initiate and participate in change.
- Values truth, accuracy, honesty and ethical standards in personal and professional life.
- Accepts responsibilities and obligations and asserts rights.
- Appreciates his or her own and other cultures and customs. (University of Wollongong 1994: 92)

Internationally many other universities are defining graduate attributes in similar terms. Some have referred to the "hallmarks of a quality education" and stress the importance of graduates who are able to think critically and solve problems, have a global vision and a multicultural perspective. (Bunnell Jones 1992: 27)

Faculties such as the Arts Faculty of the University of Wollongong are documenting specific attributes more attuned to their own faculty's interpretation of the University's mission statement (see Appendix A). As part of its rationale for conducting tutorials and seminars, the Arts Planning Committee writes:

These small classes allow teaching by example, intensive practice, exploration of different positions and interpretations, and the challenging and refining of students' understanding. They are crucial to the development of skills in critical thinking and clear expression. (Faculty of Arts Planning Committee 1994)

### **GRADUATE QUALITIES - THE ACADEMIC LIBRARY**

While universities, and their individual faculties and departments, have been attending to images of the graduates they aim to cultivate, academic library staff have also been concerned with the future facing these graduates. Students today are moving in a rapidly changing information environment. The quantity of information is growing at a frightening pace with an increasing amount available in electronic format. Students frequently experience bewilderment when required to find out what information sources are available and to select those appropriate for their needs. This is before they even try to use the information sources themselves which can involve unfamiliar language such as catalogue subject headings or unfamiliar technology of the kind needed to access CD-ROM databases. To effectively navigate their way through this maze students need specific information skills which librarians can help develop.

These skills continue to be applied by graduates after university in their personal and professional lives and employers are becoming increasingly aware of the value of employees with sound information skills.

Even now, business leaders call for college graduates who are critical thinkers and problem solvers and who are able to search out and process information from throughout the global community. (Farmer, 1992: 103)

Librarians in universities today are concerned to develop independent learners and graduates who are information literate. For some time now, academic libraries and their professional bodies have been contributing to the debate about the graduate of the future by promoting these views on information literacy. In particular, they have been attempting to achieve appropriate recognition for information skills in graduate education. The Department of Education, Employment and Training recently called for submissions for the preparation of the Candy Report due for release in October 1994. Professor Phil Candy's report, entitled *Developing Lifelong Learners Through Undergraduate Education*, is concerned with the enabling characteristics of undergraduate education. Christine Bruce, of the Q.U.T. Library, contributed a submission on behalf of libraries. In this she requested

that information literacy education be acknowledged as crucial to the development of lifelong learning skills in our universities' graduates, that Australian academic libraries and librarians be acknowledged as having a significant role to play in the design and implementation of curriculum which will foster information literacy and that strategies be developed at a national level and within individual institutions which will facilitate such involvement. (Bruce, 1993, Summary and Recommendations)

The authors of the Candy Report have now identified information literacy as one of five key characteristics of lifelong learners and one of four essential components of an undergraduate curriculum. Librarians will welcome this report and await it with interest.

## **GRADUATE QUALITIES - WORKING TOGETHER**

It is clear that university teaching staff and librarians identify many of the same desirable characteristics of undergraduate education. Earlier in this paper the first listed competency for a Wollongong graduate requires that he or she be "equipped for continued learning, intellectual development, critical analysis and creativity". Another competency refers to the graduate's "ability to solve problems and make decisions". The Faculty of Arts Planning Committee document takes this further. The Faculty "aims at a critical understanding of society" and believes that "students should be introduced to a range of approaches and views" and be able "to think critically, to scrutinise information, and compare and evaluate arguments". These aims link directly to the lifelong learning skills which librarians seek to develop in students. They link to the critical and reflective approach which library staff are encouraging students to adopt in their information seeking behaviour.

Librarians and academics need to collaborate in the educational process from the earliest curriculum planning stage to foster information literacy skills in graduates who can then truly be said to be "equipped for continued learning".

## **INFORMATION LITERACY**

### **Definitions**

Definitions of information literacy have been emerging from professional library organisations and individual libraries in recent years. The ALA (American Library Association) Presidential Committee on Information Literacy issued a definition in 1989 which has been widely accepted or adapted by many libraries:

To be information literate, a person must be able to recognise when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the information needed... Ultimately information literate people are those who have learned how to learn. They know how to learn because they know how knowledge is organised, how to find information, and how to use information in such a way that others can learn from them. They are people prepared for lifelong learning because they can always find the information needed for any task or decision at hand.

The University of Wollongong Library staff have adapted this definition to obtain their own:

To be information literate an individual requires skills which enable the recognition of the need for information, and the ability to locate, evaluate and use it effectively.

The Library has been successful in gaining acceptance of this definition in the University's Information Literacy Policy statement of August 1994.

### **Integration with the curriculum**

Librarians recognise that the development of information literacy skills can really only occur when these skills are fully integrated into university curricula at all levels. In the US in 1989 the National Forum on Information Literacy was established. Patricia Senn Breivik in her paper 'Education for the Information Age' refers to this forum and the push by its members for curriculum reform. She quotes from a resolution passed in 1991 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development:

Information literacy, the ability to locate, process, and use information effectively, equips individuals to take advantage of the opportunities inherent in the global information society. Information literacy should be a part of every student's educational experience. ASCD urges schools, colleges, and universities to integrate information literacy programs into learning programs for all. (1992: 10)

In Australia the 1990 report, *Library Provision in Higher Education Institutions*, devoted a section on 'The Library as Educator' to issues on information literacy. The importance of collaboration between academic staff and librarians is highlighted:

... it is also obvious that it takes more than commitment by library staff to ensure full integration of information skills into an academic program. Until teaching staff accept this principle, user education is likely to remain a useful, but limited addendum to the teaching program. (1990: 67)

This integration of information literacy with other aspects of a student's learning experience is fundamental to the success of any information literacy program. Librarians are only too aware that students will often discount library instruction which is offered as an add-on to the subject. Academics need to work with library staff to

### **Academic Information Days**

With the advent of CD ROM databases and, more recently, the escalation of information sources on the Internet, it became clear that faculty also needed an opportunity to acquire new information skills. Several weeks in the year are now set aside for "Academic Information Days" during which librarians offer a flexible and varied program tailored to the needs of faculty. Postgraduate students and research assistants are also welcome at these sessions. Although the program is still not receiving an overwhelming response, those who attend are extremely motivated and enthusiastic and are often new staff members grateful for the chance to engage with new information networks.

These Information Days have certainly helped facilitate closer liaisons between individual academic staff and librarians. The Library is now considering earmarking certain days throughout the year when Faculty Librarians can spend time in departments working closely with academics to update their information skills.

### **Lunchtime Workshops**

In 1993, staff from the Learning Development Centre and the Library jointly initiated a program of lunchtime workshops to run each session. The library instruction provided is designed to appeal to those students who are still not being given the opportunity to attend curriculum-based information skills instruction, yet need to develop skills too complex to be taught at the Information Desk. Other students often attend these classes as refresher sessions or will choose an advanced class to build on their basic level of skills in a particular area. With the joint efforts of the two units involved, advertising of the program has been very effective and subsequent attendance high.

### **Reaching Other Customers**

Wollongong English Language Centre and Foundation Studies provide University entrance programs to overseas students on a fee for service basis. It was becoming increasingly difficult and time consuming for library staff to educate these students through the Information Desk service. International students doing library research have the additional problem of communicating in English as their second language. The Centre welcomed the chance to collaborate with library staff on a curriculum-based information skills program.

## **CHALLENGES OF THE CHANGE**

### **Library Staff - Skills and Resources**

Information Services staff had planned for change and thus were prepared for some of the effects on their unit. Other effects were less expected and sometimes required innovative and flexible responses which could be costly as they frequently involved the purchase of new technology or library staff training.

It was clear that Faculty Librarians were now in demand as teachers, which had implications for teaching skills, teaching resources and staff time. In some cases increased training was found to be necessary but other solutions were also sought. Library staff recommendations at this time included:

- \* Improve the teaching skills of Faculty Librarians by increasing the emphasis on areas such as reflective teaching, promotion of active learning through small group work, peer coaching etc.
- \* Encourage participation in teaching programs offered at the University
- \* Increase librarians' confidence in using technology which can enhance teaching
- \* Improve instructional strategies through increased access to technology (by procuring appropriate teaching spaces or, if necessary, purchasing equipment for library rooms)
- \* Establish a pool of teaching resources to avoid duplication of effort

### **Library Staff - Overload**

Librarians experienced difficulty in meeting the increased demands on their time. Teaching staff preferred to allocate tutorial slots for library classes and librarians could find themselves committed to ten one-hour information skills sessions per subject each week in the first few weeks of session. Lesson planning, reference desk work and participation in non-subject classes (for example, the CD-ROM teaching program) had to be fitted in around this large commitment of time. Recommendations to alleviate the situation included:

- \* Negotiating with academics for lecture slots rather than repeat multiple tutorial slots for subject-based library classes
- \* Encouraging academics to improve planning and liaison with library staff when incorporating library instruction in subjects
- \* Encouraging academics to schedule library classes, where possible, later in session

- \* Deploying other library staff - besides Faculty Librarians - to teach basic information skills sessions such as online catalogue classes
- \* Relieving Faculty Librarians of some reference desk work in the early part of each session.

### **Students - Overlap**

Problems emerged when it was found that students were often required to attend similar library classes in more than one 100-level subject. This caused resentment among students and librarians found it difficult to pitch classes appropriately and to retain interest. On the other hand, some students were still receiving no library skills training at all and librarians found it difficult to identify students who fell into this category.

## **RISING TO THE CHALLENGES**

### **Some Solutions**

Faculty Librarians welcomed their increased profile and sought to maintain the momentum by quickly alleviating, where possible, the accompanying problems. They proceeded with some of the recommendations above and achieved results in a number of ways:

- \* Some academics assigned lecture slots for library instruction
- \* Several academics increased liaison with librarians to improve planning for library instruction and decided to link assignments to the demonstrated use of learned information skills
- \* Paraprofessional library staff assumed particular teaching responsibilities and received training in Reference Desk work
- \* A number of in-house courses were conducted on presentation skills and effective use of technology
- \* Further resources were planned for in the next budget to purchase quality presentation hardware, for example, a colour LCD panel and portable computer
- \* One of the Faculty Librarian team enrolled in the Introduction to Tertiary Teaching (ITT) subject. This experience led to librarians later sharing their teaching experiences in an in-house teaching development seminar and two other Faculty Librarians enrolling in the ITT subject
- \* Faculty Librarians worked towards increased participation in the broader campus network so as to better contribute to wider policy issues (for example, through the Education Committee and Computer Policy Committee)
- \* Faculty Librarians increased attendance at departmental meetings and at library committee meetings in each faculty in order to promote the information literacy agenda.

### **Academic Forum**

By the end of 1993, Faculty Librarians felt they had reached a number of faculty with their message that information skills objectives needed to be set at the same time as other instructional objectives for all subjects across the curriculum. They needed, however, to reach many more.

It was now imperative to gain a university-wide approach to information literacy if academics and library staff were to work together to develop the attributes referred to earlier. They would need to jointly discuss their shared goals and future collaborative efforts. In early February 1994, academics from all departments were invited by library staff to attend a two-hour forum which was designed to provide:

- \* Confirmation of direction from the wider academic community
- \* Sharing of the information literacy vision
- \* Promise of support for the information literacy objectives set by the librarians
- \* An opportunity to air concerns by both librarians and academics.

Although uncertain of whether these outcomes might be achieved, librarians believed that any dialogue would be worthwhile. The exercise in fact turned out to be extremely productive.

All participants received a substantial information package some days prior to the forum including a list of discussion topics set by librarians. On the day academic staff and librarians worked in small groups on these topics which covered information literacy, library instruction and time restrictions, critical evaluation of library sources and making library instruction relevant. Within each topic a number of questions had been set (again by librarians) and following discussions, each group reported to the entire audience. In this way, library staff maintained a degree of control over the agenda whilst providing an arena for frank dialogue.

Some notable comments from academic participants included:

- \* Departments and faculties should retain the right to decide needs for their students
- \* There was a need for greater interaction and planning beforehand between librarians and academics
- \* Students needed to achieve a wider view of information
- \* It was possible to have a common core of library retrieval skills, but more appropriate to allow departments and faculties to tailor
- \* Common core units need to be faculty-based to be relevant to skills required
- \* Library skills could be taught with other literacy subjects compulsory for students.

In the light of these comments, Faculty Librarians were later able to set some new objectives and revise others. The idea of a common core of information skills which could be tailored for each department or faculty was popular and deserved attention. In response to this, shortly after the forum, a Skills Inventory was developed (Appendix B).

### **Skills Inventory**

The Faculty Librarian team felt that the Skills Inventory would be a useful starting point and could serve a twofold purpose: it would allow librarians to start defining the appropriate level of skills for students to acquire from year to year; and it would provide them with a document that could be presented to academics to initiate discussion on curriculum-based information literacy skills programs. The inventory in this paper is still in draft form and has yet to be formally presented to academics and tailored to each department's needs. The draft has been shown to a small number of academic staff and has met with extremely positive comments.

Librarians believe that these core skills will need to be acquired progressively by students throughout their entire period of university attendance. They cannot be attained in one year (still less in a one-hour library slot!). A spiralling curriculum is envisaged to allow for the provision of basic and/or generic information skills as a foundation on which to build in subsequent years. For such a curriculum-based program to work, these information skills objectives need to be considered from the first stages of course planning and feature alongside other subject objectives.

What is pleasing about the comments of academics who have viewed the draft inventory so far is their enthusiastic response to the idea of library staff helping to clarify objectives relating to research skills and to work out specific ways of meeting these. Involvement of librarians at such an early stage allows them in turn to fully appreciate subject content, expected student outcomes and assessment procedures within each discipline.

The authors recognise that should the Skills Inventory be adopted by and tailored for departments, it will require continuous review and evaluation in response to changes in the University's mission statement, objectives and desired qualities of a graduate. Changes in information technology, student needs, course changes, enhancements resulting from input by new academic staff or library staff will all play a significant role in the further development and implementation of the Skills Inventory.

### **MISSION ACCOMPLISHED OR ONLY THE BEGINNING?**

In the meantime an even more significant development has emerged which is providing an excellent opportunity for librarians to influence decisions on how information skills can be integrated into the curriculum. Library staff have been asked to contribute one-third of the teaching load in a 100-level subject to be offered in the Faculty of Arts for the first time in 1995. The involvement in the process of designing a totally new subject is exciting and can also help the progress of other initiatives such as the Skills Inventory.

### **ARTS101**

#### **Background**

The Information Literacy discussion group at the Academic Forum alerted the Arts Librarian to the existence of a Faculty of Arts Statistical Literacy Working Group. All faculties had been asked in 1993 to examine how a requirement for statistical literacy could best be interpreted. The Arts Working Group was aware of the University's computer literacy requirement and the library's contribution to this. They had considered the development of a 100-level subject which could allow students to fulfil more than one literacy requirement at a time. It became clear to the group members who attended the Academic Forum that library staff were keen to work towards a wider definition of computer literacy - at least if the Library was to continue to remain involved in the implementation of the requirement. Fortunately these group members had a long record of liaison with library staff, viewed information skills as extremely important for their students and had high regard for the teaching and dedication of library staff.

The Reference Librarian and Arts Librarian were invited to participate in discussions about the concept of a subject to cover three literacy requirements: statistical literacy, computer literacy and information literacy. The concept proposal was approved in principle in March this year, a steering committee was drawn from several units of the Faculty of Arts and a coordinator for the subject was appointed. This coordinator is an academic in the Philosophy Department. The usual routes were followed to gain approval for the subject to run in 1995 and acceptance was complete by mid year. The new subject - ARTS101 - was given the title of *Analysis, Research and Technical Skills in the Arts*.

### **Rationale**

It was believed that ARTS101 would be attractive to Arts students as a convenient route for them to fulfil the literacy requirements (although other routes needed to remain) and it was decided that the subject should not be compulsory. It was felt that it would reduce some of the administrative burden associated with administering the computer literacy requirement especially as enrolment in ARTS101 increased. It would help the Arts Librarian cope more efficiently with the increased load of library classes as well as eventually alleviating the problem of overlap. Although it was decided that the subject would have an initial enrolment of sixty students controlled by a quota and would be offered in Autumn, Spring and Summer sessions, it was envisaged that it could be offered to more students in the future. Its success would determine this.

In the proposal document, it was emphasised that this was a pioneering subject in the University.

It could be highlighted in the Faculty's presentation of its distinctive qualities, of its commitment to quality in teaching, and of the means by which it ensures its graduates have achieved the desired attributes. (Faculty of Arts Statistical Literacy Working Group, 1994)

### **Content**

The success of ARTS101 will depend largely on the successful integration of the three components. For example, material generated as a result of library research might need to be submitted as a word processed document, thus requiring students to combine information and computer skills in one assignment. Meetings to date have been concerned with this integration aspect; a draft program for fourteen weeks of teaching has now been drawn up. Library staff have welcomed the opportunity for involvement in a new curriculum initiative and to collaborate on teaching from such an early planning stage. They have also discovered that it is hard work!

The ARTS101 proposal document (1994) contained the following description:

training in basic computer techniques appropriate to social sciences and humanities students;  
training in library searching and other information retrieval strategies and techniques;  
training in such statistical techniques and the interpretation and critique of statistical information as is considered appropriate for social sciences and humanities students;  
training in other research/study skills and techniques which are considered useful to all social sciences and humanities students and could reasonably be fitted into the subject.

### **Objectives**

In subsequent meetings, each of the instructors has had to draw up a detailed list of objectives for his or her component of the subject. It was important for the Arts Librarian to have been assigned an equal third of the subject (fourteen contact and equivalent non-contact hours) so that all objectives could be covered. Although the aim is to provide a basic level of information skills, the objectives shown below indicate that a wide range and level of skills can be covered in fourteen hours. This contrasts starkly with the usual 50-minute one-off library slot.

### **ARTS101: LIBRARY OBJECTIVES**

#### **AIM:**

In their first academic year, students will acquire a basic level of information skills which can be developed further throughout the rest of their undergraduate years. By the end of their degree, students will have achieved a level of information literacy in accordance with the definition adopted by the University Library.

#### **General Orientation**

##### **Overall Goal:**

Students will become familiar with the University of Wollongong Library.

**Objectives:**

Students will:

- \* Be able to describe the services offered by the University Library and staff
- \* Know how to find their way around the University Library
- \* Understand their rights and responsibilities regarding the use of the University Library

**Attitudes**

**Overall Goal:**

Students will develop a confident and independent approach to learning information skills.

**Objectives:**

Students will:

- \* Develop a positive attitude to the use of information skills
- \* Develop a positive attitude towards using the University Library
- \* Perceive library staff as helpful in assisting with information questions
- \* Recognise the importance of developing skills for life-long independent learning
- \* Develop an independent approach to research

**Critical Evaluation**

**Overall Goal:**

Students will develop effective information skills within a critical thinking framework.

**Objectives:**

Students will:

- \* Be able to distinguish between primary and secondary sources
- \* Be able to distinguish popular from scholarly treatments of topics
- \* Know how to analyse a topic in order to frame questions which will aid the information search
- \* Be able to evaluate, according to relevant criteria:
  - the quality of information
  - the usefulness of the content
  - the format of particular information tools
- \* Be able to reflect on the results of their searches for information and revise their strategies accordingly

**The World of Information**

**Overall Goal:**

Students will understand how knowledge is organised, its value in the scholarly setting and the importance of developing search strategies for retrieval of information.

**Objectives:**

Students will:

- \* Be able to describe how scholars and researchers use information and practise current awareness
- \* Appreciate how the use of information can improve the quality of scholarly work
- \* Recognise the value of formal and informal information networks
- \* Recognise that the University Library is a gateway to other information sources
- \* Understand the costs associated with misinformation and the possibilities and consequences of abuse such as plagiarism
- \* Know how to construct a search strategy to locate information
- \* Be able to transfer the principles of accessing information from one situation to another

***Management of Information***

**Overall Goal:**

Students will become competent in the management of information.

**Objectives:**

Students will:

- \* Develop a management system for storage of citations
- \* Know how to produce correct bibliographic citations according to a specified style for a variety of sources, including books, journal articles, conference papers and government documents

***Online Catalogue & Dewey System***

**Overall Goal:**

Students will become competent in the use of the Online Catalogue and in locating material on the shelves.

**Objectives:**

Students will:

- \* Know how to use the Online Catalogue to determine if items ranging over a variety of formats are held by the University Library
- \* Know how to use topic narrowing procedures to perform effective subject searches
- \* Be able to locate items found on the catalogue on the shelves
- \* Be familiar with the concepts of the Dewey Decimal classification system
- \* Appreciate the value of browsing on the shelves in a subject area

***Reference Material***

**Overall Goal:**

Students will be able to use reference tools to locate information on specific topics.

**Objectives:**

Students will:

- \* Recognise the importance of reference tools in a search strategy
- \* Be familiar with the types of reference tools available in libraries
- \* Be able to select and use reference sources in this Library appropriate for specific topics

***Journals***

**Overall Goal:**

Students will become familiar with the journals collection in the University Library and understand the value of journals in the scholarly community.

**Objectives:**

Students will:

- \* Know the kind of information held in a journal
- \* Appreciate the contribution of journal literature to the research process
- \* Know how to locate journals by title using the Online Catalogue
- \* Know how to locate journal titles in their subject area using the Online Catalogue
- \* Know where journals are held in this Library
- \* Know how to cite a journal reference according to one or more accepted standard formats

### **Indexes**

#### **Overall Goal:**

Students will understand the purpose, variety and structure of printed indexes and be able to use them effectively.

#### **Objectives:**

Students will:

- \* Be able to describe the purpose of indexes
- \* Understand how different indexes draw on different kinds of information sources
- \* Recognise the appropriateness of different indexes for different topics
- \* Be able to list indexes available in their fields of study
- \* Understand the concepts involved in index searching
- \* Be able to locate topics in a variety of indexes
- \* Know how to interpret references found in indexes
- \* Understand how to locate references in this Library and/or in other sources

### **Electronic Sources**

#### **Overall Goal:**

Students will understand the role of electronic sources, in particular bibliographic databases, and be able to demonstrate competence in the use of particular databases.

#### **Objectives:**

Students will:

- \* Understand the range and amount of information available in electronic formats
- \* Be able to describe the advantages and limitations of searching electronic sources, in particular bibliographic databases
- \* Be able to describe the different forms in which information can be retrieved from databases
- \* Know the range of databases available on this campus
- \* Be able to select appropriate databases for different research needs
- \* Understand how to manipulate a range of databases to retrieve appropriate results
- \* Understand how to locate references in this Library and/or in other sources

The presentation of these objectives to the course coordinator, Steering Committee members and other instructors has proved to be the most useful part of the process so far. Librarians involved are enjoying the experience of rigorously examining their own objectives in relation to the teaching aims of the Faculty of Arts and to the specific aims of the subject.

### **AFTER ARTS101?**

Librarians will closely monitor the implementation of ARTS101 in 1995 and, in particular, the information skills component. If it proves to be a successful model, library staff may choose from a variety of routes in order to build on the success. They may work toward:

- \* increasing the quota of students for ARTS101 but within a certain limit
- \* influencing adoption of ARTS101 information literacy strand as compulsory for *all* beginning Arts students
- \* establishing a similar subject - but with quotas - across all faculties
- \* influencing adoption of a similar information literacy strand as compulsory for all faculties

All of these routes will depend in part on the success of ARTS101. Librarians are aware of the importance of documenting the planning, implementation and evaluation stages of the subject to identify future directions for this and other programs.

### **CONCLUSION**

The development of information skills programs at the University of Wollongong Library has most recently been driven by the philosophy of information literacy. Librarians have significantly altered their teaching programs to accommodate this philosophy and have deliberately embarked on a process to help foster an appropriate learning environment for information literacy. They have had to create new collaborative partnerships with academic staff, mostly at their own initiative. To reach the current phase of integration of information skills into the curriculum, they have displayed unlimited enthusiasm. They will need to retain this enthusiasm in order to continue to demonstrate their abilities as educators, not only in the classroom, but in the committee room.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A**

#### **TEACHING IN THE FACULTY OF ARTS**

The Faculty aims at a critical understanding of society, and the creation and evaluation of knowledge concerning a range of human activities. Much of its work focuses particularly on the structures, processes and values which form Australian society and culture. At the same time, the Faculty recognises that an understanding of Australia can only come through a combination of an historical analysis and a critical appreciation of the globalising trends in economy and culture. Moreover, an understanding and comparison of other societies, cultures and value systems is important. The Faculty is conscious of the country's unique characteristics - its indigenous, European and other cultures, and a geographical position which makes it a potential bridge between European and Asian cultures. Its commitment to teaching a range of European and Asian languages reflects this view.

The Faculty believes that no single interpretation should be imposed in its teaching but that students should be introduced to a range of approaches and views. Contention between different schools of thought in each discipline and even between different conceptions of the objectives of teaching social sciences and humanities are both a vital condition of intellectual vigour and a necessary result of it. Work in the social sciences and humanities depends on a questioning of orthodoxy but equally on a respect for, and a willingness to engage with, the views of others. Students will have a deep grounding in a discipline, but will have had sufficiently wide exposure to understand and appreciate the approaches and value of other disciplines. The Faculty aims to cultivate an approach which is detached and rigorous, but which recognises the limits of objectivity in knowledge. It aims to encourage students to reflect on the status and basis of their own beliefs, and to develop their personal identity and values in relation to an understanding of the structures and processes of the wider society.

The Faculty aims to foster both a theoretical understanding of culture and society and an awareness of the relation between that understanding and an ability to engage in and shape social processes and cultural interpretations. Its teaching thus seeks to cultivate in its students a range of skills necessary to analyse, to identify and assess competing values, to participate in debates, to contribute to cultural forms, and to engage in practical intervention. Arts graduates will be able:

- to comprehend the written and spoken word accurately and imaginatively;
- to think critically, to scrutinise information, and compare and evaluate arguments;
- to provide and interpret statistical information and to identify the social values and political commitments conveyed in seemingly neutral quantitative findings;
- to pose pertinent and searching questions;
- to speak and write accurately and clearly; and
- to imagine and evaluate possible future directions.

The Faculty is conscious of the general value of these skills to its students and also of the need and demand for Arts graduates trained in these ways for a wide range of occupations and vocations. But the Faculty is also committed to the idea that such skills are appropriate for students in the technical faculties. It provides a range of courses through which students undergoing a technical training can not only receive a more rounded education for its own sake but can directly enhance their professional skills and their understanding of their roles and responsibilities and the context of their future work. Through cooperation with the other faculties the Arts Faculty is seeking to develop and extend these contributions.

### **Teaching methods**

The Faculty uses a variety of forms of teaching. Lectures are central to most subjects, allowing the provision of information, introduction and guidance in new material, comparison and synthesis of arguments, and a means of enthusing and provoking students to learn. Tutorials and seminars allow students not only to consolidate the material introduced in lectures but also to develop their ability to apply theoretical analysis to specific issues. These small classes allow teaching by example, intensive practice, exploration of different positions and interpretations, and the challenging and refining of students' understanding. They are crucial to the development of skills in critical thinking and clear expression. A range of activities from open discussions to intensive individual and small group work are appropriate here. Preparation for tutorials usually involves extensive guided reading. Thus students should spend many more hours using the Library than they do in the classroom. Library resources are thus crucial to effective teaching in the Faculty, and through close cooperation with Library staff, students are taught effective searching and retrieval of information through a variety of means. In research workshops, particularly at postgraduate level, students develop the ability to produce theoretically informed research reports and an understanding of the methodological and theoretical problems of research. Laboratory work is also used in some disciplines. The Faculty has a commitment both to exploring, evaluating and integrating new teaching media and techniques, particularly computer and visual media, and to the continual enhancement of traditional teaching methods and styles through cooperation with the University's Centre for Staff Development.

Each student is required to complete a disciplinary or sometimes interdisciplinary major study. The minimum number of credit points to complete a major study varies between department from 52 to 72, from a total of 144 in the degree. This requirement is based on the principle that the command of a body of knowledge only comes with a long period of study in a particular area. However, the Arts degree is structured so that students have plenty of scope and flexibility to combine offerings from a range of disciplines, some of which may be outside the Faculty.

### **Assessment methods**

The Faculty believes that assessment of students must be carried out using a range of methods. Most assessment schedules thus contain three or four components, tailored to the objectives of the subject and spaced through the session so that continuous assessment encourages steady effort. The assessment methods include: tutorial presentations and papers; evaluation of performance in tutorial work and preparation for it; oral examinations and individual interviews; written examinations, supervised or unsupervised; summaries and reports on reading; tests; practical exercises; and written pieces ranging from short reviews or essays to research reports, dissertations and theses.

The Faculty takes careful measures to ensure the quality of assessment, and while these methods inevitably involve some degree of subjective judgement, departments use explicit criteria and guidelines, check marking, and/or external examiners, to ensure consistency of marking standard within and across subjects, particularly when several staff are involved in one subject. The Faculty is committed to maintaining standards of assessment in all three sessions in the year. Faculty offers appropriate teaching opportunities to postgraduate students, regarding this as an important part of their professional training; again, to ensure consistency and quality of both teaching and assessment, it aims to provide close supervision and mentoring.

**Appendix B**

**LIBRARY and INFORMATION LITERACY  
SKILLS INVENTORY**

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>SKILLS</b>	<b>Ongoing skills- to be covered in all years</b>
1st year	Students will: * know how to find their way around the Library * understand their rights and responsibilities regarding the use of the Library * know how to use the online catalogue to locate items held in the Library * know how to construct a search strategy * know how to use the online catalogue to locate items held in other Libraries using LIBLINK and similar facilities * be able to define standard terms eg. bibliographic citation, periodicals * know how to use the Reserve Collection facilities * have a basic understanding of the Dewey Decimal classification system and know how to locate items on the shelves * know where to find bibliographic details (from the original source) in order to compile a bibliography * understand the value of current information sources eg newspapers & journals * use a variety of Reference sources specific to their subject speciality eg. printed indexes, ABS statistics, subject dictionaries/encyclopedias, standards, basic CD ROM databases (eg. Austrom)	Emphasise transferable skills  Keeping records  Compiling a bibliography
2nd year	In addition to the above skills - Students will: * become familiar with a broader range of print indexes * use more complex Reference material e.g.: directories, handbooks, tests, standards * further utilise CD ROM indexes to access information * use a wider range of information sources: newspapers, ABS, government publications, parliamentary papers, annual reports.	Awareness of plagiarism  Citing non-book material
3rd year	In addition to the above skills - Students will: * explore advanced CD ROM searching capabilities * access limited databases via the Internet * know how to identify appropriate print or computerised information sources and evaluate their relevance and value * become familiar with ways of contacting informal information sources e.g. using directories of associations and government directories * (where subjects require) use Parliamentary debates * understand the need to use other libraries and appreciate the diversity of libraries in general	Evaluation of sources  Critical thinking
4th year	In addition to the above skills - Students will: * understand the need to explore a topic in depth "digging a bit deeper". * utilise small/specific collections eg. archives, standards * develop sophisticated research skills * explore citation indexes * appreciate and be encouraged to obtain the extension of privileges eg. Inter Library Loans, telnet access on email password	Electronic Mail and Internet skills jointly taught by ITS and the Library

Postgraduates bridging	Students: from overseas, mature age or who have been out of study for more than two years. These students may need all of the undergraduate program in an abridged format. This could be provided through a booklet, lunchtime and/or Saturday workshops.	Ongoing skills as for Under-graduates
Postgraduates	<p>Students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* understand the importance of searching Dissertations Abstracts</li> <li>* extensively utilise the full range of Internet resources</li> <li>* have a clear understanding of online and alert services</li> <li>* have a working knowledge of the Inter Library Loan and document delivery services</li> <li>* know how to use citation indexes and understand the importance of tracing an author's work</li> <li>* know the full range of facilities available for studying from home (via computer access)</li> <li>* recognise the need to explore other libraries and have the confidence and knowledge to do so</li> <li>* understand how the use of information can improve the quality of scholars' and professionals' work</li> </ul>	

## MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES AND ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

Ted Chrisfield  
La Trobe University Library

### ABSTRACT

Developments in information technology related to microcomputer networking and the increasing use of digital storage and access media are providing new and improved ways to both store and access recorded knowledge and to communicate. Interactive multimedia capabilities and resources will become central to academic discourse as the tools become more accessible to us. Ted Chrisfield, Divisional Librarian - Audio-Visual Services, will discuss how the La Trobe University Library is providing this access and demonstrate a selection of IMM titles and software tools using the two primary delivery forms which are now available:

1. Optical stand alone media such as CD-ROM, laserdisc and CDI
2. Network resources using the World Wide Web and Mosaic on the Internet.

**BETTER LATE THAN NEVER? TEACHING SKILLS OF ANALYSIS AND  
EVALUATION TO EARLY CHILDHOOD STUDENTS**

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**ABSTRACT**

Teachers from the Learning Development Centre at the University of Western Sydney, Macarthur have developed in the past two years a number of support programs for students from the Faculty of Education. Although some of these programs have been included in subject outlines, more of them have been arranged, sometimes at quite short notice, to meet needs that lecturers identify after submission of assignments.

This paper describes one such program organised for third year students in the Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood) degree. It discusses issues related to the delivery of the course, which was voluntary but strongly recommended by subject tutors, course content, and broader issues related to faculty planning and provision for students who enter university without a typical academic background.

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUPPORT IN AN INTERNATIONAL PROJECT: A  
COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH IN A CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXT**

Karin Hawkins, Language Centre, La Trobe University  
Lorraine Ling, Graduate School of Education, La Trobe University

**ABSTRACT**

The Indonesia-IBRD Primary Teacher Education Project is a World Bank-Indonesian Ministry of Education project to retrain secondary teacher educators from Indonesian universities and teacher education institutions, as primary teacher educators. This project is part of the effort to redevelop primary education in Indonesia. La Trobe University is one of six institutions across the world which have been contracted to conduct the retraining program over a five year time span. In the course of this project the concept of academic discourse and its integration throughout the program components is of central importance. In this paper, an examination of the strategies for English language support which have been applied to the project to this stage is undertaken. Particular emphasis is placed upon the ways the English language support program has been structured to the needs of the participants and has been geared towards supporting their understandings of the nature of academic discourse in the Australian setting. The cultural differences which appear in the area of academic discourse are explored and the dialectical relationship which exists between the English language support component and other program components is discussed.

(N.B. A number of participants expressed an interest in Ms. Hawkins' overhead transparencies. She is happy to make any of these available upon request. - Ed.)

## INTEGRATING CONTENT-COURSE TASKS INTO THE TEACHING OF WRITING SKILLS FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES

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### ABSTRACT

This paper presents a method of integrating the teaching of academic writing into reading and writing tasks in the student's own discipline in situations where it is not feasible to group students into classes by discipline. The method consists of lessons and exercises aimed at developing self-monitoring and self-evaluation skills which students can apply to their academic writing. Students are taught to observe in their content subject textbooks the moves writers in their discipline typically make (e.g. introducing an elaborate explanation, hypothesizing). Students are guided to an awareness of the rhetorical purpose of the sentences and paragraphs in their own essays. Such an awareness enables students to evaluate their own writing for the presence or absence of the moves expected by a reader in the discipline.

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### Introduction

Low level student motivation is a problem in language skills courses, particularly in academic writing courses. Many students, including students for whom English is not the first language, think they write well enough except for occasional grammar and vocabulary errors and are reluctant to expend time and effort on improving what they believe needs no improvement. One way round the problem of poor motivation is to integrate content-course assignments into academic English courses, using the assignments as the vehicle for training students in effective communication strategies for academic purposes. This paper presents one such method of integration used in an academic English course for international students at Murdoch University.

The need for integration must be seen against the background of overseas students with inadequate language and communication skills for academic functions and the problem of organizing classes to upgrade their literacy and communication skills. This paper will begin with a description of the background and problems that make integration the most feasible solution. Then a method of integrating disciplinary reading and writing tasks into an academic English course will be described. The final part of the paper discusses the challenges encountered by students and teacher when integration was tried out for two semesters at Murdoch University.

### What problems does integration solve?

The first problem is that of poor student motivation in academic English courses. Academic writing classes are often classes where students do not wish to be. Many are there not through choice but because they have been directed to attend by content subject lecturers exasperated by incoherent essays. Quite a number attending writing classes believe they are proficient enough in English and therefore their writing skills are adequate. They cannot motivate themselves to improve what they think do not need improvement. Furthermore, because writing skills classes are perceived as less relevant and important than content subject courses, students are unwilling to commit time and effort to assignments for training up academic writing skills. They would be better motivated if they were convinced that the writing course equips them with the knowhow for doing well in content-course assignments.

The second problem arises from the mix of disciplines represented by students attending academic writing classes. Time tabling difficulties make it impossible to have students of the same disciplinary background grouped in one class. Having students from a variety of disciplines poses the problem of how to plan learning activities and course content that address the diverse needs of students writing different genres of texts (essays, case studies, reports, etc.) on different topics for different subjects. Selecting general interest topics (e.g. conservation, euthanasia, etc.) as course content does not solve the problem; students perceive such content as irrelevant to the writing tasks in their own discipline and show scant interest. Another drawback of general

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interest topics is that students are poor at transferring skills learnt through such topics to the process of writing in their own discipline.

The problem of maintaining student motivation and the challenge posed by students coming from different disciplinary backgrounds point to integration of writing-course tasks and content-course tasks as the most feasible way to organize an academic writing programme.

### How to integrate?

This section will describe how cognitive writing and revising skills can be taught and practised through the use of assignments set by content-course lecturers. The skills selected to illustrate this method of writing-course and content-course integration are:

- 1 Awareness of rhetorical moves in academic writing.
- 2 Self evaluation of rhetorical moves in student's own essay.
- 3 Signaling explicitly relations between part and whole.
- 4 Stating the motivation for given information.

#### **1 Awareness of rhetorical moves**

Student writers have been observed to take an information-giving and word/sentence approach to writing, i.e. they see essay writing as the production of words and sentences containing topic-related information (Chandrasegaran, 1992). So preoccupied are they with what Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) have described as "knowledge-telling" that they do not see essay writing as the process of communicating a theme through the performance of a series of rhetorical moves. When students are told to develop a theme they think it means covering sheets of paper with information about the topics mentioned in the essay question. They do not think of theme development in terms of rhetorical functions such as supporting a proposition with evidence, dismissing a contrary view, clarifying a comment, or appealing to an authority. To become better essay writers students need to develop an awareness of rhetorical moves in academic texts so that they can consciously decide what move they should make at a particular point in an essay.

Reading texts prescribed by content subject lecturers can be used to promote student awareness of rhetorical moves in academic writing in the student's own discipline and of the linguistic means through which the moves are realized. But first students must be trained to identify rhetorical purpose. Exercise 4 in Appendix A is an example of a tutorial activity for training students to observe rhetorical moves in an academic text. In the discussion that follows the exercise students' attention is drawn to the language and grammatical structure used to realize the moves.

Having learnt to identify rhetorical moves in an academic text, students are ready to study content-course reading material for moves (Exercise 5 in Appendix A). The result expected from studying moves in content-course material is that students become familiar with the moves characteristically made in texts in their discipline and also note the language used to express the moves.

Exercises such as those in Appendix A impress on students the fact that sentences and paragraphs have a function in relation to a global purpose, aside from stating information. An awareness of rhetorical moves will, hopefully, result in students considering the communicative purpose of the sentences and paragraphs they write in their essays. They will then see essay writing as a process that is more than giving information for information's sake.

#### **2 Self evaluation of rhetorical moves**

Self evaluation is the most valuable skill that writing teachers can impart to their students. The aim of academic writing lessons should be to empower students to review and improve their essays without a teacher pointing out every shortcoming and prescribing every correction. Learning to self evaluate means learning to recognize whether the rhetorical moves expected at different stages of an essay have been made, and whether there is information that serves no function in relation to a higher level rhetorical purpose. How students can learn to self evaluate their own content subject essays is demonstrated in Task 3 in the assignment in Appendix B.

Task 3 requires students to evaluate the introduction of their content-course essay to determine if they have stated the theme and described the organization structure. (The concept of organization structure has been taught earlier; see Task 2.) Students are asked to quote the words used to perform these two moves because it is necessary to ascertain if students understand what theme and organizational structure mean. A common misconception among students is that the mere mention of a topic is equivalent to stating the theme and that giving a list of topics suffices to indicate the organizational frame. Evidence of such a misconception is a signal to the teacher that

students need to have demonstrated to them the difference between topic and theme and between topic lists and organizational frame.

Task 3 further teaches students how to check if they have given prominence to the theme in introductory paragraphs (*What else have you said in the introduction?*). By questioning the role of each sentence in the introduction, students learn to recognize extraneous information that should be removed so that it does not distract reader attention from the theme.

By requiring students to examine sentences in their introduction for rhetorical function (*Explain the function of each item of information*), Task 3 drives home the lesson that information is not given in essays for information's sake but for a purpose that is related to the development of the overall argument. Awareness of rhetorical function will move students away from "knowledge telling" (Bereiter and Scardamalia's term) to communication of a central proposition.

### **3 Stating relation and motivation**

Two features contributing to coherence and unity in academic writing are relational statements and indications of the motivation for information, i.e. telling the reader why information presented is given. The omission of explicit relation and motivation signals is a commonly observed weakness in student essays. One study of essays written by freshmen at the University of Michigan found that writers of high score essays were more effective than less successful writers at indicating at paragraph boundaries the relationship between preceding text and forthcoming information (Hult, 1986). Merely telling students that relationships between arguments and motivation for information must be explicitly stated does not equip them with the cognitive skill to do so. They have to be specifically taught to signal relations between items of information stated in separate sentences and between sub-arguments and the main argument. They must also learn to state the significance (motivation) of information instead of depending on the reader's willingness to cooperate and work out the purpose of apparently unrelated items of information.

The first step is to sensitize students to the presence of relation and motivation indicators in the academic texts they read. Students can be asked to describe the relation between parts or sections of a text, e.g. between a paragraph and the sub-section to which it belongs, as in Exercise 1a in Appendix C. Examining part-whole connections has students thinking about the rhetorical purpose of a section of text, like a paragraph, in relation to a higher level organizational frame, and about the rhetorical purpose of a section of text in relation to the overall theme. Exercise 1b in Appendix C, for example, is one way of training students to describe the motivation for information with reference to the micro-macro level relationship.

The second step is to develop students' ability to look for relation and motivation signals in their own essays and recognize the absence of such signals. Task 4d (Appendix B) illustrates how this can be done. Students are asked to quote the words they have used to make explicit the motivation for information and the part-whole relation in a 2-paragraph excerpt from an essay they have written for a content-course assignment. Identifying the words used is necessary because too often student writers assume that when the motivation and relations exist in the writer's head they are automatically available to the reader. A further reason for requiring students to identify motivation or relation signals is to tell the teacher whether a student needs assistance with linguistic devices for stating intended motivation and relation.

#### What are the challenges of integration?

Integration of content-course assignments into the academic writing course did produce among students at Murdoch University a positive attitude towards the academic English course the first time it was run. More than 70% of the students who did the course perceived the academic reading and writing components as useful or very useful, as the course evaluation results in the table below show. The positive feedback is to be attributed to the opportunity students had of using their content-course assignments as the vehicle for learning more efficient strategies of reading and writing.

How students rated Academic English Course (%)

	Very useful	Useful	Not really useful	Useless
Writing skills	44	28	22	0
Reading skills	22	50	17	6

The positive feedback does not mean, however, that integration of content-course tasks and academic writing is without its problems and challenges. Some of these challenges are discussed below.

The extent to which integration of writing skills development and disciplinary assignments is successful relies greatly on students' readiness to take responsibility for autonomous learning. Herein lies the first challenge. Many students in EAP classes come from cultures in which the teacher is regarded as the authority that decides what students learn and what questions they should answer. Students from such cultures are unaccustomed to asking questions and assuming responsibility for their own learning. In a writing course in which students are using different content-subject tasks to develop writing skills, it is imperative that students set their own goals as to what they need to learn, and decide what steps to take to reach their goals. In other words, they have to ask questions and manage the learning process instead of waiting for the teacher to ask the questions. Success depends on how far the teacher is able to convince students to assume responsibility for managing their own progress.

The second problem is that effective academic writing requires student writers to engage in ways of thinking they are unused to. In school they got by well enough with an information focused, egocentric approach to writing. School essays either ask for accurately recalled knowledge or expression of the student's own view of the world (in essay topics like "My best friend" or "How I spent the vacation"). To be successful in university type writing students are called upon to do more than state recalled knowledge or their own subjective views; they are expected to use knowledge for a rhetorical purpose and to construct a hierarchical network of relations between ideas so as to produce a coherent theme.

The move from a knowledge focus to a rhetorical purpose orientation is an attitudinal and mental adjustment not easy for students to make. We can understand the nature of the difficulty by looking at some unsuccessful responses to a test requiring students to write a relational statement to link information in a given paragraph to a question for which the paragraph had been written (see Appendix D for the question). While 50% of the students tested produced satisfactory relational statements, indicating that integration of writing skills and content-course writing assignments did result in their learning to state part-whole relations, the other 50% were less successful. The unsuccessful responses (see sample unsuccessful answers in Appendix D) indicate that the students had confined their attention to local information and consequently were unable to forge a connecting link from the local level to the global. These students were handicapped by an inability to think beyond immediate topical content (the case of Uri Geller of whose psychic powers some scientists were unshakably convinced despite his occasional use of trickery), to consider the rhetorical function of this content in an answer to the question (why psychologists are sceptical about research in ESP).

The third problem is that, to be effective, integration of writing lessons and content-course assignments makes heavy demands on the writing teacher's time. Because students are working on different content-course assignments, not every one's difficulties and queries can be addressed during lectures and tutorials. Additional time must be set aside for students to consult the teacher individually or in small groups of two or three students doing the same content course. Students need this extra contact time to discover if their analysis of the requirements of their content-course assignment is adequate, to check if their self-evaluation is accurate, and to obtain help with decision-making in organization and revising. Guidance specific to the student's own writing task and problems has to be given because a common failing among students is an under-developed ability to apply general principles to specific problems.

The teacher must also make time, at least initially, to learn the structure and purpose of genres of writing that students are required to produce in certain subjects. For example, the case study in an organisational behaviour course is not exactly the same as the case study written in social work. Listening to students explain what they

think the assignment requires, talking to content-course lecturers, and studying samples of the end product are familiarisation activities that take time.

The fourth problem has to do with agreement (or the lack of it) between content course teachers and the writing teacher on what a good essay or report is. Ideally, both should judge student texts with the same criteria. More often than not this is not the case. There are content-course lecturers who award high grades for essays containing expected content words regardless of haphazard organization, unexplained topic shifts, and the absence of relational statements linking given information to the essay question. The high grades give the writers of the essays the illusion that they write well enough and naturally they see no reason to apply themselves in the writing course to developing better writing skills.

Despite the challenges posed to both students and teacher, integration can be a rewarding experience for both sides. At the end of the course at Murdoch the students felt that the effort spent analysing their content course assignments and essays had benefited them. Their positive evaluation was reason for the teacher to feel that the extra time and work needed to make integration succeed was worthwhile.

### Conclusion

The goal of integration is to teach students the cognitive and metacognitive skills they need to manage the process of producing satisfactory content-course writing. In a survey of nonnative-English-speaking students who had taken an EAP writing course in the US, Leki and Carson (1994) asked students what aspects of the EAP course they found most helpful in content-course writing tasks. 64% mentioned task management strategies and rhetorical skills, clearly indicating that cognitive processes such as planning, organization, whole-text revising, and establishing coherence links are essential to successful academic writing.

The method of integration described in this paper helps students to learn management strategies and rhetorical skills in the context of writing assignments in their own discipline. The opportunity to work on content-course assignments and talk about them in the writing course puts students in a more favourable frame of mind for learning writing skills. An academic writing course that imposed its own assignments using topics of general interest on students would be perceived as a burden taking up time better spent on content-course assignments.

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## APPENDICES

**Appendix A** (*Editor's note: the excerpt from an anthropology text, to which this appendix refers, was not submitted; readers may apply to Dr. Chandrasegaran for copies.*)

From Course H150 Tutorial Worksheet 5

### EXPRESSING MOVES IN ACADEMIC WRITING

4. Identify in excerpt B sentences expressing these moves:

- (a) Narrating with writer's comment (identify the word expressing the comment).
- (b) Speculating on the reasons for a phenomenon.
- (c) Reporting writer's own personal observation.
- (d) Indicating forthcoming information.
- (e) Commenting on/ evaluating the reaction of one group.
- (f) Stating the significance (meaning) of an act described in the paragraph.
- (g) Introducing an explanation of why orthodox Buddhist clergy are critical of the Tapasas.

5. Examine a page from a book or article in your content-subject course.

What move is the writer performing in each sentence?

Sample answers to exercise 4 from excerpt B, an extract from an anthropology text.

- (a) Narrating with writer's comment (comment italicised)  
I used to see them walking through the jungle in single file, looking down at the ground, *bedraggled but impressive* figures in their brown, *humble* attire.
- (b) Speculating on reasons  
The reasons for this revival of interest in asceticism are not entirely clear. Two points may be indicated.
- (c) Reporting writer's observations  
I found considerable interest in . . .  
I used to see them walking . . .
- (d) Indicating forthcoming information  
How are the Tapasa distinguished from the orthodox priesthood?
- (e) Commenting on the reaction of one group (comment italicised)  
Considering *the highly critical tenor* of Tapasa's teaching with regard to the orthodox priesthood, this attitude is *hardly surprising*.
- (f) Stating the significance of an act described  
In both respects the intention is to break through the traditional formal channels . . .
- (g) Introducing an explanation  
The Tapasas have incurred the hostility of the established church in particular on two doctrinal points.

## Appendix B

### ACADEMIC WRITING AND REVISING SKILL

Choose an essay you are writing or have written for an assignment in a content subject course and do the following tasks:

#### Task 1

Do a task analysis of the assignment question. Write sub-questions or sub-tasks to show your understanding of what the lecturer expects you to *do* in the essay. (Do not merely give content information.)

#### Task 2

Draw a chart of the organization structure of the essay. Explain how the organization structure matches (or does not match) the focus of the assignment. If you find that the organization structure does not fit the focus, draw a revised version.

#### Task 3

Indicate the introduction of the essay with a brace and write *introd* in the margin. What words did you use in the introduction to perform these functions:

- (a) Stating the theme
- (b) Telling the reader how the essay is organized?

What else have you said in the introduction? Explain the function of each item of information. If it has no function, say why you included the information and whether you should leave it out.

If necessary, write a revised introduction, performing functions (a) and (b) and omitting purposeless information, or moving such information elsewhere.

#### Task 4

Choose 2 substantial consecutive paragraphs from the body of the essay. Label them Paragraph P and Paragraph Q. Answer the questions below.

- (a) What is the topic idea of paragraph P? Which sentence tells the reader that this is the topic idea?
- (b) Examine each item of information in the paragraph and say how it develops the topic idea. Number each item of information for ease of reference. Is there information that is not relevant to the purpose of the paragraph? Write down the information you should delete, if any, or rewrite it to make it directly relevant to the purpose of the paragraph.
- (c) What is the main information in paragraph Q? Which words tell the reader the logical connection between the 2 paragraphs? If you have not stated the connection, make revision changes so that the reader will understand how paragraph Q logically follows from P.
- (d) Explain how the information in both paragraphs is relevant to the essay's theme and purpose. Will the reader understand the motivation for the information given? Which words tell the reader why the information is given and how it is relevant to the assignment? If the motivation for the information is unclear to the reader, rewrite with the tutor's help.

#### Task 5

Examine the conclusion of the essay.

- (a) Does it reflect the essay's theme? Which words do so?

- (b) Show how the conclusion addresses the assignment question. Which words or ideas create the link between the conclusion and the assignment?
- (c) What else does the conclusion say? Explain why this information is there and why it should or should not be left out.
- (d) Use what you learnt from (a), (b) and (c) to rewrite the conclusion, if necessary.

## Appendix C

### Academic reading skills (paragraph and sentence level)

Do question 1 before the tutorial. You will be asked to report the results at the tutorial.

#### Relations between part and whole

1. Pick a paragraph (5 or more sentences long) from a chapter in a textbook you are reading for a content subject course.

(a) Explain the link between the paragraph and the sub-section of the chapter, i.e. the sub-section containing the paragraph. Use the sub-heading if the chapter has sub-headings. If not, identify the purpose of the sub-section (a group of paragraphs) and use that as a sub-heading.

(b) Explain the function of the paragraph in the development of the writer's theme (overall purpose) in the chapter. To get the theme of the chapter, read its opening and closing paragraphs, and any other statement indicating the writer's purpose.

## Appendix D

### Evaluating ability to write relational statements

Question 9 (from end of course examination paper)

Here is an excerpt from an answer to Question Q: *Why are many psychologists sceptical about research in ESP and PK?*

(1) One reason for scepticism is the tendency among some researchers to ignore proof of trickery. (2) The case of Uri Geller is an example. (3) Geller, a much publicised psychic, claims he is able to magically cause metal objects to bend. (4) On several occasions he has been caught for trickery. (5) Yet some scientists insist he has psychic powers. (6) . . .

Write a relational statement (sentence 6) telling the reader the motivation for the given information. Your sentence will indicate how information about Uri Geller is relevant to Question Q.

(Explanatory note: ESP, extrasensory perception, and PK, psychokinesis are the topics in the reading passage given at the beginning of the exam paper.)

#### Sample successful answer

Hence it is cases such as this where scientists insist on the existence of ESP and PK phenomena despite proofs to the contrary that has led to scepticism among researchers.

#### Sample unsuccessful answers

- 1 Since trickery has been found in Geller's claim, it is difficult to prove that Geller really has psychic powers.
- 2 However, there is deception occasionally and many people believe that Geller's psychic powers are genuine.

**INCORPORATING ACADEMIC SKILLS IN FIRST SEMESTER, FIRST YEAR:  
AN EXPERIENCE IN THE 'FUNDAMENTALS OF LAW' UNIT IN THE B. COMMERCE,  
UNIVERSITY OF BALLARAT**

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**ABSTRACT**

In first semester 1994 an attempt was made to expressly incorporate the teaching of academic skills into the first semester, first year unit 'Fundamentals of Law'. There were several reasons for this which will be discussed. For example, it was felt it could not be assumed that simply because students had gained entrance to tertiary study they had adequate learning skills.

The objectives, content and assessment of the 'Fundamentals of Law' unit were re-assessed and the academic skills required in the unit were expressly identified. They were: analytical and critical thinking skills, essay writing, acknowledgement of sources, English expression, self-evaluation, library research, examination technique, note-taking and personal time management skills. A number of changes were made to try to ensure students were given the opportunity to acquire or improve those skills in an integrated way in the unit. These changes included altering tutorial exercises, adding a tutorial self-assessment component to the assessment of the unit, and running 'how to take notes' and 'essay writing' sessions in conjunction with the University Student Development Unit (SDU). In addition a 'threshold test' was conducted early in the semester to identify students who had weaknesses in content or writing skills. In conjunction with the SDU group sessions were offered addressing the weaknesses identified in the test, viz., poor spelling, punctuation, written expression, grammar and analysis.

An evaluation of these efforts will be presented, together with some suggested changes for 1995.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Like many other academics, I am concerned about the performance of students. My particular concern is with first year commerce students studying business law. Law is always *perceived* as being a difficult subject and it is true that our results in first semester first year are not as good as in some other discipline areas. I think that is partly due to the requirements of the subject. Students need to grapple with the legal language and to be able to think and write clearly and analytically and many find this difficult.

I believe that the ability of students to understand the discipline content and communicate that understanding (or at least the ease with which students can do that) is related to their level of academic skills. By 'academic skills' I mean the ability to undertake critical and analytical thinking, to communicate clearly with good expression, grammar etc., to acknowledge sources in the appropriate way, to research, take notes, and to study for and sit tests and/or exams. Having said that, it is also correct to say that if a student does not understand the discipline content, perhaps through lack of ability or interest, academic skills programs are only going to help at the margin. On the other hand, the better the level of academic skills, the more *opportunity* students have to excel.

In this paper I have presented briefly my reasons for incorporating academic skills into the BL502 first year business law unit, identified what I see as the challenge and my approach to the challenge. I have then reflected on whether the effort has been worth it. The reasons for doing what I have done, the problems identified and the actions I have taken are based on my own experiences, observations, personal reflections and discussion with academic and non-academic staff members, rather than an exhaustive academic investigation. My basic philosophy is that I have a responsibility to make it as easy as I can for students to grasp and communicate the discipline content and methodology - but I will not drop the standard of outcome which I see as appropriate.

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## A REASONS FOR INCORPORATING ACADEMIC SKILLS INTO THE UNIT

1. Many students lack necessary generic academic skills: is a university wide learning skills unit the answer?

Many of us have been concerned at the large number of students, in first year particularly, who have inadequate academic skills. There are many reasons why students may lack the necessary academic skills. The inescapable fact is that they do.

A small secondment project was undertaken by myself and another academic, Malcolm Dorricott (a Mining lecturer), in second semester 1993 to investigate the support for a university wide generic learning skills unit. The results indicated that, although there were some common skills required, when they were needed in particular units or courses and the importance placed on them varied considerably. Non-academic support staff were adamant that students will only seek to acquire or improve particular learning skills when they are needed. A generic learning skills unit would therefore not be the most effective way to proceed.

Another reason why a learning skills unit might have been preferable is the problem of expertise. I doubted I had the necessary skills to incorporate academic skills into my unit because I had no 'qualifications' to teach them. I am a lawyer, not an English teacher. This would have been a convenient excuse. I do not believe it is a legitimate one because I do have some knowledge, can improve if I need to in some areas and I do not have to be an expert. The non-academic support staff at Ballarat are willing and pleased to assist in running workshops etc. - if only they are asked!

2. Academics have a responsibility to assist students

One attitude is that, on entry to tertiary study, students should have basic academic skills. If they do not then it is not up to academics to 'drop content' to teach them those skills. Students can seek advice from non-academic support staff or acquire the necessary skills 'on the way' just as 'we did or had to'. I do not believe this is an appropriate response. Knowing that we have students who lack the necessary skills, I think we have a professional responsibility to tackle the problem. Sending students 'up the hill to Student Services or the Student Development Unit' is not always effective or efficient. Many students lack the confidence (others lack the will power!) to seek assistance. There are three other reasons why I feel the lack of skills should be dealt with at the discipline level.

First, lecturers should not assess skills which they do not know their students have or have had the opportunity to learn. Lecturers cannot assume that all the students in their units have a common level of skills. For example, there are a number of first year entrant categories and variants in those categories. Even VCE students may not have had a common experience. Some have been expected to undertake independent research, others have had a less challenging experience. Probably few new students have had to study for, and sit, a three-hour exam - a common type of assessment in the university sector. In addition, with courses becoming more flexible and students moving from TAFE to the university sector with exemptions, it cannot be assumed in second semester first year units or second year units that all students should know how to research for an assignment, critically and analytically evaluate arguments, do an oral presentation etc. The only way lecturers can be sure that all students are fairly assessed is to make sure the teaching and reinforcement of or opportunity to acquire the necessary skills is available within the discipline area. An alternative way is to share the teaching of necessary skills across, say, the first semester units of the B. Commerce course. The difficulty with this is that there is no common set of units students must take.

Secondly, I am continually being told by the non-academic support staff that students learn academic skills most effectively and efficiently when they are taught in the discipline area, at the time they need them.

Thirdly, there is less room for conflicting signals to be given to students if academics take the lead role in thinking through what skills are required in their particular units and then make sure students have appropriate opportunities to acquire or reinforce those skills. There is also an inherent benefit in this process. It 'forced' me to critically re-appraise my unit's objectives, discipline content, assessment tasks and their criteria. Lectures and tutorials which supported these then had to be re-evaluated.

## **B. THE CHALLENGE : TO FIND THE CORRECT BALANCE BETWEEN TEACHING DISCIPLINE CONTENT AND ACADEMIC SKILLS**

It is easy to ask the question:

How do you enhance the opportunities for students to improve their academic skills (ie improve their learning ability) in the unit without compromising academic rigour and content?

It is more difficult to find practical answers!

## **C. THE APPROACH TAKEN IN BL502**

For first year students I felt that there was a need to tackle the problem of improving academic skills on two levels. The first was to consider what general problems may affect first year students' performance levels. The second was to consider what particular skills were needed in my unit and how to incorporate them. I felt this 'holistic' approach was necessary because I suspected that some students had the necessary learning skills but may not have been able to take advantage of them for one reason or another. This is just as much a problem as students not having the necessary skills.

### 1. General problems

#### (a) Transition to tertiary study

This is obviously not a new problem but the difficulties in making the transition are very real for some students. This was addressed by:

- (i) the 'B UNIWISE' orientation program
- (ii) setting out the purpose of lectures and tutorials in the unit outline
- (iii) discussion in the first tutorial of (ii) plus a discussion of expectations: 'yours and ours' compared with eg VCE experiences
- (iv) note-taking and assignment writing sessions were run in the first few weeks as a joint effort with Annette Chappell-Lawrence (Equity Programs Co-ordinator).

#### (b) Communicating the standard expected in BL502

Often students have said they are unsure of what is expected - what standard are we looking for? It seemed to me it would be better if they had an indication of this BEFORE the first piece of assessable work rather than after. Therefore:

- (i) 10% from the total assessment was set aside for tutorial participation. Students were required to set their own criteria - ie to consider (given the purpose of tutorials) what their responsibilities should be if they were to have a productive learning experience. Each tutorial group's criteria was compared and a common set of criteria produced. Students were required to monitor their performance and to evaluate it at the end of week 12. Tutors had an overriding say in the actual mark awarded. An 'appeal' system was set up. The scheme is described in Appendix A.

It was hoped that through this process students would actually see how different tertiary study was: that they had to be active and take responsibility for their own learning. It was also hoped it would encourage students to see the value of preparing for and participating in tutorials and set up good study patterns for the whole course. The 'carrot' was a potential 10 marks for doing what students should do anyway!

I think the initial process was valuable but many students did not refer to the criteria again - so that there was a mad scramble to find that bit of yellow paper they had to hand in with their mark. Most students were fair in their assessment. Some marks went up; some went down. There were no appeals.

- (ii) In the second tutorial, an old exam question and sample student answers were distributed. Students had to grade the answers and give reasons. The results were quite interesting. One paper was a 'B', one an 'E' and one an 'F'. Most picked the F, most passed the E and some failed the B because 'it was too long and involved!' I believe this was a very valuable exercise which the students were referred back to at the time of tests and the final examination.
- (iii) To give the students a practical taste of standards, they sat a 'threshold test' in week 3 - marked 50% content and 50% grammar, spelling etc. A written feedback sheet was given to each student. 90% of the 91 students returning tutorial feedback sheets at the end of the semester thought the test was helpful. The most critical were VCE students who had studied legal studies and found the test a 'bit easy' and therefore misleading because they had done well in it - but found the real test much harder. This will be addressed next year.

(c) Identifying academic skills' weaknesses

About 25% of the total intake (40 of 162) failed the skills section of the threshold test. Three skills workshops were organised in the areas of weakness identified, viz. expression, grammar; spelling and punctuation; analysis/content. They were conducted by Anne Bouts from our Student Development Unit. Originally it was intended the workshops would commence before Easter and be run at the time students should have been working on their assignments. Due to matters outside our control, the sessions could not be run until after Easter. I think the momentum was lost and this could account for the poor attendance: only 12 out of the 40 students identified attended. Half were overseas students who are always keen attenders of these sorts of sessions.

On the other hand, similar skills workshops were run in second semester, again not in class time but at a time when no students had classes and the attendance was worse. This may suggest that students are just not willing to make the investment for two weeks time when their assignments have to be in for law, if they have a test in another subject area the next day.

(d) Improved lectures and tutorials

Undoubtedly there is a correlation between the clarity with which lecture material is organised and presented - and the ability of students to take good notes. I tried to be even more conscious to deliver material clearly and concisely, using diagrams and flow charts to assist visualisation.

All the tutorial exercises were revamped to ensure students had time to adjust to the legal jargon and way of thinking, a 'building block approach' was taken in tutorial exercises, and the variety of exercises which required the active participation of students was increased.

2. Specific academic skills needed

The following were identified as necessary to the law unit and action was taken as set out below.

(a) Critical/analytical thinking and writing

Law units require students to think clearly and to be critical and analytical. Students often find this quite difficult to do - some seem to have little idea of what being critical and analytical means. This is by no means a first year problem as often exam questions in later units requiring 'critical evaluation' are answered in a descriptive way.

Clear thinking and analysis would seem to be a generic skill that could be easily taught outside the discipline area. It is also so essential to the law discipline that we think we are teaching it whenever we look at any case study and 'apply the law' to solve the problem. In the past we have provided 'how to answer a legal question'

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guides - giving students a process. But what seems so elementary and easy to us, seems so hard to first year students. I decided to try to go back a few steps in tutorials.

In week 3, we had a tutorial session on 'how to find your way around a case' and started 'case analysis' exercises. Students were given a simple factual scenario and asked to give a ruling on the outcome - then further scenarios were introduced and students had to use their first case ruling to decide the outcomes of those scenarios - in effect they were developing law through precedent. By looking for differences and similarities and missing information which might be important, it was a clear thinking and analytical exercise. Next week they were given a 'real' case, asked to give a ruling, then 'apply' that to another set of facts.

As was customary there was also a 'hands on' exercise in the library where students had to find cases and answer questions about them. After the tutorials described above, this should have been an easier and more effective exercise than in previous years.

An excellent book *How to Study Business Law* by Crosling & Murphy became available and students were encouraged to buy it or borrow it from the library and work through the exercises. About 50 copies were sold which shows the interest of students (and their desperate need?!)

A short Legal Writing Guide prepared by me was handed out with the assignment topics.

(b) Essay writing/English expression/grammar/punctuation/spelling

The threshold test was relied on to indicate to students in advance if they had a weakness in this area. The workshops were intended to provide the opportunity for students to improve. Those few who attended were, I think, quite surprised about what they knew and didn't know. The difficulty was competing priorities: the workshops were run at a time when students were madly cramming for tests or writing assignments and were probably seen as a 'good idea' if 'I had the time'.

It is amazing that some second and third year students still have very poor skills in this area - know it and know they are marked down because of it - but do nothing. This is a university-wide problem and must be tackled better than the ad hoc way in which it has been.

I have some further thoughts on how to address these skills. See section D below.

(c) Acknowledging sources

There are three problems here. One is a general problem of students following the style indicated correctly. A *University Guide to the Presentation of Academic Work* has always been available and referred to. The readability of the document and distribution process needs to be improved, however. The proposal is for it to be available on the computer network for easy access - with an interactive component.

The second problem is the students' uncertainty about how to introduce and source legal materials, particularly cases. The *Legal Writing Guide* referred to earlier gave examples of how to cite a case. A special section in the Guide needs to be written as well. Crosling & Murphy's text is very useful in this area and students were referred to the relevant sections.

The third problem is the students' lack of understanding of what 'plagiarism' is and of how important it is to reference meticulously. Again this would seem to be a generic skill. One experience here suggests that the students are not easily able to transfer this skill across units. An exercise, say done in economics, on how to paraphrase and source does not seem to assist students in law. Perhaps one exercise is not enough and the students need reinforcement. It also requires every lecturer and tutor to set rigorous standards and apply a penalty if they are not met.

(d) Library research skills

Students are not required to undertake a lot of independent research in BL502. The assignment is usually case-based and students use texts and counter-reserve materials to answer it. So in a sense they are not really prepared

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when in later units they are given an assignment and *expected* to undertake 'thorough' research using CD-Rom etc. Should they know how? Should we run group sessions in eg second year? Would one lecturer make available a tutorial session for this? Is one session enough in one discipline area? These are difficult questions.

I did set a tutorial exercise where students were asked to find an 'article' from the library on a designated topic and bring it to class to discuss it. The majority of students attended with a newspaper clipping, which was not what I had intended! A communication breakdown? Certainly a difference in expectations. Next year I will specify an 'academic article' ie from a journal!

(e) Test/exam technique

I tried to address these skills by:

- (i) handing out sample exam answers (week 2)
- (ii) using old exam/test questions as tutorial questions
- (iii) in the last few weeks dividing students into teams, with each team to 'lead' the class through a case study; each member to hand in a properly written answer which was marked and returned with comments.
- (iv) handing out the Legal Writing Guide, referring to chapters in the Crosling & Murphy, 'How to Study Law', exam tips in last tutorial.

Whilst we seemed to have retained the students' interest and 75% were in a pass position prior to the exam, the performance in the exam was extremely poor. 54% who received an F grade (the lowest fail grade) had been in a pass position and 57% of those had passed both the test and the assignment. Was a cause of the poor performance the fact that the final exam was of 3 hours duration and students just do not have experience with 3 hour exams? More work will need to be done on this area.

(f) Note taking and personal time management

Again these are generic skills. Sessions in orientation do not seem to be totally effective but perhaps students have to 'learn through experience' to a certain extent. I organised note-taking sessions which were quite well attended and the students in those sessions had some good ideas to pass on to others.

One quite unprepared exercise seemed to work well and next time we will orchestrate it! While one person was giving a short talk on how to write a legal assignment, I noticed that there were few students taking notes. I decided to start making notes on the board. From that exercise we demonstrated the lack of natural inclination of some students to take notes, the worth of doing so, the short-hand way of doing so and how queries should be raised etc.

In the past, we had often thought of doing this in lectures: give a short burst - then ask students to compare what notes they had taken - then put up on an overhead what notes you would expect them to have taken. (This would make me think very carefully about what/how and why I lectured!) I think this is an excellent exercise BUT I could never force myself to find the appropriate time because I always had so much lecture material to get through! If every lecturer did this one or two times I am sure the note-taking would improve but is the time-cost worth the effort? Again, a difficult question.

#### **D. EVALUATION AND REFLECTIONS**

The foregoing has been a very detailed look at how I conducted my first year unit. It left me with the question: was it worth it? The effort to revamp the unit and organise the support sessions was very time consuming. Many of my peers said "I was mad" - "Doing too much for the students". In fact I was trying to organise it so that the students ended up doing more!

Were the results any different? It depends what 'results' means. The over-all pass rate was similar to the year before. The exam seemed to be the problem. As noted above, it was very poorly done. Was it too hard/unfair? It was checked by others - it only covered the work covered in lectures and tutorials - the questions were similar to tutorial questions. I do not think the exam was 'unfair'. Informal feedback from students was that it was a good exam - if you had studied! 'Results' could also mean a less tangible outcome. This is looked at in points 2 and 3 below.

Overall, I think it was worth the effort to try to incorporate more explicitly academic skills into the unit.

1. It enhanced my own professional development. It made me really think through the connection between lectures/tutorials/assessment and objectives/content/skills/assessment. I also became far more aware of the support services available to students and how to access them. I think students will benefit from that knowledge. I have also benefited from the increased inter-action with non-academic support staff. I have learnt a lot and had my memory concerning grammar and spelling rules refreshed!

2. The feedback from students was positive. Approximately 90% of students who returned tutorial feedback sheets felt the tutorial participation scheme and threshold test were helpful. 87% felt the unit had helped them to be a more critical thinker.

3. The learning environment was much better than 1993. That year I felt we had lost the students by about week 5. This year I think there was a good feeling all semester. Students were far more interactive in tutorials. Anne Bouts reported informally that even those going to her for help were not completely lost souls. So there may be longer term benefits.

4. The pass rate was no better. This was disappointing. It could indicate that incorporating academic skills into the discipline does not improve students' results, therefore it is a waste of time. Alternatively, it could indicate that the way I incorporated academic skills into my unit was not effective: ie a criticism of myself. Or it could indicate that teaching skills in one unit is not sufficient or that there were other factors which affected the pass rate..

Certainly I can see areas that could be improved and I have alluded to some of these throughout the paper. Examples of the major improvements I would seek to make are:

- (i) running the skills workshops earlier: immediately after feedback from the threshold test and before the 'assessment rush'.
- (ii) reconsidering the content of the threshold test. Students who have previously studied legal studies could sit a 'harder' test. I think the test needs to be run in about week 3 and by that time we have only covered introductory material. This material will seem easy to some students because of their head start - they get a shock when we start case analysis. The other students struggle from day one because of the 'new language' that has to be understood, as well as the concepts, analysis etc.
- (iii) running skills workshops and library research sessions in second semester. Students should be more receptive and motivated to improve their learning skills after they have had their first semester experiences. In terms of efficiency there is an argument that we should not incorporate skills work until second semester. I think the ideal situation would be skills workshops in both semesters. The attendance of students at academic skills' workshops in *both* first and second semester this year was, however, very disappointing.
- (iv) reinforcing the time and effort required to prepare for tests, assignments and exams. This is still being underestimated by many students. To some extent they have to learn from their experiences. On the other hand I do not think we can use this as excuse for not trying to find ways so they can avoid making mistakes. Perhaps more interaction between the second and third year students and the first years would assist.
- (v) addressing the problems of 3 hour exams.
- (vi) withholding students' assignment marks where the assignments are deficient in terms of expression, grammar, spelling, referencing etc. until those deficiencies have been rectified.

There were frustrations. It was a challenge to reassess how to incorporate skills work explicitly in tutorials. Each tutorial exercise had to be assessed for its importance and usefulness. Problem case-study questions had to be cut down in number and put in later tutorials to accommodate the 'building block' approach. In the end, however, I think the changes made the unit more coherent and cohesive.

Running the threshold test and providing feedback was an extra workload for all of us tutoring in the unit. Organising the various skills workshops and attending them also took time. I think even better communication with Annette and Anne would further improve the workshops. They were most generous with their time, however, and I thank them for that.

There is also the problem of the students suffering 'workshop overload'. If every lecturer attempted to do what I have done, there would be workshops running everywhere! So there is obviously a need for more communication and co-ordination between academics and non-academics.

Considering the thought and effort put into running the workshops, the poor attendance was disappointing, if not demoralising from our point of view. From my experience in 1994, giving students the opportunity to learn and improve their academic skills in workshops run from the discipline but out of official class contact hours was not entirely successful. If that means academic skills workshops have to be run in class time, I suspect it will be difficult to get the support of a lot of academics.

#### **E. CONCLUSION**

I know that we cannot live students' lives for them. Sometimes the only way to learn is to make mistakes. Knowing that students lack important skills, however, I feel we have an obligation to provide them with an OPPORTUNITY to learn or improve the skills they need. We have to provide the environment where they are encouraged to take up that opportunity.

It is interesting that anecdotal feedback from some students suggests that a major reason for their not performing well in first semester is the enjoyment of their new found freedom causing them to delay studying seriously until it is too late. In answer to my question 'What can we do' they say ... 'Nothing - it is up to us'.

I believe the last response is not a signal to do nothing but to make sure that we have provided the very best lectures, tutorials, assessment tasks - and the best learning opportunities, which includes incorporating academic skills into discipline units. **Then** it is up to the students..... Having said that, the experiences described above have left some unanswered questions - particularly about the *extent* to which skills programs should and can be incorporated in the discipline area in official class contact time.

## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A**

UNIVERSITY OF BALLARAT  
DIVISION OF BUSINESS AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT  
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

#### **BL502 - FUNDAMENTALS OF LAW**

#### **TUTORIAL PARTICIPATION ASSESSMENT AND A NOTE ABOUT 'CASE BOOKS'**

This semester we are going to trial a scheme where you will be involved in setting the criteria for the 10 marks set aside for tutorial participation. You will also be asked to evaluate your own performance.

##### **1. Why assess tutorial participation?**

This is answered in the Unit Description. See the last four objectives on page 1, the purpose of tutorials on page 2, and the material under the heading 'Tutorial Participation', also on page 2.

##### **2. How will tutorial participation be assessed?**

In the past tutors have awarded a mark based on their assessment of the performance of each student over the semester. In most cases the unit co-ordinator will have set the criteria.

I have decided to introduce a different system this year to give more responsibility to students for their own learning. Students, in consultation with their tutors will propose the criteria. Students will then be asked to assess themselves according to the criteria. More detail of the actual procedures is set out in the next points.

Why this approach? Throughout your studies and future employment you will have to monitor your own performance, and invariably others'. This gives you the opportunity to start learning those skills. In addition, one of the objectives of this unit (and of the whole course) is to assist you to become independent learners and to take responsibility for your own learning. Involving you in the assessment process is one way to help achieve this.

##### **3. How will the criteria be set?**

In the first tutorial you will be asked to break into small groups to discuss what you think the criteria should be. List down 3 or 4 points. Each group will be asked to contribute their points. Discussion will follow when the points will be 'teased out' and a number agreed upon. (Prior to this there will have been a discussion about the purpose of lectures and tutorials; and the difference between VCE/TAFE and tertiary study. This will have helped give you some ideas.)

Each tutor will give me the suggested criteria. I will then consolidate the different groups' input and produce a common set of criteria. Each student will be assessed using the same criteria.

In other units, this process has produced a similar set of criteria from each group. This does not make the exercise a waste of time. The great benefit of it is that the discussion that takes place will assist students to become aware of some of the best strategies for learning and a true appreciation of the benefits of tutorials. Hopefully it will lead to students having more confidence to raise issues, to ask questions and make comments based on their preparation for the tutorial. This makes it more enjoyable for everyone and allows a greater depth and breadth of material to be covered. As I will keep repeating, tutorials are not for us to 'give' you information - they are for you to explore the extent of your knowledge and understanding.

4. What will the tutorials be like?

As most of you have not had tutorials at a higher education institution before, you might think it will be difficult to think of criteria when you do not know what is expected of you. This is fair comment. Set out below are the sorts of activities you can expect in this unit.

Topic one: Introduction to Law - you already have your tutorial guide - look through this.

Topic two: Tort - you will be asked to find an article in the library and bring it to class ready to discuss it; you will be given a number of fact situations (called case studies or problem questions) and be asked to work out what the legal issues are, what law might apply and to solve the legal problem for the parties. This may involve working in small groups, with each group looking at a separate fact situation and reporting on it and their conclusions. At other times, you will be required to look at a fact situation before class and to offer your opinion about the legal principles involved, the likely arguments by the various parties, and what the legal (and other) outcomes might be for them.

Topic three: Contract - there will be a number of short answers (for example, from the V&L Workbook and chapters in Graw); case studies (as for Tort) and role plays. The last exercise will involve dividing each tutorial group into 'teams'. Each team will be given at least one fact situation (in advance) to act out - they and the rest of the class will then have to discuss the legal repercussions. Written exercises will also be set, some done in class.

5. How the actual mark will be decided.

Students will be required to give themselves a mark out of 10 - using the criteria decided upon earlier. Each student will be given in week 2 a copy of the criteria, a checklist to help them keep tabs on their performance and a tear-off slip that they must complete and hand in to their tutors by the end of week 12.

Each tutor will also independently give a mark for each student. If there is a difference between the two, the tutor has the discretion to change the student's mark. The student has the right to discuss with his or her tutor why that was done. If the student has kept a 'check' on their tutorial work, this could be helpful. If no satisfaction is forthcoming, the student should come to me.

Students should take this exercise seriously - as an opportunity to monitor their own learning. It should enable them to know early when they need further assistance, either from their tutors or from student services, Anne Bouts or Annette Chappell-Lawrence (the Equity Support Program).

**CASEBOOKS**

The source of law for most of the areas covered in BL502 is case law. That is, the legal principles covered in the introductory area, tort and contract derive from cases and the doctrine of precedent. Therefore you will be required to read cases, or extracts from them. How to do this will be covered in tutorials.

AS A LEARNING AID we encourage students to summarise the law cases that contain and explain the relevant legal principles of each topic. If you do this regularly it means you are continually revising and developing a greater understanding of the law. In addition it means that you have a good resource to make it easier for you to learn for tests and exams. **USING SOMEONE ELSE'S CASEBOOK DOES NOT HELP YOU TO LEARN!**

This semester we will be running a 'case book' session in WEEK 5 for those who are unsure of how to start. You will be given more information about this in the next Lecture Guide and Tutorial Exercises Handout entitled "Tort".

In the meantime feel free to start. The sort of information you need to isolate from each case is :

- a. names of the parties
- b. brief statement of the **important facts**

- c. a summary of the legal issues (eg precedent, statutory interpretation, some aspect of contract)
- d. the court's decision; and
- e. **MOST IMPORTANTLY THE REASON FOR THAT DECISION** i.e. why was there a contract or why was the contract not enforceable?

Chris Baker,  
Unit Co-ordinator, 23 February 1994

**Appendix B**

UNIVERSITY OF BALLARAT SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

**BL502 FUNDAMENTALS OF LAW 1994 TUTORIAL PARTICIPATION: CRITERIA**

Based on the discussions and input from all tutorial groups, the following will be the criteria by which students will monitor their own performance. By the end of week 12 all students must hand in the tear-off slip below to their tutor. The actual marks will be placed on my door (B111) by the end of week 13 (list will show student numbers only). It is the responsibility of students to check their mark and, in the first instance, to see their tutor if they disagree. If no satisfactory conclusion is reached students may see me. All marks must be finalised by the end of swot vac.

**CRITERIA**

1. ATTENDANCE : 9 of the 11 double-tutorials (ie weeks 2 to 12).
2. PREPARATION
3. PARTICIPATION in class generally and in small group discussions

The meaning of preparation and participation is expanded on below in the form of a checklist. The checklist comes from what students said in the various tutorials.

	Wk 2	Wk 3	Wk 4	Wk 5	Wk 6	Wk 7	Wk 8	Wk 9	Wk 10	Wk 11
<b><u>PREPARATION</u></b>										
Planned my time										
Made an effort to complete all set tutorial work										
Used initiative										
Had a go by reading topics I didn't understand / asked other students/my tutor before class										
Worked out what I did not know, so could ask in class										
Used legal principles and related to the facts										
<b><u>PARTICIPATION</u></b>										
Willingness to participate in class and small group discussions										
Took the initiative to lead discussion/ took notes for group, reported for group										
Made others feel comfortable in class										
Performed designated role if required										
Co-operated/respected others views/listened										
Input was relevant to question or discussion										
Asked for help/asked what didn't understand about lectures/tutorial work										
Answered questions voluntarily/when asked										
Gave own ideas										
Handed in work for feedback (say, one essay)										
Showed knowledge/understood the work										

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**BL502 TUTORIAL PARTICIPATION MARK** (OUT OF 10) ..... **TUTOR'S NAME**  
 .....

**STUDENT NAME** ..... **STUDENT NO.** ..... **TUTORIAL NO.**.....

## A KIND OF COLLABORATION WITH THE FACULTY OF LAW: TEACHING LAW STUDENTS ACADEMIC WRITING

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### ABSTRACT

This paper describes an action research project that was carried out at the University of Wollongong in Autumn Session, 1994. Design and implementation of a program to assist in the development of academic writing for 11 students enrolled in 'Law in Society' was carried out by the Head of the Learning Development Centre (LDC), and support for the students, in the form of individual consultation, was provided by a member of the Faculty of Law. Evaluation was undertaken in two ways: the Faculty of Law evaluated student essays submitted in the normal process of assessment; and the LDC monitored student writing undertaken during the period of the program. The project resulted in all students who undertook the course achieving credit or distinction grades in the subject.

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### **Entry to Law at the University of Wollongong**

Law courses at the University of Wollongong are offered in a five-year full-time (or equivalent part-time) joint degree structure: Arts/Law, Commerce/Law, Science/Law, Computer Science/Law, Information Technology/Law, Mathematics/Law or Creative Arts/Law. Law is only offered as a single degree to graduates.

Students entering Law studies at the University of Wollongong do so with a similar Tertiary Entrance Rank (TER) to those entering the Australian National University (ANU), Macquarie University and the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). They are much higher achievers at school level than those accepted into the University of New England, and slightly lower in achievement at school level than those accepted into the Universities of Sydney and New South Wales. In 1993 the TER cut-off mark was 92.5 for students entering Law at the University of Wollongong and in 1994 it rose to 93.8.

### **The Problem**

Despite achieving high TER scores or high scores on the Law entrance test for mature students, many first year students do not demonstrate adequate control of written English at the level of essay writing. Whilst they have a sound knowledge of word meanings, they often demonstrate poor oral and written use of vocabulary. Poole (1976: 145) in a study at New England University, found this occurred for both middle and working-class university entrants.

In late 1993 I met with the Dean of Law and a member of the teaching staff of that Faculty. The Dean sought to involve me in developing a general strategy for improving the writing competence of students enrolled in a first year law subject (LLB100 - Law in Society) and he was particularly concerned with improving the writing competence of a group of students who, judging from previous years, might well be 'at risk' of failure in the subject. Whilst the 1994 students were yet to enrol, experience had shown that each year a significant group of academically high achieving school leavers were unable to cope with the writing demands of the subject. The Dean identified, as the prime point of dissatisfaction, students' inability to initiate and sustain an academic argument. He further identified poor grammar, spelling and punctuation as areas of irritation to Faculty of Law staff.

What he sought was a method of identifying which students would be 'at risk', and a strategy for solving the problems identified by himself and his staff. The Dean wanted to 'hand over' the problem to the Learning Development Centre, and he wanted to feel comfortable (a) that the students would be taught to generate academic discourse at a suitable and appropriate level; and (b) that a mechanism for dealing with 'the problem' would be found that could be adopted as an ongoing strategy.

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### **Method of selecting students**

It was agreed that an appropriate way to determine which students would be likely to experience difficulty generating a piece of written academic text was to have them write something. It was further agreed that the Faculty of Law would set a topic that could be answered 'from life', that is, without recourse to research as preparation, and that those staff members engaged in teaching LLB100 would mark the writing as though it were a first examination or pre-test in Law.

In week one, all students (N = 117) enrolled in LLB100 were required to write an essay on the question, 'Why are laws broken?'. Time allowed was fifty minutes during a normal lecture period. No notification of the testing procedure was given to the students because the Faculty wished to complete the testing in the first week to enable writing classes to commence as soon as possible.

Twenty four students (20.5%) were selected as requiring assistance to develop academic discourse. Of the 24, six approached the Centre with the express purpose of venting hostility that they had been chosen for 'remedial' writing classes. Either the fact that attendance was voluntary had not been conveyed to the students, or they did not understand that the decision to attend was theirs.

The six students were asked whether they would like to have another attempt at the topic, using their first attempt as a draft to develop their ideas. All attempted the rewriting and they were allowed to take as long as they wished to complete the task. At the end of the rewriting, two were assessed as not requiring further classes. One was a mature aged student (70+ years) who had retired from the engineering profession. This student had misunderstood the original task to 'write an essay' and had written in point form (a common requirement of his previous profession). Another took three hours to generate an acceptable academic argument. The Law Faculty was advised that these two students did not need to attend the classes. The four remaining students made very little improvement on their original piece. One student, a female Chinese Australian, immediately withdrew from the law degree.

### **The students**

Eleven students (9.4%) decided to attend the weekly two-hour sessions, including one who had not been identified as needing assistance. This student insisted that he be included in the class because he felt he had not been prepared well enough during his HSC years for university level writing (this student had been the dux of his high school and had been ranked first in several subjects.). The remaining students (11) did not attend the weekly two-hour class because of timetable clashes, but they also did not attend the Learning Development Centre for individual tuition, even though this option was made available to them.

All of the students (six males, five females) were Australians aged 18 to 19 years who had completed the NSW HSC in 1993. Eight students were enrolled in BComm/LLB, two in BA/LLB and one in BSc/LLB. None were from non-English speaking backgrounds, but three were grandchildren of post-war European migrants. None had parents employed in the legal profession or similar levels of profession. It may be argued that whilst they had developed both vocabulary and word fluency, they were deficient in the complex syntactical strategies necessary for sophisticated written communication. They lacked the 'cultural capital' necessary to achieve early success in the university environment.

### **Aims of the program**

One aim was to empower students as writers, to build their confidence in having something worthwhile to say. As new undergraduates, it was very easy for them to feel that they had little to contribute in terms of ideas.

The second aim was to develop students' awareness of 'how writers and readers interact on the middle ground of the text' (Smith, 1986: 88). They were to discover that readers (in this case academic markers) have expectations that writers (students) must respect if they aspire to make their text meaningful. The text is the common link, where writers and readers influence each other. As such, the program was to make explicit reader expectations, including academic conventions of argument and evidence. Since these students were first semester, first year undergraduates, their familiarity with 'academic English' at any level was superficial.

The third aim of the program was to develop an awareness of what Smith calls the 'composition' and 'transcription' sides of writing (1986: 20). For Smith, composition involves the process of getting ideas,

selecting words and using grammar. Transcription involves the physical effort of writing and taking care of the conventions of spelling, capitalisation, punctuation, paragraphs and legibility. The majority of students were providing ideas that were neither fully developed nor well expressed (composition level) and their writing showed little awareness of the conventions (transcription level). The program therefore tried to raise students' awareness of the composing and editing tasks involved in the writing process.

### **The Program**

The Program consisted of eight two-hour classes that were conducted on a workshop basis. In all but the first and second classes, students directed the lessons. What emerged was a truly student-centred curriculum, and as a teacher I was surprised, weekly, at the direction the classes took.

#### Class One

The introductory class had two objectives: to convince the students that there really was scope for improvement in their writing and that it was necessary for that improvement to take place if they were to be successful within the Faculty of Law. The intention of this first class was to initiate a learning environment that would develop students' confidence in themselves as writers, confidence in their peers as supportive rather than as competitive learners, and confidence in me as a teacher of academic discourse appropriate to studying Law, even though I had no legal training.

I began by introducing myself and providing a background on why the Faculty of Law had embarked on a strategy to improve student writing. I indicated that they could withdraw from the course at any time. The students introduced themselves and several confessed feelings of disappointment and/or embarrassment that they had been selected to undertake the course. We discussed how it felt to be placed in the equivalent of a primary school 'wombat' class for reading.

The students were given an opportunity to review the piece of writing they had undertaken for the test and to redraft it. I read aloud their first attempts and gave a brief appraisal and some guidance. The reading aloud did not appear to evoke negative feelings on the part of the students. Perhaps, since they were all to have a turn 'under the microscope', it was a kind of voyeuristic opportunity to see how others had done. They talked freely, offering advice to each other and saying things like, 'I did that, too' and 'Yeah. I don't know how to put in an example there, either'. At the end of the two hours I asked them whether they would like to continue to meet each week and their unanimous and affirmative response was the culmination of what I believed to be a very warm and productive first class. I collected their redrafts and the next week provided written feedback.

#### Class Two

The aim of the second class was to explore how text acts as the common link between writers and readers and the ways in which they influence each other. My objective was to make explicit reader expectations, including academic conventions of argument and evidence, and to make explicit writer responsibilities for generating clear meanings and establishing logical arguments, which in academe involved the use of appropriate examples and/or evidence.

Discussion involved paragraphs and the positioning of thesis (or topic) sentences, explanatory (or supporting) sentences, exemplification (or other evidence), and concluding (or sub-topic) sentences (see, e.g., Cunningham 1976: 45-7; Packham et al., 1985: 8; Crosling and Murphy, 1994: 98-101). Three formats for the organisation of technical writing in English (Packham et al., 1985: 9) were discussed and these were compared to analyses of formats for business law essays (Crosling and Murphy, 1994: 111-120). My objective was to focus on the 'composition' or 'meaning-making' level of writing.

Student direction of the class focussed on the use of apostrophes in contractions and in showing possession. One began by asking, 'How do you use those comma things in words?'. It was clear that for students, 'transcription' or editing issues had primacy since these were the items that most attracted the marker's red pen.

#### Class Three

Wishing to work at the 'composition' level of writing, students asked whether we could discuss their current essay topic:

Does the decision in Mabo v. Queensland [No.2] challenge community values that are reflected in Australian law? If so, how? Are the acts passed by (1) the Commonwealth Parliament and (2) the Parliament of Western Australia after the Mabo decision a reassertion of community values? Which legislation best reflects community values? Why?

Discussion focused on finding a definition of 'community values'.

Focusing on the transcription level, they asked when they should use the word 'Aboriginal' as opposed to the word 'Aborigine'. This stimulated a discussion on the use of adjectival forms of proper nouns, for example, 'an Australian woman', or 'a Russian child', and exposed the problem of how to form adjectives from proper nouns such as 'New Zealand'. We ventured into territory that exposed significant deficits in vocabulary as the students discussed how to turn various kinds of words into others, for example nouns into verbs. The class expressed great surprise that kinds of words actually had 'labels' such as 'noun' or 'verb', and whilst I resisted what could easily have become a diversion in the guise of a lesson on traditional grammar, it was clear that the students were interested in knowing more about their own language.

#### Class Four

In the fourth week of the course, students had submitted their first essay and without the need to generate another immediately, again focused on the 'transcription' or editing level of writing: 'When do you use the double dots and the dot and a comma?' (a colon and semi-colon). Again we moved into the difficult territory of discussing grammatical issues such as the joining of two like clauses, without access to a common vocabulary. I used strategies such as, 'Show me in your writing where you would like to use one of these'. Various examples were written on the board and we worked out which were appropriate/inappropriate and why/why not.

#### Classes Five and Six

These two classes again focussed on the composition level of writing; on the need to understand (the meaning in the question) and to generate meaning (in the essay answer).

"Sometimes judicial initiative is inevitable... It is no longer feasible for courts to decide cases by reference to obsolete or unsound rules which result in injustice and await future reform at the hands of the legislature. There is a growing expectation that courts will apply rules that are just, equitable and soundly based except in so far as the courts are constrained by statute to act otherwise. Nothing is more likely to bring about an erosion of public confidence in the administration of justice than the continued adherence by the courts to rules and doctrines which are unsound and lead to unjust outcomes . . ." Sir Anthony Mason, Chief Justice of Australia, 15 March 1994.

Do you agree with Sir Anthony Mason's remarks? . . .

The students taught me and each other about what the question was asking, and posited several ways in which to answer. The two classes (four hours) turned into 'brainstorming' and 'freewriting' sessions.

#### Classes Seven and Eight

These two classes focused at the transcription level. Once again, students refined their writing, read their essays aloud to each other, and offered suggestions for redrafting.

### **Results**

One hundred students completed the subject, Law in Society, and grades awarded to those attending the writing class were seven Credits and four Distinctions. The following table compares the grades awarded to the participating students with the grades of those who did not participate. As can be seen, 20% of the Distinction

grades awarded were to those who participated in the writing class and 14% of the Credit grades were awarded to participating students.

**Table 2:** Comparison of the grades awarded to participating and non-participating students

	No. of students enrolled in subject	No. of students undertaking writing course
Fail	5	
Pass	24	
Credit	50	7 (14%)
Distinction	20	4 (20%)
High Distinction	1	
<b>Total students</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>11 (11%)</b>

### Discussion and Conclusion

The writing class was successful in assisting a group of students, identified as likely to fail Law in Society, to achieve above-average grades. The collaboration between the Learning Development Centre and the Faculty of Law was minimal, but sufficient to provide support to the students. It has been proposed by the Faculty of Law that the Learning Development Centre and the Faculty team-teach the subject, Law in Society, in 1995. By increasing the level of collaboration, and by teaching academic writing within the discipline, it is hoped that this successful venture will be continued.

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## TEAM-TEACHING THROUGH WRITING: A CASE STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

This paper will be based on work done in 1993 with a lecturer in Adult Education, in both the Associate Diploma course and an MEd course. Students in the Associate Diploma were mature-age Aboriginal students attending by block mode. Many were returning to study after some time, as were the Masters students who came from HRD backgrounds in business, or from community education.

The students had been experiencing considerable difficulties with the requirements of writing a case-study based on their work-place. Researching, organising the material and structuring the writing were causing problems. The lecturer and I devised a plan of assistance which began with my presentation to them as a group of strategies for time and research organisation, and the planning and structuring of their writing. The lecturer's own writing was used as a model for analysis. Following this session, students handed drafts to the lecturer who commented on them, then passed them to me for further editing advice. Frequently at this stage, one-to-one teaching was needed at the sentence structure and grammar level, as well as the overall case-study genre requirements. Further drafts were submitted to the lecturer if necessary and we conferred regularly on students' progress. The final case-studies were of a high quality. The lecturer expressed satisfaction with the process, and has gone on to incorporate the early planning strategies into the content of the course.

## **TERTIARY LITERACY: POLICY, DEFINITION AND PRACTICE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The presentation describes the first half of a Masters research thesis on tertiary literacy, within the framework of the cultural view of language. The study examines literacy policy within a university, the literacy definitions given by various academic and administrative staff and the practices undertaken to develop literacy. An analysis of twenty interviews with university staff who are either decision makers and/or experts in the area of language development will be presented, exploring views and attitudes on policy; definition of tertiary literacy; and best practice.

A description will also be given of case studies being currently undertaken within Schools representing four diverse discipline areas.

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### **1.0. INTRODUCTION**

This paper describes the preliminary results of a study undertaken for a Masters of Education research thesis entitled, *Tertiary Literacy: A Study Of The Literacy Policies And Practices Of Different Disciplines Within A University And Their Impact On The Literacy Development Of Students*. Specifically, research data gathered for the first phase of the study will be analysed within the themes of tertiary literacy policy, definition and practice.

### **2.0 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

#### **2.1 Data Collection**

The way in which literacy policy is made, defined and put into practice within a university provides a method for exploring and illustrating the relationship between current literacy theory, and tertiary practices in the area of literacy development. The first phase of the research, and the focus of this paper, was an analysis of twenty two interviews with Curtin University academic and administrative staff. Those interviewed were decision makers within the university and some of the respondents also had expertise in the area of literacy development. The analysis explores the views and attitudes of these staff in the areas of: literacy policy within the university; definitions of tertiary literacy; and best practice in language development.

The second phase of this research, for which the data gathering has been completed but not yet analysed, involved four case studies. The Schools involved represent the disciplines of Business, Health Science, Science and Social Science. The purpose of the case studies is to describe and compare literacy policies and practices adopted by different disciplines, and explore student perceptions and attitudes to practices within the Schools related to their own literacy development. The data collected in the case studies at this stage include: nineteen interviews with key staff; one hundred staff questionnaires; one hundred student questionnaires, and an analysis of documents relating to language and literacy policies and practices within each School.

### **3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **3.1 Current Language and Literacy Theory**

Literacy pedagogies and curricula are by definition the textual representations and products of particular cultural contexts, institutional conditions and political interests...an official language of instruction, a corpus of texts, reading and writing practices and events - is not an arbitrary or 'natural' decision, but is an extension of extant ideological, discursive and material relations. (Luke, 1991: 3)

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The 1980's and 1990's have seen language and literacy theorists espousing common themes. Graff (1979), Street (1992), Luke (1991), Freebody (1993) and Gee (1990), although representing diverse disciplines, focus on similar issues in their commentaries on the history and development of literacy.

These theorists express the view that when analysing language and its transmission, the influence of society, culture, and the power and politics represented by that society and culture cannot be ignored. According to Luke (1992) and Gee (1990), definitions of society, culture and literacy are germane to specific contexts involving social and political choices. These choices may not always be overt. However, it is essential according to Luke (1992), to recognise that literacy is 'malleable' and that, in the analysis and definition of literacy in any context, the issue is: 'What is counting as literacy?' (Luke, 1992).

Developing the literacy of a person in a particular social context is a process that can empower the individual within that specific context. The process also involves taking on the values and attitudes of that particular social context (Gee, 1990). This occurs through the parent/child relationship, education, the workplace, social contacts and the like. Within this process, the development of literacy in education 'is allied closely with matters of language and culture, ideology and discourse, knowledge and power' (Luke in Gee, 1990: ii). Gee's (1990) definition of literacy focuses on an understanding of the term 'Discourse'. He defines 'Discourse' as:

a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role' (Gee, 1990: 143)

Gee (1990) emphasises that being an initiate of a particular 'Discourse' equips one with the specific values and ways of seeing the world of that 'Discourse'. Becoming a full initiate means understanding and manipulating the ideology and values of any specific social context. Gee then defines literacy as "mastery of, or fluent control over, a secondary 'Discourse' involving print" (1990: 153). Gee explains that the primary 'Discourse' is that which socialised us within the 'family'.

Another theory relevant to literacy and to the study of tertiary literacy development is Krashen's (1981) "Monitor Theory". Krashen, on second language acquisition theory, explains "Monitor Theory" as adults having two independent systems for learning a second language. These two systems are defined as 'acquisition' that is, learning which takes place subconsciously, and 'learning', that is, learning which takes place consciously. Gee also distinguishes between acquisition and learning, and in doing so offers a base for teaching practice. Gee maintains that any 'Discourse' is for most people mastered through acquisition and not learning. Acquisition is explained as being exposed to "models in natural, meaningful and functional settings" (Gee, 1990: 154). Gee maintains that good teachers are aware of both types of learning and can, therefore, adapt their teaching methods according to the learning that is taking place.

### **3.2 Theory and Practice**

Current language and literacy theories emerging across different disciplines define literacy as follows:

- Literacy is a socially constructed term;
- Literacy may or may not empower individuals and groups depending on the social context;
- Literacy occurs as a developmental process;
- There are many literacies or 'Discourses';
- Literacy always takes place within a specific social context;
- Literacy involves acquiring and learning values, ways of behaving, speaking and writing;
- Literacy is acquired and learned.

The above framework strongly influenced this study into tertiary literacy practices. The research questions explore to what extent a tertiary institution's practices reflect what the theorists, language policy makers and expert practitioners regard as axiomatic. The study also explores how much academic reflection, pedagogical discussion, and debate takes place within a university on a subject that has engendered "renewed energy and urgency" (Christie, 1994: 1), and is recognised to be of paramount importance across all levels of our education systems.

#### **4.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON CURTIN UNIVERSITY**

The Western Australian Institute of Technology (WAIT) was established in August 1966 and became Curtin University of Technology in 1987. Curtin's current total population is 20,600 students with 17,905 of these enrolled at the main Bentley campus just outside the city of Perth. The number of full time academic staff teaching at the University is 1,004 with 830 staff teaching on the Bentley campus.

The University has a devolved administrative structure which consists of six divisions each headed by a Deputy Vice Chancellor. These divisions are Research and Development, Academic Affairs, Health Science, Engineering and Science, Business and Arts, Education and Social Sciences.

Academic decisions, policies or resolutions are made within the University Academic Board (UAB) and then ratified by the University Council. UAB has a number of standing committees one of which is the Matriculation Committee whose role it is to monitor and implement literacy and academic entry standards within the University.

#### **5.0 THE FOCUS OF THIS PAPER**

This paper describes and analyses the data gathered in the initial twenty two interviews conducted with University administrators and Heads of Schools. University administrative and teacher development staff were also represented as were language and literacy experts. The results are reported within the three broad categories of literacy policy, literacy definition, and a description of current literacy practices and perceived best practice in literacy development.

The perceptions of literacy development by leading academics and university administrators of literacy development was regarded as essential to a study which explores whether in fact current theory can be found in the literacy practices within a university. Common assumptions, attitudes, and beliefs were sought in this phase of the study to provide the 'broad brushstrokes' which help describe the context and culture of literacy within one university.

#### **6.0 AN EXPLORATION OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY POLICY IN ONE UNIVERSITY**

##### **6.1 Introduction: Existing University Policies**

As defined by the Oxford dictionary a policy is a "course of action undertaken as advantageous or expedient" (Little, W. et al. 1973). At the time of this research Curtin University has in place two resolutions or statements relating to tertiary literacy. One is a UAB resolution or 'policy' which states that a communication unit of one semester be included in every course of study (degree). This resolution can be traced back to the inception of WAIT in the late nineteen sixties. The other statement relating to communication skills in tertiary studies appeared in a November 1992 University strategic plan document, which devoted one paragraph to the point that employers and the community required communication skills from graduates. In the initial phases of this research, no other document outlining current policy or resolutions relating to tertiary literacy emerged in the document analysis, nor did interviewees refer to any other document relating to literacy. However, in May and August 1994 an initial report on communication skills was discussed by two standing committees of UAB. The intention was to develop a policy document on the development of communication skills for Curtin University which could be presented to UAB for discussion and approval. This document was to be discussed by UAB one week after the writing of this paper.

##### **6.2 Discussion**

The first section of the interview focused on policy, and respondents were asked whether they thought a literacy or communication policy existed within the University. If respondents answered in the affirmative they were then asked if they felt the existing policy was adequate. To explore the extent of University staff involvement in the literacy debate respondents were asked to comment on the nature of the language and literacy discussion they had taken part in whilst sitting on the University Academic Board, Matriculation Committee or during their involvement in different Divisional meetings. Respondents were also asked about the focus of any language and literacy recommendations emanating from these committees over the recent years.

Two respondents claimed that the existing practice of having a compulsory communication unit in every degree course was indeed a policy. However, eleven respondents did not feel that the above compulsory unit amounted to a policy. Six respondents identified having minimum University entry requirement for English, that is "gatekeeping", as literacy policy for the University, and three respondents were not sure if indeed a policy existed.

According to one respondent there is nothing on literacy policy within the university "which spells out action or has processes in place which set out to achieve goals", and another academic stated that, "there is no policy which is honoured in practice", or that the communication skills resolution has "no monitoring or evaluation" taking place.

The above sentiments were then reinforced by responses given to questions relating to the adequacy of the existing 'policy' or communication unit resolution, and the focus of past and current discussions that have taken place within the University Academic Board and Matriculation Committee. Overwhelmingly, nineteen respondents, felt that whatever was in place was "inadequate" and "superficial", and that the university as a central system had given "very little support or commitment" to literacy development on campus. The views of the University Academic Board were seen by some to be "very disparate", "hostile", "dodging the issue", and "supporting it in principle but offering no definite action", and focused on mainly resource issues rather than pedagogy.

Many of the respondents quite strongly identified literacy development within the university as being bound up with the question of resources. One respondent commented "if it were possible for people to disentangle their view of educational issues from resource issues we would be up with this fully". Another commented "that any concession to literacy development is a reduction in funding", and another reflected that "the question of resources has been a fundamental issue".

Some respondents perceived a lack of consensus within UAB as to how a literacy policy should in fact be developed or implemented. The same respondents felt there was a lack of any definite action taking place other than agreeing to literacy development "in principle" or "paying lip-service" to the issue.

Some respondents also reflected that literacy was part of the larger context of teaching/learning policies and inseparable from the learning task. "Literacy is a package, part of what you need to cope with university". A perceived negative feature within the system and one which could affect literacy development was identified as "no one in the university having designated responsibility for teaching/learning policies". Another comment about university systems in general was that "the separation of knowledge from communication is one of the fundamental problems in modern society".

### **6.3 Policy - Emerging Issues**

Within the social cultural context of a university the administrative and academic systems, that is, the way in which a university governs itself cannot be ignored in the making and maintaining of a literacy policy. The social construction of literacy within a university should reflect the overall objectives of that institution. Involvement, commitment and support at all levels are integral, if in fact, the policy is to proceed beyond rhetoric. University systems need to provide frameworks or scaffolding within which its educators are encouraged to reflect on the empowerment which the acquisition and learning of literacy can provide.

According to the perceptions of many of the University administrators and academics interviewed in this research, the University currently lacks such systems. In the area of literacy development respondents identified an apparent lack of central university support in pedagogical leadership, a lack of action, and a lack of allocating sufficient resources. If literacy is seen as a socially constructed term then the 'social' in that definition should include the central system from which direction and leadership emerges. The quality of that direction and leadership begs close scrutiny in terms of its impact on shaping a nurturing learning environment. Policy on literacy development in a university can only progress, as one respondent stated, "beyond the generalities" if clear objectives and leadership are evident.

It is important to note that at the time of this research as with many universities in Australia in 1994, Curtin was immersed in quality assurance processes specifically in the area of teaching and learning. It was evident whilst this research was under way that the University was attempting to address some of the tertiary literacy

issues identified in the interviews part of the University response to quality assurance. The responses to the quality assurance initiatives may be explored in the second phase of this research.

## **7.0 AN EXPLORATION OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY DEFINITION IN ONE UNIVERSITY**

### **7.1 Introduction**

An important focus of this study is the exploration of how literacy is defined. Inherent in the questions relating to this exploration is whether the definitions of literacy espoused by a cross section of staff from different areas in one university have any relationship to the current theories underpinning this research introduced earlier.

### **7.2 Discussion**

Respondents were asked to comment on: whether they could recall any discussions in committees or their Schools on what they meant by literacy; the focus of those discussions; how they would define tertiary literacy; and whether the university should be developing this literacy in its students?

Many people felt awkward in answering these questions as they did not regard themselves as 'experts', and one respondent stated: "A lot of people are speaking from the heart rather than from any proper sort of empirical base or a constant agreed platform of ideas". It is essential, however, to explore what the 'heart' is saying in this discussion as in reality the majority of people dealing on all levels with literacy policy, its definition and practice will in fact not be language 'experts', but teachers from different disciplines. Only a minority of respondents recalled being involved in discussions on the definitions of literacy for university students. Their comments include, "we don't have a firm handle on it", "concept hard to grab hold of", and "discussions were linked to remediation". Some respondents also made the point that discussions about literacy concentrated on non native speakers of English and standards of entry for overseas students.

One of the most interesting aspects of this phase of the study relates to the "definitions" which emerged when respondents were asked 'what is it that a tertiary student is able to do when he/she is literate'? Seven respondents defined tertiary literacy as having well developed cognitive skills. This was associated with the ability to: "analyse"; "synthesise and communicate ideas"; and "to process and express in writing, complex material". One definition was to write well enough to "get good marks and feel affirmed", which included the ability to write reports and extended essays. Another was to "write a simple sentence grammatically correct, with correct spelling and can convey their thoughts on paper". At least five of the respondents linked the definition to accomplishing writing tasks related to the graduate's profession. The International English Language Testing System (IELTS) was also given as a good definition of literacy by one respondent. Some felt passing a course with fifty percent was a definition of a literate tertiary student. In fact this 50% pass definition was seen to be one that was used by UAB. This was perceived as a shortcoming by some as it was felt that no one ever asked how students achieved the 50% mark. Another criticism directed at UAB by some, was that it saw literacy development as remedial or achieving the most basic skills, an issue that was just concerned with non native speakers of English.

There was unanimous agreement that a university should develop the literacy of its students, even if it is because "high schools don't do a good job" as one respondent claimed.

In order to explore perceptions of literacy development in a tertiary setting respondents were also asked to comment specifically on: the view that literacy was something that should have been taken care of in high school; and whether they felt literacy standards had declined in the community and in universities in general. Four respondents commented that they felt UAB certainly saw literacy as something that should have been learnt before university entrance. Ten respondents personally endorsed the view that literacy is something that should have been taken care of in high school and the remainder felt that literacy was an on-going developmental issue for universities to continue to address.

Two people felt standards had definitely dropped, and one respondent commented "to some extent", and another felt they had dropped because of overseas students. The remainder of the respondents commented that the perception that standards had declined was due to various reasons such as: more pressure to include more skills in courses; larger classes; variations in student intake, and because the community had greater expectations of undergraduates.

### **7.3 Definition - Emerging Issues**

Defining literacy in any social cultural context is a complex task which challenges all, including those working in the area of language and literacy. As one respondent succinctly stated:

the people who want to promote literacy at tertiary level actually don't do themselves justice because we don't have a clear understanding of what we mean by literacy, because the moment you say literacy, some people think of spelling, grammar, punctuation. Other people think about good writing as a whole. Others think of literacy in a much broader context.

Involvement in pedagogical discussion and debate is necessary if those within the social cultural context of an educational institution are to own and value the definitions of literacy within their setting. The range in the literacy definitions given by the twenty two respondents can be viewed as representative of the University. As the above analysis illustrates, the basic tenant of language theory, that is, that literacy develops throughout one's life, is not necessarily adhered to by a majority of the educators within a university environment. The apprentice/master relationship described by Gee (1990) is one positive model in which the development of literacy can occur, however, this model demands reflective practice on all administrative and academic levels. Literacies and the societies they represent are complex, ever changing and adapting. Awareness and acknowledgment of these elements is essential by all who share in the social cultural context of a tertiary institution, and by all who share in its teaching/learning goals. Participation and consensus in the on going process of defining and redefining literacy, therefore, should not be left only to those who are recognised as the language and literacy experts on campus. Such action will continue to see literacy development on our campuses as marginal, ineffectual and continually deprived of resources.

## **8.0 AN EXPLORATION OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY PRACTICE IN ONE UNIVERSITY**

### **8.1 Introduction**

In practice, Curtin University has many different delivery models operating to address the literacy development of its students. However, the respondents commented on the lack of coherence in terms of an overall University approach, and a lack of evaluation taking place in relation to overall University objectives.

One of the existing models mentioned earlier is the resolution or 'policy' that all Curtin University undergraduates must take one communication unit, of one semester duration as part of their Bachelor's Degree. Many communication units have been developed either by a service School or by the Division/School in which the graduate is completing the course. These units vary in terms of their content and objectives.

Seminars, workshops and one to one tuition are also available to students through Counselling Services and the Teaching Learning Group. Students may 'drop in' for these services or they may be referred by their lecturers. There are also individual initiatives emanating from a variety of disciplines where academics are thinking seriously about the issue of language development in its students and are devising curriculum to incorporate language goals.

A strong motivation for phase two of this study was in fact the desire to explore and describe many of the above practices and to relate them to social cultural language and literacy theory.

### **8.2 Discussion**

In this section respondents were asked: whether there was a relationship between literacy and the teaching and learning process; to describe that relationship; to examine how study skills provision could be improved (the implication being that literacy and study skills were related); and whether Curtin had shown leadership and had been successful in developing literacy in its graduates.

The majority of respondents felt that there was certainly a strong relationship between literacy and the teaching/learning processes occurring within an undergraduate course. That is, twenty out of the twenty-two people interviewed expressed the view that literacy was best developed within the context of discipline specific content. Although specific delivery models were not discussed in this part of the study, respondents believed

that: "skills should be integrated instead of being an adjunct"; "what they learn in the Schools is very important"; "it must happen in all subjects"; and "the vaccination model.....is not appropriate".

When discussing the improvement of literacy and study skills provision in the university respondents claimed that these two areas on campus were "diffused", "lacking focus", and in need of "direction" and "central support" from the University. Twelve of the respondents also remarked that although central support is essential, specific initiatives for implementation should come from School based curriculum. Four respondents commented on the need to have an extra compulsory foundation year added on to the degree course to address these issues.

In response to the questions relating to Curtin's success in developing literacy in its students, nine respondents felt "not at all", or "that we hadn't made a particular effort". Eleven respondents felt "some good work" and practices were in place but were "patchy". One respondent felt we were successful "to some extent", and only one claimed without qualification, that "we were quite successful".

In the area of leadership eighteen of those interviewed claimed Curtin was not successful in providing leadership in the area of literacy development, three felt leadership had been shown "in certain pockets of the university" but not on "a senior level", and one respondent "didn't know".

### **8.3 Practice - Emerging Issues**

The interview concluded with respondents being asked to recommend any best practice models or initiatives they were aware of in the area of literacy development. There were a range of views expressed relating to models for implementing literacy policy and practice. These models ranged from developing literacy within 'mainstream curriculum' provided by all Schools, to delivery models which combined service teaching offered by language and literacy teachers. The most significant point to note, however, is that overwhelmingly respondents perceived a strong need for a literacy policy statement which offers a coherent approach to the development of tertiary literacy within the university, and which is continually reviewed and evaluated. There was also strong support for any policy to support the development of literacy within content curriculum at various levels, as well as separate units being provided for 'remedial' students. It is clear from the data collected in this section "a number of different models could be operating at any one time", and that literacy policy should be developed as part of the overall University teaching and learning objectives.

## **9.0 SUMMARY**

### **9.1 Introduction**

The central question of this research is to explore and describe to what extent current literacy theory is practiced in one university. In analysing the interviews it was found that University debate of pedagogical issues does not occur without reference to issues of administration, educational management and distribution of resources. It is not possible therefore, to examine interview data in terms of policy, definition and practice without differentiating between those comments expressed about the 'system', that is, its administration and educational management, and those comments which expressed 'individual' pedagogical views.

### **9.2 Policy**

Having established that theoretically literacy is a 'socially constructed term', it is relevant to examine and explore what it is that makes up the 'social construction' of one university. The data gathered in this research indicate that the 'social construction' of the University in question is:

- a composite of the perceptions of students and staff relating to pedagogical objectives and academic administration and practice;
- administrative and academic practices, that is, action;
- ideas and objectives expressed in print.

The 'system' and the 'individual' are both integral parts of the 'social construction'. In terms of policy, however, it is the 'system' that has a crucial part to play. There is a requirement for the 'system' to provide leadership, commitment and on-going academic and financial support in reflecting a social cultural context which is an expression of its educational objectives and an expression of the needs of its participants both staff and students, which is in this instance literacy development.

In the analysis of 'policy' and how it was put into practice it was important to examine: the level or status of the staff involved in the language and literacy debate; whether debate and comment was about the 'system' or expression of 'individual' pedagogical views; the focus and depth of the debate and discussion; and the action which ensued. The following points emerge after an analysis of interview data in the area of policy:

- There is at present not a strong link between 'individual' social constructs of literacy and the way in which the 'system' expresses those constructs in 'policy', that is, through print and action.
- Many respondents expressed the view that unfortunately the 'social construct' of the University's literacy 'policy' was directed and controlled by available resources, the distribution of those resources and pedagogy, in that order.
- At the time of this research 'policy' documents relating to literacy within the University identified empowerment through literacy as being linked with passing a specific course, or being employable upon graduation, rather than being expressed in terms of personal goals and learning objectives.
- Respondents perceived the current 'system' as not providing an identifiable and cohesive social cultural 'policy' which reflected clear University teaching/learning goals for tertiary literacy.

### **9.3 Definition**

Within a social cultural view of language there are many literacies; literacy always takes place within a specific context; and it is continually developing throughout one's life. An exploration of the relationship between the theoretical perspectives of literacy, and how it is defined in reality by administrators and academics within the University provided some interesting observations:

- There was little awareness beyond the 'literacy experts' that literacy is a socially constructed term requiring definition within a specific social context.
- Most respondents felt the University 'system' did not have clear, working definitions or involve itself in pedagogical debate discussing the nature of the multiple literacies within a tertiary institution, and how they could be best developed.
- Definitions of literacy provided by individuals illustrate a great variance in the understanding of what literacy might mean for a tertiary institution.
- Definitions given by most individuals did not reflect the complexities provided by social cultural theories, including the theory that literacy develops throughout one's life.

### **9.4 Practice**

In the area of literacy practices, the social cultural theory of Gee (1990) proposes a master/apprentice teaching model which imparts language, values, and ways of behaving through acquisition and learning, within specific disciplines. The analysis of the interview data explored how these theories relate in practice within the University environment.

- There was overwhelming agreement that literacy was best developed within the content areas, and that it should be part of the overall teaching/learning objectives of the undergraduate course.
- The majority of those interviewed expressed a desire for the 'system' to support academically and financially literacy development within content areas.

The above points illustrate that both academic and administrative staff, whether they are 'literacy experts' or not, view literacy as something closely connected with content. How this is achieved in real terms is explored in the case studies which make up the second phase of this research

## **10.0 CONCLUSION**

Whilst this research was undertaken, Curtin University's Academic Board had in fact employed a research assistant to gather data to investigate the university's needs and how it should proceed in the area of

"communication studies". That report with its recommendations will be debated December 1994. From the data gathered in this study this initiative has been long overdue. One of the respondents commented "I think the debate on literacy has been a long standing debate , it has only been matched by the unwillingness of the organisation to come to grips with it to date - whether it will in the future is still to be seen".

Like many universities Curtin is working towards harnessing what is a complex issue. Current theory points to the view that literacy is many things, in many different contexts. Rosie Wickert, in *No Single Measure: A Survey of Australian Adult Literacy*, expresses this complexity when she states that "literacy is not a clearly definable positive/negative accomplishment ....the notion of a minimum standard is relative" (1989: 4). Universities through national equity and access objectives will continue to diversify their student intake. This diversity will lead to greater demands for the active teaching and modeling of literacy in tertiary institutions. Our challenge as language and literacy educators is to encourage debate and discussion on the many literacies on a campus, and give meaningful teaching support which will not only empower the student, but also the teacher who imparts the knowledge and values embedded in those literacies.

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**PROGRAMS AIMED AT ADDRESSING PERCEIVED PROBLEMS OF STUDENT ILLITERACY -- A BLESSING OR CURSE FOR STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES?**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper describes the faculty-specific programs developed by the Learning Development Centre at the University of Western Sydney Macarthur in response to the university's requirements that all its graduates will meet minimum standards of competency in spoken and written communication. It then discusses the success and value of these programs, and invites participants to evaluate their inclusion at a university in the context of both the debate on literacy standards and the alternatives for academic support and development of students.

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The University of Western Sydney (UWS) is a federated network of three university members comprising Hawkesbury, Macarthur and Nepean, and is spread across six main campuses and a wide geographical area. Established as a university in 1989, UWS provides tertiary education for the people of Greater Western Sydney, a geographical region with a large population of considerable diversity. Acknowledged as a disadvantaged area, Western Sydney experiences a high unemployment rate, low socioeconomic levels, a high proportion of young people, a significant number of people for whom English is not the first language, and no history of tertiary education. UWS Macarthur's two main campuses are located at Bankstown and at Campbelltown.

The University of Western Sydney Macarthur's Academic Committee approved a Communications and Computing Competency Policy in 1991. This policy identifies the minimum essential skills all undergraduates must achieve by graduation and applies to all students starting their studies in 1993 and after. Ensuring that students achieve these communication competencies is the responsibility of the Faculties. The Learning Development Centre (LDC) was given the mandate to provide safety net provisions for students at risk of not meeting communication competencies. The identification of these students has been variously approached by the different faculties.

The LDC has developed Communication Competency Programs which attempt to meet the distinctive needs of students from different Faculties. The standard program consists of a fifteen-hour workshop program, usually conducted on five consecutive days during semester break periods, followed by an additional fifteen hours of individual work, monitored by follow-up appointments with an LDC tutor.

The workshop program offered to students is different for each Faculty. Once a target group of students has been identified, LDC lecturers have designed activities that are similar to those students must complete to meet Faculty requirements. Faculty members are frequently consulted during this developmental process.

A typical workshop program consists of five three-hour tutorials. During or after completion of this program, students are required to submit a completed task, such as an essay, which allows the LDC to plan a follow-up self-access program of individual support. Areas of need are identified and further tasks and support material are given to students. On completion of both the workshop and the self access programs, a report on activities completed is sent to Faculty.

**Content of LDC Workshop Programs**

Although the structure of LDC workshops for the four Faculties is similar, the content of each differs. Each workshop program aims to teach students skills in the three areas identified in the Competency Policy: Understanding Information, Thinking and Writing Critically and Expressing Criticism in Discussion, and Presenting and Organising Information. However, these are dealt with in distinctive ways in each workshop. For example, while Education students may need to discuss and analyse selected journal articles and use the

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information to write an essay on an education topic, students from Business may read business texts with the purpose of writing a critical review. Each workshop within a program will attempt to develop specific skills necessary for successful completion of the ultimate task. Such skills may include making notes and summarising texts, creating cohesive links between stages of a text, elaborating on a claim, developing and structuring paragraphs and, in spoken communication, speaking clearly and with appropriate stress and gesture.

### **Self access Program**

All students who are referred to the Communication Competency program are also required to complete a self-access program during the following semester. A timetable of follow-up appointments is negotiated with an LDC tutor at the end of the workshop program. Self-access follow-up is very demanding on LDC staff time, as each student enrolled in workshops is expected to make at least three follow-up appointments of at least one hour duration. Students frequently need reminders about their obligation to complete this part of the communication competency program. The LDC staff have decided that students will be sent one reminder letter after the workshop program is completed. Those who do not make follow-up appointments will not be sent further reminders. Referring lecturers or Faculty Competency Co-ordinators receive progress and final reports which record the attendance of referred students at both workshops and self access programs.

I would now like to outline briefly what we have been doing in the different faculty areas. There are five Faculties at Macarthur: Law; Business and Technology (includes science, commerce, engineering); Health; Arts and Social Sciences (a hybrid faculty, three separate Divisions, many very different courses); and Education.

### **Business and Technology (B&T)**

This faculty decided to assess the communication competencies through a compulsory second year subject - the only subject common to all courses in the faculty, ie Introduction to Research Methods. The LDC wrote workshop modules for students being referred from this subject. The modules used tasks and texts typical of the subject (report writing focus)

The two workshop series offered in 1993 in the mid-year break and mid Spring semester were not well attended. Nevertheless, developmental work was invaluable in providing core materials on which workshop programs for other faculties were modelled. The poor student response to workshops offered to B&T students in 1993 was seen as evidence that students need to be identified in first year, rather than waiting until they were studying the second year subject. One of the possible reasons for poor attendance is student reluctance to respond to a referral when they had already passed first year subjects. Some students' defensive attitudes to being referred are also an issue to be dealt with in the approach to teaching of the programs.

In consultation with the Faculty, the LDC agreed to design a test of written competency that would be administered early in first year to the approximately 300 students enrolled in Computing 1.1. Although not a compulsory subject, it had the largest number of first year students. The test consisted of a writing task based on two short reading passages on a computer topic, and a multiple choice grammar test, and was marked by LDC staff. The writing task was assessed using criteria of organisation/coherence and grammatical accuracy. An initial identification of "at risk" students was made, and comparison was then made with results of the multiple choice test. This led to a final division of students into three groups: those for whom attendance at a competency workshop was strongly advised, those for whom attendance was recommended, and those who would be likely to meet the Faculty's competency standards.

Twenty four students, the majority of them from language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE), received from the Faculty a letter strongly recommending attendance. A further 24 received a letter recommending attendance. Two competency programs were run in July. Nine students from the second year subject IRM attended 3-hour workshops twice a week for 3 weeks. This group completed a program based on report writing. Students identified by testing in Computing 1 attended five 3-hour workshops. Because the participants were selected on the basis of their poor English grammar, these workshops concentrated on the development of accurate and coherent writing. Both groups of students began a program of follow up tutorials.

### **Faculty of Health**

The largest numbers of students in the Health faculty are in the Bachelor of Nursing degree, although there are many smaller courses where students access LDC support. The LDC was already working with many health students at both undergraduate and post-graduate level through a non-compulsory referral system because of strong liaison links with faculty staff. The competency program has tended to formalise the support that was already being provided although it is still mainly through the established staff links that students are referred. The nursing course is taught through a criterion-referenced problem-based learning model and prior to the

introduction of the communication competency policy, the faculty already had in place assessment criteria attached to designated tasks which dealt with academic writing and other communication skills. However, there are some faculty staff who are not willing or feel unconfident about providing their students with guidance in these areas.

The level of academic literacy of the first group of students for whom a competency workshop was run was low. The program that was developed by the LDC was thus aimed at a fairly basic level of academic literacy where the workshops concentrated on integration of source material, paragraphing skills and organisation, and the development of argument.

### **Education**

There are 3 main undergraduate degree courses offered in the area of Secondary Maths and Science Teaching, Early Childhood and Primary education. No students have been referred to us from the Secondary teaching course, but 30 students altogether from the Primary and Early Childhood courses registered for workshops in July 1993.

Differences between the two programs reflected the different needs and experiences of the students. The Primary Teaching workshops were based on the skills of argument and analysis associated with reports, while the Early Childhood workshops aimed to develop skills of critical reading and analytical writing in the context of an essay task.

### **Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences**

This has been the most difficult area for us to feel that we have made any headway towards providing a satisfactory support program. Arts Faculty staff in general have not believed that any extra support from the LDC would be required as they consider that they already provide adequate guidance through their own teaching strategies, and also assume that the typical Arts student is already competent in communication skills.

It is unclear how a consistent approach to assessing the communication competencies is achieved or achievable in this faculty because of the varied types of course progression permitted across a variety of degree courses. However, we have had close contact with individual lecturers in the Faculty who have been deeply concerned over the lack of some skills in some of their students. As a response to some of these concerns, the LDC developed a program for students in Visual Arts, which followed the 15 hour workshop model with self-access follow-up. Workshops have also been run for students in Sociology.

It seems, therefore, that student access to support in meeting competency requirements through a system dependent on referral from faculty staff members is necessarily uneven. It is possible for students to refer themselves, but this has only occurred twice. Most students seem content to wait until someone else (ie a lecturer or tutor) tells them that their skills need improving. Even after receiving notification of the competency requirements and the possibility of their failing to meet these, a number of referred students do not avail themselves of the support programs offered. Apart from the obvious difficulties for some students of attending at times that may be inconvenient, another factor in the reluctance of some students to register for workshops could be the lack of commitment to the Policy displayed by the lecturer who referred them in that it may be perceived as a "remediation" rather than a developmental issue.

Thus, one issue that is raised for the faculties is how to ensure that the competencies are achieved by all their students. This is particularly difficult if courses do not have common or core subjects. Another issue is how to be consistent in applying the assessment of the competencies, particularly when some subjects cannot be seen by faculty staff as appropriate to test communication competencies within. In addition, there has been an element of resistance by some faculty staff to changing their assessment items to accommodate the incorporation of competencies, and there is still a widespread perception of the competencies as additional/separate to content and thus perhaps someone else's responsibility.

We have encountered many different attitudes to this, some extreme in both directions - certainly we have encountered an eagerness amongst a few faculty members to absolve themselves of their own responsibilities to develop their students' communication skills by leaving not only the teaching and development of those skills to the LDC but also the assessment of them. We have resisted this and do not generally assess students for the competencies in a way which might impact upon their passing or failing the subject. Conversely we have encountered hostility from some staff who have taken a territorial stand in stating that no outside body will have any power to decide on faculty issues such as a student's pass or fail in their subject. This of course we have agreed with and have managed to allay such fears among those staff.

The main problem we have encountered, however, is a lack of consistency across all the faculties in applying the Policy, and thus our response has been varied and is still in the process of being developed in relation both to procedures and to the development of materials to support students to improve their communication skills within the very different disciplines across faculties.

A question we constantly revisit in the development of the programs is how far into the discipline do we go? If the workshop works through, for example, a literary review as a main task in one subject area and an essay or report in another, can students transfer skills? If workshop tasks are not seen as directly relevant will students be motivated to do the extra work? Will they actually develop any skills if they are not directly motivated? Students who are referred usually have other difficulties with their studies, eg a NESB student whose lack of English fluency means that he spends much longer reading source material than others. Thus the 'extra work' perceived as the competency workshop load puts an additional burden on the student who is already struggling with meeting submission deadlines. So, working through a task similar to one given in a current assignment produces the highest level of commitment from the students.

Professor Ian Reid from Curtin University wrote in *Campus Review* in June that literacy requirements need a re-think. He identifies the coming together of two issues - that of general literacy practices and that of specific cross-cultural difficulties in language-based situations. The widespread concern about communication skills relating to written English has resulted from surveys of private and public employers which show perceived deficiencies in the quality of graduates to be in the literacy area. The Competency Policy at UWS Macarthur was introduced by the university to address community and business expectations of literacy standards. However, the introduction of a policy that is cross-cultural will be the most effective. To paraphrase from Professor Reid, we need to accept the necessity of a cross-cultural perspective, to understand how reading is culturally framed, to learn to analyse the use of written genres embedded in literacy events and to map the differences between native-speaker and non-native speaker groups of learners (1994:8).

Ballard and Clanchy's discussion of literacy in *Literacy by Degrees* confirms that it is on "the appropriateness to cultural context of a student's cognitive and linguistic behaviours that the assessment of his or her 'literacy' ultimately rests." (1988) The introduction of the Communication Policy was an attempt to ensure that all undergraduate programs included instruction and modelling about the cultural rules and conventions by which staff expected the students to behave and communicate.

There are different measures of the success and value of the programs developed to meet the requirements of the Communication Competency Policy. We agree that their success lies in the numbers of students that have been through the program so far. We have yet to do a substantial evaluation of the improvement of their grades, but anecdotal feedback from students themselves has been very positive and their written evaluations show an increase in confidence in their communication skills. Another measure of success lies in the recognition of our role in a development process although this is limited to certain areas.

A lack of success, or "non-success", can be said to be the continued entrenchment of the 'remedial' status of these programs in some Faculty perceptions and, to an extent, the programs could be seen as a perpetuation of the common literacy myths (solving problems by add-on programs).

In terms of value, our place in providing the programs has given us a higher profile and in the areas where we have done most work, has led to our being invited to collaborate in developing and delivering EAP-style but discipline-specific courses for credit. However, the opposite is also a repercussion in other areas: the avoidance of alternatives like EAP electives and teaching staff development across Faculties.

Are Communication Competency Programs a blessing or a curse? There is commitment from the university but this is a 'top down' model, and as stated earlier in the conference, 'top-downs on their own don't work'. However, it has given us a legitimacy enabling the 'bottom-up' types of links to flourish. Our most successful programs are so because of the dedication of the Faculty staff we have been working with. For us, it is therefore both a blessing and a curse.

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## CULTURAL LITERACY SUPPORT PROGRAMS FOR ARTS STUDENTS: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AT THE WESTERN METROPOLITAN COLLEGE OF TAFE

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### ABSTRACT

Students in undergraduate Humanities are often hampered by a lack of general cultural literacy which these courses typically presuppose. This is especially so of the reading that students are expected to do. Students sometimes report this themselves and teachers perceive it as one cause of student miscomprehension and limitedly "surface" readings of academic texts. The provision of programs to address this gap is fraught with difficulty, however, not least because of the obvious political complications attending the concept of "cultural literacy".

Recently there have been several curriculum developments along these lines at WMCOT and VUT, which seek to overcome these difficulties: at WMCOT a two-year Associate Diploma in Arts and at VUT a semester-long unit within the Footscray campus B.A. program. This paper will provide an introductory overview of these initiatives, focussing upon how Academic Discourse within the Associate Diploma works in tandem with the "content" units of that program.

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(The following is an expanded version of a conference presentation given jointly with Peter Moraitis and Clara Brack, who teach within the course this paper describes and who were members of the group that designed it. The last section of the paper closely follows a text provided by Peter Moraitis. Dirk den Hartog was a VUT representative on the course design group.)

One crisp winter's morning in 1993 the Dean of Arts at V.U.T., Robert Pascoe, strode into a meeting he had called with a few colleagues, brandishing a copy of E.D. Hirsch's contentious *Cultural Literacy* (1987). The purpose of the gathering, he explained, was to address shortcomings of current B.A. programmes by devising a new one along Hirschian lines. Too many of our students, the group agreed, were not sufficiently culturally literate, in Hirschian terms, to cope with their courses in the current forms in which these were offered; conversely, even for those who were coping, the typical course selected was too narrow to provide the broad cultural literacy necessary for full participation in society after graduation. The select group, which included the present writer, were by and large middle-aged, all male, and traditionally humanistic in outlook. They took to their task with a relish in keeping with the time and day. Other meetings followed. The group was aware of problems with their founding concept, but this was dimmed by the happy preliminaries of compiling lists of desirable knowledge, adapting Hirsch's "What Literate Americans Know" to the alternative "What Arts graduates should know".

The first real challenge came when the group was enlarged to include several teachers from the Footscray campus of the Western Metropolitan college of TAFE, experienced educators in the Humanities and Adult Literacy field. These were not people from whom to expect dogmatic opposition of a progressivist or post-modern kind - indeed they were known for defining a position on teaching non-mainstream learners that was in opposition to what they saw as the unhelpfully romantic elements of progressivism (Pancini, Moraitis and McCormack, 1990). Nevertheless a keener pressing was to be expected of the politically and pedagogically contentious nature of the cultural literacy idea. This was further sharpened by the addition of three female academics, diverse of outlook but all in their way sharing the generally more progressivist stance of the St. Albans campus ( the former Western Institute). All of these new participants introduced new and important concerns that they saw the project as potentially addressing. The WMCOT people, for instance, drawing on their highly successful work developing Return To Study courses, were especially interested in creating a more extended alternative for adults wanting tertiary preparation but for whom the time schedules of the VCE are unsuitable. Intense debate ensued, but instead of the impasse one might predict, there was six months of dialectical sorting through of contradictions that finally produced a new two-year Associate Diploma in Liberal Arts, which began at the WMCOT Footscray Campus in 1994. Its first year of operation has been generally successful, despite - or

perhaps because - the ideological diversity of the design group has been carried over into the range of staff actually teaching the course.

This paper gives an account of this innovative programme (for Australia) in the light of the negotiations, still ongoing, that have shaped it.(1) The motivating idea of cultural literacy has been a focal point, but other pedagogical concerns have been equally prominent: the challenging problem has been how to reconcile their often conflicting imperatives. The answer so far, as I will outline, has been to devise a course that attempts to both meet the requirements of cultural literacy whilst going beyond the all too obvious limitations of the idea itself. Nevertheless, however modified, the founding idea persists in the Diploma's acknowledgement of the co-dependence of 'content' and 'skills' in helping students cope with the demands of tertiary courses.

**Course Structure:**

The Associate Diploma in Liberal Arts requires students to cover an inclusive range of subjects in the humanities and social science area. Arrangements have been concluded, under the auspices of the Pathways scheme for TAFE-University articulation, that its graduates, upon selection into any of the five B.A. programmes at the Victoria University of Technology, will have advance standing into the second-year level. The course is structured as follows:

Semester One:	Public Life: Past and Present	Stories Cultures Tell Themselves: Myths and Sacred Texts	Academic Discourse A	
Semester two:	Economic Systems and Society	Nature and its Human Transformations	Academic Discourse B	
Semester Three:	Tradition and Modernity in Europe and Asia	Urbanism	The History of Human Relations	
Semester Four:	Tradition and Modernity in Europe and Asia (Continued)	Theories of Human Personality	Text and Genre	Academic Discourse C: Research Essay

The subject matter of some of the units is not self-evident from their titles. "Public Life: Past and Present" is basically a politics unit, but based upon a comparison of contemporary democracy with democracy in classical Athens. "Economic Systems and Society" combines an introduction to orthodox economics, some economic history and contemporary critiques (eg. Marxist, feminist) of economic orthodoxy. "Nature and its Human Transformation" is a thematically focussed inter-disciplinary unit, bringing together elements of geography, environmental science, history and philosophy of science ( including contemporary feminist critique) and the varying historical representations of Nature in Literature, Art and landscape gardening. "Tradition and Modernity" is a cross-cultural comparison of selected themes in European and Asian history. "The History of Human Relations" is an introduction to sociology that focusses upon the history of the family and of intimate relations. "Theories of Human Personality" is about psychology for general cultural literacy rather than academic purposes - psychology/psychoanalysis as 'ideas' rather than an empirical discipline. "Text and Genre" deals mainly with literary texts.

The structure encourages continuity of interest across units. A number of themes raised in first-year units, for instance, are taken up and developed in the year-long "Tradition and Modernity" unit in second year. Conversely, the sociologically focussed, "History of Human Relations" develops its especial thematic focus in parallel with the broader framework of the concurrent "Tradition and Modernity" unit.

**Cultural Literacy**

Cultural literacy is a minefield concept that one cannot avoid taking the risk of defusing. As expounded by Hirsch, it refers to the background cultural knowledge which is necessary in order to comprehend discourse which it is necessary to understand in order to participate in one's culture. It is knowledge, that is, which that discourse presupposes as a condition of its being understood. Hirsch of course contextualises the concept in a much more specific and politically challenging way than this abstraction immediately suggests. American education, he argues, has failed to teach students the knowledge necessary for them to participate effectively as citizens, to be able to take part in the 'public conversation' of the nation (by following and thinking critically about policy debates in the more intelligent media, for instance) - or, to use, Patricia Bizzell's rephrasing, to

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participate in the 'discourse community' of the nation. (Bizzell, 1990). Education should thus be reformed to provide this. Both the diagnosis and the remedy have obvious relevance to the 'advanced' Western democracies outside the U.S., though it is noticeable that the debate on the issue in Australia, for instance, has so far been relatively low-key (the Federal government's recently appointed 'civic experts' committee on citizenship may perhaps stir things up). One reason for this may be that the traditional political ideas of Republican democracy within which Hirsch strongly frames his appeal connect citizenship so strongly with literacy - Jefferson is always handy to provide maxims about the civic virtue of reading the newspapers. Australian egalitarianism, by contrast, has emphasised the appeal of matey manners rather than such a self-improving virtue. Nationally prominent or not, both the issue and its problems were felt to be very real to the group designing the new diploma.

Hirsch's case and its problems can be examined on two interrelated levels, the pedagogic and the political. With the former his main thrust is against the tendency of modern education to separate skills from content, to believe that the former can be meaningfully taught in the absence of the latter, and to use this split to justify indifference to the transmission of core cultural knowledge. It is such beliefs that have produced, to take an instance outside Hirsch's ambit, Academic Skills units operating separate from content areas, teaching reading and writing strategies for students to independently transfer onto work in their chosen disciplines. Hirsch ascribes this belief to the influence of Dewey (with an admixture of Rousseau) upon educational thought and its subsequent progressivist leanings. It is thus an ironic reversal that it is from the very discipline most associated with this 'formalism', psychology, that Hirsch draws persuasive evidence for his case. Current theories of reading are broadly in agreement that comprehension is not a bit by bit assemblage of atoms of understanding, but a more active process in which key details of text activate pre-existing schemata of knowledge, which the reader then uses to organise the text along these pre-known lines, subject to subsequent modification to accommodate textual details that contradict existing schemata and induce their revision. (Rumelhart, 1977, 1980; Hirsch, 1987). Background cultural knowledge is important to comprehension because it provides these schemata - communication between text and reader (or speaking teacher and listening student) can only occur if the latter's tacit schemata are at least roughly adequate to those presupposed by the former.

Hirsch's pedagogic remedy for this problem is in its way admirably precise - a list of 5000 "essential names, phrases, dates and concepts" (to be adjusted to particular national circumstances) which can be the blueprint for the shared knowledge-base that is allegedly missing. The very practicality and reassuring concreteness of this solution has provoked much opposition, however, as it is hard to offer such a list without seeming to imply the pedagogic primitivism of dispersing it encyclopaedically as so many discrete bits of knowledge into students who are envisaged as passive receptacles. Cultural literacy thus begins to look like a new form of Gradgrindism, and phrases like "flashcard literacy" and "a ...superficial grasp of factoids" abound amongst critical reactions. (Scholes, 1988; Christenbury, 1989; Harper, 1990) Such critics are not deterred by Hirsch's anticipation of their response by his insistence that most of the 5000 items should be introduced - as superficial knowledge - in early schooling, where stories are an ideal medium for smuggling in an acquaintance with historical and mythical reference points (Hirsch: ch.5). This done, senior years can properly focus on the deeper, more integral kind of learning that he is accused of ignoring. However such reactions sound a timely warning against possible misuses of Hirsch - when lists like his get publicly circulating there's no knowing whose Gradgrindian hands they can fall into: might cultural literacy turn up, perhaps, as something taught in a competency-based training format, delivered 'efficiently and effectively' by self-paced, interactive computer packages? And there is still the problem that our design team faced, which is how such knowledge - or its reworked equivalent - is to be given to students who have missed out on it at the primary level? It is after all the preponderance of such students that has prompted Hirsch's critique in the first place.

The other major problem with Hirsch's case is the political one of whether it is valid to designate 'core knowledge', and, if so, what is to be chosen and by whom? Hirsch believes that there is such a core and that to specify it is not to privilege the WASP culture whose members tend to know more of it than non-WASPs, but to allow non-WASPs greater access to the "conversation" of public life (as typified, say, by policy debate in the 'serious' media) for which such a core functions as pre-supposed background knowledge. His democratic ideal thus explicitly denies the Marxist notion of class culture and the allied notion of the hegemony by which a dominant class imposes a dominant culture: in support of this he cites the manifold allusions to historical documents such as the Declaration of Independence, the Gettysburg Address and the Bible that are contained in the 1972 platform of the Black Panther Party. (Hirsch: 23) Such claims, to say the least, have by no means elicited universal agreement. On one level there has been the strong "anti-foundational" reaction Bizzell (1990) has described (and deplored), which has taken the post-modern position of denying anything the authority of being a 'core' - the fragmentation of sub-cultural knowledges, from this point of view, is simply and irrevocably our post-modern condition. Less dogmatically there is the line generally taken by our design group - and others,

including, in her way, Bizzell - (1990; see also Anson, 1988): this acknowledges the validity of a core, but argues that the version of this Hirsch proposes seems more like an attempt to prescriptively enforce a canonic knowledge which is partly over-exclusive and partly out-dated, that a descriptive core that would really function in the way Hirsch proposes for it would look rather different from his list.

Whatever one thinks on these issues, however, it is important to keep clearly in mind that Hirsch's case is quite distinct from the views advanced by the even more notorious Allan Bloom in his *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987), with which he is often associated. The essential difference is that where Bloom values canonic knowledge and texts for their irreplaceably valuable content, Hirsch does so for the socially valuable processes of communication that knowledge of them enables. For Bloom the works of Shakespeare et. al. are good in that they embody truths about human Nature that humanity must live by if civilisation is to be maintained: his defiantly traditionalist conviction of the absoluteness of this authority sets him apart from other humanists like Wayne Booth, Charles Altieri and the late F.R. Leavis, for whom truth is much more a matter of search, dialogue and choice: Bloom in fact comes close to the straw man humanist of much post-structuralist thought. The focus of his critique is thus relativism, in that it denies the possibility of such absolute authority. For Hirsch's argument, however, Shakespeare et. al. are good in that some sort of knowledge of them enables participation in "the public conversation". Several things follow from this instrumentalism. Unlike humanist arguments about the benefit of studying canonic works, be they Bloom's or Leavis', Hirsch's claims, like the cognitive psychology they draw upon, are empirically verifiable in a fairly straightforward way: one can test for background knowledge, comprehension of text and their interrelation or lack of it. (2) Both the general idea of cultural literacy and the specific content Hirsch ascribes to it are thus more strictly open to the possibility of clear disproof: as a literary scholar Hirsch would be reluctant to admit it, but the ground upon which he has based his case does admit of the possibility, for instance, that knowledge of Shakespeare can be shown to be decisively irrelevant to late 20th century citizenship. In fact one would be surprised if this background knowledge didn't prove somewhat less essential - on Hirsch's chosen ground - than knowledge about the meaning of terms such as "Free Trade" and "Protection". Humanists need to be cautious about putting all their eggs in an attractively hard-headed Hirschean basket, as it does have a somewhat suspect bottom to it.

It was however on the grounds of this flexibility and proneness to revision that our course design group reached a working consensus over cultural literacy as a guiding concept. In this, though, they were also energised by a further view that was quite distinct from the cultural literacy idea. This was a shared perception that existing Arts programmes had become somewhat overspecialised in their evolution along their disciplinary logic; furthermore, recently emerged inter-disciplinary programmes, whilst opening up avenues of enquiry that were interesting and relevant in their own right, had done so as, in a sense, new specialisms. Put simply, any given combination of existing Arts majors simply left so much out that genuinely curious students were interested in. This was an argument for a generalist course that made no appeal to humanist ethical self-shaping or literacy for citizenship, but simply to the excitement of ranging expansively over the fields of knowledge. By itself it would not have legitimised our proceedings, but it gave them a touch of joy and was perhaps more directly in tune with our own enthusiasm as we airily dreamt up curricula castles and set ourselves to make them real. It also strengthened our conviction that there should be plenty of excursions and lots of exposure to visual materials in the course.

But if our course was to be an alternative to existing Arts courses it also had to be a preparation for them: its formal administrative brief, derived from the Pathways scheme, was to be at once a qualification in itself and an alternative entry route into existing courses - with negotiated advanced standing into the second-year level. This introduced an ambiguity into cultural literacy that is lacking in Hirsch's case for it. We all more or less agreed with the civic participation argument - being able to read analytic articles in *The Age* was a recurring point of reference. But we were also conscious of addressing the specific problem of the cultural literacy presupposed by existing Arts programmes within the faculty. It was here that our guiding concept resonated most with our experience: it was one of the main reasons, we felt, why current Arts students were so at sea with so much of what they were supposed to read for their courses. It was this that drove us along the somewhat tortuous multiple path of designing a diploma providing both civic and Arts-specific cultural literacy in its generalist reach, whilst at the same time covering enough of the specifics of the main first-year offerings in Arts to justify the advance standing upon articulation.

### **Arts-specific cultural literacy: an example**

An Arts-specific cultural literacy: what this is will vary from discipline to discipline. All academic disciplines presuppose it, as is recognised by the growing movement towards 'content-based' ESL teaching within formal education, where language teaching is integrated with the specific content of language-students' 'mainstream'

enrolments (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1987; Crandall and Tucker, 1990; Lynch and Hudson, 1991) (3). Yet some disciplines presuppose more cultural literacy than others: our suspicion is that the more traditional humanities, history and literary studies, presume a good deal more than an a-historical discipline like psychology. It may help at this point to step aside from our narrative of course development to illustrate this point in more detail. Richard White's *Inventing Australia* (1981) is frequently set reading in undergraduate history and Australian Studies courses: several sections are reproduced, for instance, in the set text anthology for the Open University Australian Studies course. I have taken a brief extract from it, reasonably at random, which I reprint below. The comments that ensue attempt to tease out the cultural knowledge that a reasonable comprehension of it presupposes:

The supporters of emigration to Australia painted a picture of an idealised Arcadian society, a rural Utopia, an Eden before the fall. Very different imaginations could produce surprisingly similar visions of Australia's future. W.C. Wentworth, full of Oxford scholarship and classical allusions, hoped the 'new Arcadia' would soon 'teem with simple swains'. ...'What a cheering prospect', he thought for the philanthropist to behold what is now one vast and mournful wilderness, becoming the smiling seat of industry and the social arts ... what a proud sight for the Briton to view his country pouring forth her teeming millions to people new hives. J.D. Lang, the staunch Presbyterian, published his *Historical and Statistical Account of New South Wales in 1834*. With his more biblical style, he described his vision of currency lads, 'each of whom, on attaining man's estate, goes forth with an axe into the vast forest to extend the limits of civilisation, and to fill the wilderness and the solitary place with the habitations of men'.

The remarkable thing about these varied visions of simple swains, pioneering families and well-fed peasantry was that they had nothing at all to do with Australian reality. In fact, Australia's economy, and British interest in the colonies, was to be based on big sheep-runs, mining and large cities. Nor was Australia to be an extension of rural England: Australia's connection was with industrial England, providing wool for its factories and markets for its goods. (Richard White, *Inventing Australia*, 1981)

**Text:** "The supporters of emigration to Australia painted a picture of an idealised Arcadian society, a rural Utopia, an Eden before the Fall."

**Presupposed schemata:** at the surface level the literal references to Arcadia, Utopia, Eden and the Fall; at a deeper and implicit level the traditional 'move' in social thought to compare a disliked present with an idealised past or alternative place, which White sees the supporters of emigration as repeating. The force of White's sentence depends upon our recognising not just the literally stated idealisation, but the implied conventionality of the idealisation.

**Text** "Very different imaginations...W.C. Wentworth, full of Oxford scholarship and classical allusions"

**Presupposed schemata:** these details are offered on the assumption that their associations for the reader will evoke with some definiteness the *kind* of imagination that Wentworth is seen to exemplify. This will not happen for a reader (the average Australian Arts undergraduate of the 1990's) who has no schema of 'the classical' and its continuing function within the Western tradition. A conscientious student who looked up Arcadia in the dictionary might be able to begin to work out from the reference to the 'New Arcadia' in the following clause what 'classicising' was about, but this would be a very painstaking way into the text.

**Text:** "J.D. Lang, the staunch Presbyterian ... with his more biblical style"

**Presupposed schemata:** both a literal knowledge of Presbyterianism as a branch of Protestantism, but, more importantly, a range of associations defining the ethos of Protestantism. Activation of this schema is necessary to alert the reader to the contrast White intends between the two quotations - eg. the stress on dynamism and mission in the second, and the significance of this for our sense of the shaping forces in Anglo-European Australia.

**Text:** "The remarkable thing about these varied visions of simple swains, pioneering families and well-fed peasantry was that they had nothing at all to do with the Australian reality. In fact, Australia's economy, and British interest in the colonies, was to be based on big sheep runs, mining and large cities."

**Presupposed schemata:** an idea of the pre-modern European economy and social order, so that reference to "well-fed peasantry" suggests a meaningful contrast to "big sheep runs ... etc." Also, an idea of the nostalgic uses of medievalism within the conservative tradition of social thought within modernity, in which "well-fed" peasants contrast with pauperised factory workers.

**Text:** "Nor was Australia to be an extension of rural England: Australia's connection was with industrial England, providing wool for its factories and markets for its goods."

**Presupposed schemata:** a basic idea of the contrast between pre-modern and modern economic systems, ie. the comparatively pre-capitalistic nature of the former and the capitalistic, market-oriented nature of the latter. If this understanding is brought to the text, the reference to Australia's "connection with industrial England ...providing wool for its factories" implies that Australia developed economically as part of the increasingly global market of modern capitalism, a system of trade and exchange strongly contrasted with the relative self-sufficiency of the traditional yeoman ideal. Without this schematic sense of opposing systems the reference to Australia's provision of wool and markets signifies only these actions in themselves, and not the general political-economic state of affairs they exemplify.

### **Development and teaching of the Diploma - beyond cultural literacy**

Much energy in developing the Diploma has been spent on the political problem mentioned above, the challenge of developing a content for cultural literacy that is "pluralistic" and "inclusive" (Bizzell, 1990). This emerged straightaway in an early planning session on the unit "Public Life: Past and Present": the obvious choice of comparing the present-day democracy with classical democracy in Athens immediately provoked the obvious feminist rejoinder about the Athenian exclusion of women. The solution, too, was equally obvious, i.e. a thoroughly critical study of democracy in which a writer such as Mary Wollstonecraft would be included. The proposed unit on myths and sacred texts likewise provoked a reaction from post-modernists and those who also feared a restoration of the high culture/popular culture divide that post-modernism claims to have deconstructed and which 'cultural studies' has institutionalised, including, very pertinently for us, in some of the existing VUT Arts programs that the Diploma's graduates would be articulating into. The answer here was equally simple: contemporary popular cultural versions of classic myths would be given their due, and the course would be taught with the ecumenical mixture of respect and scepticism that we felt we encapsulated in the unit title we finally decided upon: "Stories Cultures Tell Themselves: Myths and Sacred Texts". Other units followed in a similar vein: both the history and philosophy of science *and* feminist critique of science in "Nature and its Human Transformation"; both the basics of orthodox economics and critiques of it in "Economic Systems and Society". Our main real worries were practical ones: we worried about our almost unanimous Eurocentrism, but how much Asian content could we include without overburdening syllabuses? And who amongst us really knew enough about Asia to make a proper job of such inclusion?

The greatest challenge, however, has been the pedagogic one. How could the content of cultural literacy be taught in a non-Gradgrindian way, ie. one which engaged with and respected the knowledge students brought with them into the classroom (and we were thinking mainly of mature-age students from non-traditional educational backgrounds) and one which brought the two bodies of knowledge creatively together in holistic learning experiences. The answer to this, we felt, lay in setting a goal that reached further than the ambitions of Hirsch's program. Cultural literacy is an enabling condition of communication: its goal as an enabling program is comprehension. Our goal as planners and teachers of the Diploma has been to take students to this point and beyond it, to a sense of themselves as not just understanding the discourses, but actively taking up critical positions within them, engaging in critical practice. This has been a generally shared ideal of the group, as well as something that University educators in the humanities and social sciences hope for in their students, even if they sometimes seem at a loss as to how to foster it. The goal of critical practice, however, has been pursued in different ways according to the various orientations of individual teachers. The teachers' views have themselves been formed by various models of what critique might be, from Arnoldian humanism to post-structuralism. In "Public Life: Past and Present", for instance, there has been the assumption that critical practice arises from initiation into competing traditions or perspectives within a particular field; hence students first become acquainted with rival traditions (liberalism, conservatism, socialism, etc.), then are invited to classify texts in terms of these traditions, and finally are required to write an argument about democracy in relation to different perspectives the traditions provide upon democracy. The process begins with a discussion of

what might be characteristic of public as distinct from private life. Next, taking the letters column of the newspaper as a space of public debate, the teacher does a particular reading of some letters, classifying them in terms of the values they draw on and the persona of the writer; students then locate the same features in other letters and write a letter themselves. For some students this raises the question of the authority by which they take up the position of being the writer of such a letter: confronting and overcoming this is a key step in their induction. Some of the traditions drawn upon in public debate are then examined, so that the students come to appreciate that the same issue can be seen in different ways from the standpoint of different traditions. This provides a point for students to examine different notions of democracy, which eventually leads to their writing essays on democracy's problematics.

The "Stories ...Myths" unit, by contrast, ties relativity and difference of perspective more directly to personal experience. It begins with teachers and then the students talking about the stories that have been important to them. Students then read a fairy tale together, then read other, competing accounts of the same tale. Next they either write their own analysis of the tale or their own version of it: other students have to guess the authors of these new versions, testing the influence of personal perspective. Differently again, "Economic Systems and Society" proceeds from an initial introduction to orthodox economics, accompanied by some economic history, to some critiques of orthodoxy. Again the approach is to sequence the subject so that students move from outlining a theory to having to argue a case in relation to a range of different positions on a particular issue. In all units teachers are aware that they are dealing with students who are starting from different points in terms of their ways of knowing. For some students the initial curriculum needs to engage with assumptions that knowledge is always factual, a black and white matter of truth or falsity, and something of which the learner must be a purely passive recipient, conceptions along the lines of Perry's model of absolutism (1970) or Belenky et al's of silence (1986). Other students have a more confidently active sense of themselves as knowers, and seem comfortable from the start with ideas of interpretation and relativity, with the notion that texts are open to multiple readings.

These considerations explain the prominent position held in the course structure by Academic Discourse. In a sense the whole diploma plays a kind of Academic Discourse role in relation to the degree courses that most of its students are aiming for; a role along the lines of the theme of this conference, in which 'skills' and 'discipline content' are both seen as things in which students need support. Due to the factors just discussed, however, there are specific Academic Discourse units within the course, which are compulsory in the first year. In them students are first of all introduced to the notion that subjects vary in their epistemologies stances, that genres vary, and that students will thus have to take up different, sometimes conflicting stances as they move between them. Throughout the year the content from other subjects is used to identify features of academic text, its argumentative structures, rhetorical patterns, cohesive devices and so on. Students are also introduced to some theories of the differences between oral and written text and they practice various kinds of presentations in the light of these.

Whilst Academic Discourse is singled out as a subject in itself, this is not done on the basis that it teaches abstract skills which can then be applied to the content areas. Although the relationship between it and the other subjects has not been theorised, one could say, using the language of systemic linguistics, that Academic Discourse focusses on text in its interpersonal and textual dimensions, whereas the other subjects focus on text in terms of field. Or, whereas the other subjects chiefly focus on texts in their referential relationship to the world (though this is not entirely so, eg. "Text and Genre" in the second year, as well as some aspects of other units), Academic Discourse focusses on texts as constructed representations.

A final distinctive feature of the course is that it incorporates discourses beyond the typically academic ones. Critical practice is required not just in essays and class discussion, but in such activities as writing letters and conducting investigative reports. In the "Public Life" unit this year, for instance, students investigated an organisation of their choice which claimed to be democratic. Likewise, "Nature and its Human Transformation" required a small report on an environmental issue. Such non-academic use of the concepts students learnt stimulated interest. It also gives an extra vocational slant to the Diploma. Furthermore, it can be seen as taking the political dimension of cultural literacy beyond the conception of it implicit in Hirsch's argument. The participating citizen of Hirsch's polemic is always a consumer of public discourse - Hirsch's pedagogic stress is on comprehension and his political one on the citizen literately following the media in which 'public conversation' generally occurs. As the above mentioned reports suggest, the Associate Diploma's ideal citizen-graduate, as well as a thoroughly grounded 'TAFE-articulator' into degree courses, will also be a political activist.

### NOTES

1. Another parallel innovation, on a much smaller scale but with a similar motive, was a series of lunchtime "...From Scratch" lectures run this year by the Humanities Use of English Program at La Trobe University.
2. Such research has already begun; eg. Allen Smith, "Cultural Literacy and American History Textbooks" (1988), *Educational Resource Information Collection*, ED329440.
3. I am indebted to my wife Lesley for her helpful comments on the parallels between our use of Hirsch and 'content-based' developments in ESL teaching.

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## INTEGRATING ACADEMIC DISCOURSE - WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM EXPERIENCE?

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### ABSTRACT

La Trobe University, Bendigo has over the past five or six years engaged in a number of attempts to integrate academic skills into curricula. During this year a working group of the Educational Services Unit has undertaken an extensive survey of various approaches, with the view of recommending to Faculty Board a policy. In this paper we will:

- 1) Outline the four main approaches which have been taken to integration.
- 2) Examine the advantages and disadvantages of each.
- 3) Discuss the ways in which the institution has reacted to these approaches, and suggest how institutional support can be encouraged.
- 4) Discuss the ways in which integrated academic discourse programs can be systematically evaluated.

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### Introduction

Over the past five or so years, La Trobe University, Bendigo through the Educational Services Unit has conducted a number of programmes which integrate language and learning skills into the academic curriculum. We have, therefore, acquired some experience which we felt it would be useful to share.

This paper has three parts. In the first, we outline four of the approaches that have been tried, and comment on the advantages and disadvantages of each. In the second part, we discuss the institutional implications of integrating academic discourse into mainstream curricula. Finally, we consider how integration programmes might be evaluated.

#### 1 Four approaches to developing academic skills

The following strategies are in place in various schools of the Bendigo faculty. They differ mainly in the extent to which language and learning skills are integrated into the rest of the programme, and in the manner in which they are delivered.

Our experience confirms that of others: academic skills take some time and constant reinforcement to develop, and cannot be achieved by simply giving a lecture or handout on what the students should do. Introductions early in the first semester are useful in raising students' awareness of learning skills, but they need to be followed up at regular intervals by further, systematic activities. Particular attention should be given to working with the students when they are most aware of the need when assignments are due; when they are returned; in the lead-up to examinations, etc.

#### *Approaches 1a and 1b: Learning Skills units*

Two units (Literacy Skills / Writing Skills for Tertiary Students) have been offered as part of the degree programme in Business and Social Science for several years. The units integrate academic content in relevant areas with learning support and study skills. They are aimed at students whose first semester results indicate a need for additional assistance, and do not by themselves ensure that *all* students receive an explicit and systematic introduction to tertiary learning skills.

An alternative to the remedial approach of the "literacy skills" units is the approach taken in the unit Introduction to Manufacturing Technology. This has been designed as an introduction to the theory and practice

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of communication (including language and learning skills such as writing, oral presentations, reading, and exam preparation). The unit, which ran for the first time in 1994, is compulsory for all first-year students in the Bachelor of Manufacturing Technology course. In 1995, half of the unit will be compulsory for all first-year Engineering students.

*Advantages of approach 1*

- it offers the most intensive practical work on learning skills
- as they are an accredited part of the course, the units are seen by the students as academically respectable
- learning skills are treated in relation to academic content

*Disadvantages of approach 1*

- it amounts to introducing a new unit in addition to existing offerings. The demands on staff time can, however, be lessened if a single unit is available across a variety of courses, or constructed as a common core with other elements focussed on various subject areas.
- the "literacy skills" unit replaces another unit within a course, which reduces the total subject content of the course to some extent (roughly speaking, by the equivalent of one-third to one-half of a semester unit).
- the units are time-consuming of staff time, as they are based on continuous practice and feedback.
- the approach demands of departmental staff the ability to teach learning skills in the discipline. This is a specialist rôle, for which many academics are not trained.

***Approach 2: Learning skills themes within an academic unit***

At Bendigo, the first-year unit Conceptual Bases of Care (within the Nursing programme) contains the themes Adult Learning and Communication, which in varying degrees address learning skills issues. These themes are supported by a carefully planned, staged, and co-ordinated approach to the written assignments, which allows students to progress through the various writing skills by concentrating on particular aspects of each assignment. Further advice is given in special lectures and tutorials devoted to practical issues of writing.

A similar approach is adopted the first-year Education unit: Language Education A.

*Advantages of approach 2*

- all staff are involved in the presentation of learning skills, which
  - i) enhances staff development
  - ii) improves the co-ordination and staging of learning skills work
- learning skills are thoroughly integrated with the discipline
- the curriculum content and the demands on staff time are not substantially altered.

*Disadvantages of approach 2*

- there is less time for practice than in approach 1
- a high level of co-ordination and commitment are demanded from all staff in the course, not only those teaching a particular part of it
- if large numbers of students are involved, it is difficult to monitor their skills development

***Approach 3: Single classes on aspects of learning skills***

A number of courses throughout the faculty either present their own classes on specific issues, or (more commonly) request ESU staff to do so. For example, a lecture on essay-writing is regularly given in first semester by ESU staff to Psychology I students, and a class session in first-year Engineering is devoted to managing time.

*Advantages of approach 3*

- the learning skills material can be presented by those most qualified to do so
- with a small commitment of time, all students are given a basic introduction to the issues
- curriculum content is hardly affected, and there are minimal demands on staff time

*Disadvantages of approach 3*

- it can confuse "being told how" with learning
- there is no time for practice or monitoring of individuals' progress
- learning skills tend to be separated from the discipline, especially if staff outside the subject area are the presenters
- students tend to regard such classes as, at best, a simple revision of the obvious, and at worst, a waste of time

## **2 Integration and the institution**

We have been fortunate at Bendigo in that there has always been support for the work of our Unit in the programs that we have offered to students in literacy and academic skills. In the early years of our literacy units, the focus was mainly on students from Business and Social Science, where students' problems with literacy and academic skills were most readily apparent. The overall success of these original units, coupled with a more general Faculty-wide concern over the transition difficulties faced by some students in their first year, has resulted in a wider offering of academic skills teaching in 1994 and beyond.

An overview of programs/courses proposed by the ESU in 1995 includes: a first semester "communications" unit for all students enrolled in the Bachelor of Manufacturing Technology; a 2 hrs/week writing skills component in the first semester for all first year Bachelor of Engineering students; a 2 hrs/week for two weeks series of lectures on academic skills issues in the Business School at the beginning of first semester; a continuation of the collaborative work begun in 1994 with the staff of first year units in Health Science; and a continuation of the Literacy Skills units for selected students in Business and Social Science in semester two. In addition, the Literacy Skills working group which has been meeting over the year has recommended to Academic Board that all first year students within the faculty receive "an explicit and systematic introduction to tertiary learning and studying", and that every school develop the means to implement the policy within its own area in 1995. We expect that further requests to the Educational Services Unit for input, support, guidance, and staff development will be forthcoming from the schools if this recommendation is adopted by the faculty.

The introduction and wide acceptance of these programmes are the results of a number of factors. Perhaps the most obvious relates to the size of the institution. This affects the degree to which meaningful personal contact can be made and relationships established between academics and departments, and the Educational Services Unit. Staff fairly quickly become aware of the nature and quality of work carried out by the Unit. The establishment in 1994 of a Literacy Skills working group with representatives from each of the schools has also encouraged purposeful discussion about the desirability and form of subsequent study skills programmes in each school. This liaison has resulted in the recommendation outlined above being submitted to Academic Board. The relative ease in building good working relationships among the departments has enabled us to combine the students' academic skills development with staff development, another area for which the ESU has responsibility. This aspect of the Unit's role has been most apparent in the integrated study skills/staff development program conducted with Health Science staff in 1994. Another important factor relates to the funding of such programs. Initially all costs were met by the Unit in terms of staffing and devising the programs. This investment of time and personnel proved to be a good one: departments have seen the value of more formal academic skills programs for students, and have been more amenable to committing funds to their maintenance.

Our experience has been that Schools generally have clearly perceived ideas of their own needs in regard to the provision of academic skills support to their students. While this will no doubt vary from School to School, and may well not reflect the "ideal" situation from the point of view of the study skills "experts", we feel it is important to permit the Schools/departments to take ultimate responsibility for their own academic skills development programs. The study skills adviser(s) must be prepared to act, when required, as mentor and guide. In this way, the development of these skills becomes a collaboration among all those who believe they know what best meets the needs of their particular groups of students.

### 3 Evaluating different approaches

Evaluating any teaching activity is difficult. There are no definitive approaches which can be universally applied. Progress has been made in recent years in developing sensitive ways of "measuring" successful outcomes, but they will always, apparently, be most useful as supplements to intuitive and even unconscious judgments by the experienced teacher.

When we attempt to evaluate integrated programmes of the type outlined in section 1, certain problems become particularly prominent. The first question is, what specifically are we evaluating? Or, to put it another way, what constitutes a successful outcome? Is it a matter of grades in which case, are we looking for a good grade in the integrated programme, or improved grades in other subjects? Or is success rather to be looked for in changed attitudes in which case, are we concerned with increasing the confidence of low-achieving learners, or with converting high-achieving surface learners to high-achieving deep learners? Do we most need summative or formative evaluation? There are many more such questions, far easier to pose than to answer. And it does not help to say that we are interested in all of these - we are still no nearer to saying how we can evaluate such a complex set of outcomes.

Another important issue is timing. When should we attempt to evaluate the success of integrated programmes? The ideal is probably something like four stages: before commencing, immediately afterwards, a year or so later, and several years later. Short of a major, longitudinal research project, it is hard to see how any more than the first two are practicable, and yet they are the probably least likely to indicate what has worked.

There may be answers to such questions, but we are a long way from knowing what they are. It will be a long time before we shall be able to get beyond the subjective judgments - often no more than guess-work - that lie beyond academic skills policies and practices. We have begun a long-term study of students, teaching, and learning at Bendigo, which will consider integrated programmes amongst things. There is a lot of research to yet be done.

Given the ambiguities of what and when we should evaluate, it is very difficult to compare the various approaches described above. Certainly, there have been a few remarkable success stories of students undertaking the Literacy Skills units, but we shall never know if they would have been equally successful if they had had a session or two of individual counselling, or attended a single study skills workshop, rather than the fifty-odd hours of the unit. Moreover, for every noticeable success, there is at least one noticeable failure.

What, then, can we say about evaluation? At this stage of our understanding, probably the best that our own experience has shown is that we need as much information (using the term very broadly) as we can gather, from as many sources, and about as many aspects of the programmes, as possible. There are many and various sources of this information. Those we have used include

- \* questionnaires on attitudes to tertiary learning and approaches to study. These are especially interesting if administered before and after a programme, but this is not practicable when the programme is short - for example, a single class.
- \* journals. Like the above, these are useful for the longer units, but not the short-term approaches.
- \* assignments, end-of-semester examinations, and purpose-built tests.
- \* interviews with students, singly and in groups.
- \* discussions with other staff teaching subjects taken by the students in question.

Despite all of these sources of information, however, we must still admit that we are largely flying blind. We are all of us probably in a rather ironic situation. We have striven for a long time to make universities aware of their responsibility for students' language and learning skills. We appear to be winning the battle - not so much through our own efforts as through the economics of dropout rates - and most university authorities are becoming enthusiastic about these programmes. Those of us who have been in the field for some time know a lot about designing and running various programmes, but we have very little to say about whether they really work.

The time will come soon when, having introduced various schemes, the powers that be will want some quality assurance or performance assessment. When it does come, we had better have some defensible answers. We have, perhaps, a few years' grace in which to tackle the evaluation issue.

## **DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC ACADEMIC SKILLS AT POST-GRADUATE LEVEL: A MODEL**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The National Centre for Development Studies at the Australian National University was established in the 1970s primarily to provide post-graduate courses for international students from Africa, Asia and the Pacific. Currently the student cohort is approximately 250 students, some of whom are Australian. Mainly in recognition of the needs of international students at post-graduate level, but also in recognition of its institutional reliance on student fees, in 1987 the NCDS established a position for a language support tutor. The role of the tutor was to provide discipline-specific language support: support which was, at that time, largely regarded as remedial and specific to international students.

There have been significant changes since then. By the beginning of 1993 there were four academic skills lecturers, each attached to one of the disciplines taught at NCDS (Demography; Development Administration; Environmental Management and Development; and Economics of Development). The re-naming of the position to Academic Skills lecturer was a move away from the notion that providing language and academic support was remedial, and a recognition that language is just one factor among many that post-graduate students need to master. The term academic skills is broad enough to encompass other issues including academic culture and discourse, critical analysis, research skills, negotiating skills, relationships with supervisors and so on.

The NCDS Academic Skills lecturers assume as the basis of their work a genre approach where education and language teaching occur in conjunction. This approach enables a satisfactory compromise between the need for language and the need for academic knowledge, and ensures the relevance and applicability of the academic skills taught.

This paper first outlines the model of discipline-specific academic skills used for post-graduate students at the NCDS. Secondly, the paper considers some of the key advantages and disadvantages of the approach used. Finally the paper considers the relationship of the NCDS model of academic skills to other forms of study skills and academic services at the Australian National University.

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### **Introduction**

The National Centre for Development Studies (NCDS) was established in the 1970s to offer post-graduate courses primarily for international students. There are currently four courses offered: Demography; Development Administration; Economics of Development; and Environmental Management and Development. In 1994 there were approximately 250 students, and the Centre is mainly funded by AIDAB and student fees. The majority of students are from the Asia-Pacific region and a small number of Australian students are enrolled. Coursework is a significant component of Graduate Diploma and Masters courses and bridging for PhDs.

It was clear by 1987 when the first language support tutor was appointed, that accepting international students for study at NCDS carried with it certain obligations and responsibilities: a recognition that English language test scores were not accurate predictors of academic success; that despite minimum English language test scores to qualify for entry, the students required ongoing language and academic support; and that in accepting student fees for study, the institution had a responsibility to ensure that students were provided with a measure of such support.

The term 'measure' is used advisedly. In 1987 it would have been difficult to convince academic decision-makers that international students needed more than increased knowledge of the English language. It would also have been difficult to convince academic decision-makers that lack of English language ability was not a sign of lack of intelligence. In 1987, within the prevailing mythology about language and international students, it would have been assumed that a language skills tutor was just what was needed to ensure academic success for international students.

Times change and, albeit slowly, there has been an increased acceptance of the role of academic skills for both international and Australian post-graduate students within the NCDS, and the broader context of the Australian National University (ANU). This is reflected in the growth and coverage of academic skills work: currently there are language and academic skills personnel based in the Study Skills Centre, the Department of Forestry, International Relations, Public Policy, Asian Studies Faculty, Linguistics and Master of Business Administration. Increased acceptance is also apparent in terms of increased awareness by students and academics of the need for academic skills, and in terms of the increased availability of resources. By 1993, NCDS had four discipline-specific academic skills positions, one for each of the four disciplines taught. A fifth position has just been created to be shared between two of the disciplines. The 1994 academic skills lecturer/student cohort was as follows:

Student cohort by discipline, 1994 (per Academic Skills lecturer)

<b>Demography</b>	<b>Development</b>	<b>Administration</b>
G.Dip:	39	G.Dip: 25
Master:	11	Master: 17
PhD:	22	PhD: 6
Total:	72	Total: 48

#### **Environmental Management and Development**

G.Dip:	20
Master:	22
PhD:	1
Total:	43

#### **Economics of Development**

G.Dip:	27	Bridging:	12
Master:	27	G. Cert:	2
PhD:	15		

Total: 83

All the positions for academic skills are at Associate Lecturer Level A, with renewable three-year contracts and the expectation that we will reapply after five years. In 1993 the ANU Central Fund agreed to provide \$90,000 core funding to be divided between the four programs, the remainder being provided by the discipline. The ANU Central Fund allocation reflects the beginning of a broader institutional acceptance that the provision of academic skills at post-graduate level is necessary and beneficial, and that the NCDS system is effective.

#### **Structure of academic skills**

The current structure of academic skills delivery at the NCDS involves:

- Σ a six-week Preparatory Course (either Jan-Feb or June-July)
- Σ weekly lectures/workshops (required)
- Σ individual consultations.

#### **Σ Preparatory Courses**

Preparatory courses were instituted in recognition that many incoming students may have been away from formal studies for a significant time; may not have studied in Australia before; may not have English as their

first language; and may take time to adjust to the academic culture and expectations. The Preparatory Courses not only enable us to inform students in practical ways about the academic skills and expectations they will encounter, but also enable us to identify problems/issues they have and to monitor their transition in the crucial adjustment period prior to the commencement of formal coursework. The work done in the Preparatory Courses has been a significant factor in ensuring that the students adjust to post-graduate studies with greater ease and confidence.

The six-week Preparatory Course comprises vital teaching components, including introduction/refresher courses in statistics, economics, mathematics, computing/word processing and academic skills. The academic skills component comprises cultural issues in learning, the language of discourse in the discipline, critical analysis, research and referencing skills, writing and study skills and oral presentations.

Underlying the teaching in the Preparatory Course is teaching about research methodologies, pedagogical styles and academic expectations. These weeks are critical in allaying fears and instilling confidence. As far as possible we have sought to establish a common basis of understanding with respect to the academic expectations of NCDS and the ANU by offering a mid-year Preparatory Course which combines students from all four programs.

#### Σ Weekly teaching

Weekly teaching is much more discipline-specific. Much depends on the level of study (Graduate Diploma, Master, PhD) and, given that there are two intakes a year, the length of time students have been studying. The sessions reflect the particular styles and expectations of the discipline. A semester's teaching may involve teaching the writing styles of different academic genres, reviewing skills, information technology, research skills, gathering and interpreting primary data, negotiation skills, referencing, proof reading - skills which are directly related to the subject matter of the discipline, but which also have a broader applicability to the post-university professional lives of the students. At the MA level for example, presentation skills include the presentation of seminars, chairing and discussant skills, plus workshops on publishing research papers in academic journals. PhD level workshops cover various aspects of writing and organising a PhD study.

Significant in this work is the degree to which the Academic Skills lecturers liaise with discipline lecturers to establish assessment tasks and procedures, marking criteria, academic expectations and supervisory arrangements. Ensuring co-ordination between course content and assessment practices, and course content and student/lecturer expectations is a significant aspect of our work.

#### Σ Individual consultations

Finally, individual consultations comprise the third area of involvement in academic skills. It is too difficult in weekly sessions to adequately meet the language and academic needs of individual students. The consultations provide an opportunity to deal with basic areas of language and academic difficulty, as well as provide a resource whereby students can seek clarification of expectations, develop confidence in their ability, and seek assistance with developing academic and research links. These individual consultations can be seen as a process of education - learning, rather than costly trial and error failing in assessment.

Individual consultations are labour intensive, and could potentially consume almost all of our time, hence the combination of formal teaching and individual consultations. There are also strictures about when work will be considered, how frequently and how much time prior to a consultation the work should be handed in.

#### Σ Nuts and Bolts classes

Nuts and Bolts classes are held when there is a sizeable group of new students who have particular language difficulties. The classes deal with various grammatical issues (such as verb tenses, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, paragraph and structure and use of definite and indefinite articles), and while the language problem may not be serious enough to adversely affect a student's academic achievement, these sessions serve as refresher classes. The teaching of the Nuts and Bolts classes is rotated among the academic skills lecturers, and students are drawn from all four programs. These classes generally run for six to eight weeks in the first semester.

The point to make is that in the forms of academic skills provision, the focus must be on providing the student with the confidence and skills with which to perform independently. If the aim of discipline academic skills at post-graduate level is to equip students with a knowledge of the academic skills, expectations and culture with which to develop the confidence to succeed, and to enhance the educational experience and outcomes of NCDS students, then the NCDS model has largely succeeded in meeting those objectives.

### **The role of discipline-specific academic skills lecturers: some considerations**

Unfortunately, we teach within a research school and because there are few, if any, precedents for this, there are few professional standards by which we can be assessed. The greatest disadvantage of being a discipline-specific academic skills lecturer, therefore, is in terms of the institutional structure within which academic skills positions are located: the structure tends to marginalise us and relegate us to a less recognisably respected /rewarded professional niche. We well remember the day when we were told that if we wanted promotion we would have to go elsewhere - PhD students could do our jobs for us.

Our role and possible promotion is judged against the criteria set for other appointments at post-graduate level in the Research School - research. Much research does, of course, need to be done on the role of academic skills, but if we do wish to travel the research road, then two key issues emerge. First, the logistics: we teach from January to December - there are no holidays for PhDs and Masters, and Preparatory Courses take up the rest of the time. Second and more importantly, a program of research encroaches in a very significant way on our professional role - we are employed to teach.

There is another aspect to the question of research. Most of the colleagues with whom we work have been appointed on the basis of research credentials, not on the basis of their teaching abilities, despite the fact that we work in coursework programs. Teaching skills tend to be overlooked as a criterion for appointment for mainstream discipline staff, yet the work of the Academic Skills lecturer constantly deals with teaching issues. Apart from voluntarily choosing to attend a professional development program, there is no provision or requirement for academic staff to acquire teaching skills within the program. Because of our close liaison and work with students, Academic Skills lecturers can be perceived by some academics as a threat: questions of assessment techniques, teaching methodology and so on, can make the academics with whom we work defensive. Negotiating a path through the minefield of professional egos is tricky. On the other hand, the close relationship can lead to an increasing awareness of the underlying language, academic, and research issues on the part of mainstream discipline academics. This can be an enriching process for all concerned, with the potential for strong mutual support.

Because our positions tend to be marginalised, so our function tends to be misunderstood. Despite increasing institutional recognition, academic skills is still largely viewed as it was circa 1987: language (read bandaid) support, given by tutors (no status) to foreigners. The view prevails that we just correct the grammar and teach students how to study. It takes time and effort to change such perceptions, and often professional patience wears thin. This is particularly the case in terms of working with new academic staff. There is very little conception of how an Academic Skills lecturer could possibly contribute to the academic development of a student. We are at pains to demonstrate Academic Skills lecturers are integral, not just to the discipline, but to the institution. By orienting, preparing, providing teaching and ongoing language and academic skills, we are working to minimise if not prevent academic crisis. The nature of our academic skills work has a significant role in contributing to the satisfaction and professional development of the students, both international and Australian, and has a flow-on effect of attracting more students. This ultimately is a contributor to the overall esteem in which the institution is held.

### **Is discipline-specific academic skills the only model ?**

Finally, is discipline-specific academic skills the only model ? There are significant advantages to being centrally located, having a relatively small number of students with which to deal, and being attached to a discipline. But we are not isolated from what else goes on at ANU. For various reasons our students currently undertake some post-graduate courses elsewhere in the University. Some of our students attend courses put on by the Study Skills Centre. We make use of Study Skills staff for particular sessions on particular issues. There is a growing sense of interrelation and communication. Much depends on what works best under what circumstances. NCDS was fortunate in having a critical mass of international students which, by its very existence, drew attention to their particular language and academic needs at post-graduate level.

### **Conclusion**

It is becoming less and less possible ethically for institutions to accept fees from students, international or local, and not use those fees to provide adequate, sustained academic skills support. There are various ways in which that support may be provided, whether it be by a discipline-specific lecturer or a Centre such as the Study Skills Centre at ANU. What is important is that there is maximum effort to ensure that there is an interrelation of services, and that there is neither duplication, nor professional isolation. Universities have been very slow to

provide academic skills services to students and, where now attempts are being made to do so, it is important that the interrelationship between academic skills personnel and academics is carefully encouraged.

**INTEGRATING THE TEACHING OF ACADEMIC DISCOURSE INTO POSTGRADUATE COURSEWORK AND RESEARCH PROGRAMS: A REPORT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTEGRATED BRIDGING PROGRAM FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

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**ABSTRACT**

The development of English language proficiency and an understanding of the academic conventions of specific disciplines has been integrated into the early stages of the postgraduate studies programs of a number of groups of international students at the University of Adelaide. A longitudinal research study is being conducted on the language proficiency and learning progress of a cohort of international students with language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE) who began their postgraduate studies at a proficiency level just below the required minimum entry level, but supported by the 3-month 'Concurrent English Program'. Early results of this study indicate that these students are performing at least as well as a second group of LBOTE students whose International English Language Testing Systems (IELTS) score was 6 or above on commencement, but who received no integrated language development course. These results have strengthened our belief that at least part of the language preparation of LBOTE students cannot be done adequately before students enter their new research environment and that the best 'bridging' is, of necessity, integrated into the content. In this paper we give a summary report of our longitudinal study and an outline of further developments towards the implementation of an 'Integrated Bridging Program' which is to be accessible to all incoming international postgraduate students from language backgrounds other than English.

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**Introduction**

The Integrated Bridging Program (IBP) for international postgraduate students from language backgrounds other than English (LBOTE) will be in place at The University of Adelaide from the beginning of 1995. It has been developed to provide these students with a systematic and equitable induction into the linguistic and cultural expectations of the discipline in which they will pursue their postgraduate studies, and the elements 'Integrated' and 'Bridging' juxtaposed in its title provide a clue as to why it has been included in this conference. It is based on our belief that at least part of the language preparation of LBOTE students cannot be done adequately before students enter the new research environment and that the best 'bridging' is, of necessity, integrated into the content. In this paper we report on two precursor programs and their development into the current IBP, and we summarise some relevant research results obtained in a study of participants in one of the precursor programs. In the final section we report on the recent pilot of the IBP and plans for the widespread implementation of the program in 1995.

**Precursor 1: the Concurrent English Program (CEP)**

This first stage in the evolution of the IBP was triggered by dissatisfaction expressed by a number of prospective postgraduate students (and their prospective supervisors) when the students failed to achieve the University's prerequisite of 6.0 on the IELTS test (International English Language Testing System) after 10 weeks of ELICOS (English Language Intensive Course Overseas Students) in Australia. What was requested was language teaching that was more relevant to both the subject matter and the level of the study students were aspiring to.

We recognised that while IELTS scores are useful in determining the level at which a student can operate in each of the 'macroskills' of speaking, listening, reading and writing in a familiar field, they inevitably only show part of the picture (Brindley, 1989). In their urgency to 'pass' their IELTS test, students tend not to address the question of language which is specific to a new research environment, nor the larger question of the academic conventions and behaviours favoured within the new context of a particular university and department.

In response to the students' request we therefore devised a pre-enrolment program which we named the 'Concurrent English Program' (CEP).

The CEP was based on three premises:

- 1 that language derives meaning from the context within which it is used (Halliday, 1985; Halliday & Hasan, 1985), and that therefore language development is best facilitated if the content is relevant to the students' ultimate study goals (Felix, 1993);
- 2 that the culture of learning at an Australian university in regard to critical thinking, learner independence and other more specific expectations varies across universities and departments (Ballard and Clanchy, 1988, 1991) and is thus best learnt within the context of the students' actual experience within their departments; and
- 3 that mature-age international research students (with scholarships dictating strict time limits) are likely to be more motivated to devote time to their language and learning development if they can see themselves making progress within the field of their research at the same time (Brinton, Snow and Wesche, 1989).

Contextualised or 'content based' language teaching is an approach which has developed in the area of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) over the past two decades (Brinton et al., 1989; Trim, 1989), while 'English for Special Purposes' courses have been developing since the 1960s (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). The CEP was set up to meet the challenge of providing a truly contextualised program for postgraduate research students by integrating work on their language development with an introduction into their research topic, under the joint guidance of their prospective supervisors and a Language and Learning lecturer with expertise in TESOL. The focus was on students *gaining relevant information* through the English language, and in the process developing their own command of the language (Brinton et al., 1989), while also becoming aware of and acquiring the academic skills and conventions favoured in their disciplines.

The CEP was begun in 1991 and run for 12 months on a trial basis. Following positive feedback from an evaluation in 1992, it then continued until 1994. The characteristics of the CEP are detailed below:

1. Provider: Language and Learning Service (LLS) of the ACUE (Advisory Centre for University Education)
2. Duration of trial: September 1991 to October 1992
3. Timing: pre-Enrolment, 12 weeks duration
4. Students: prospective postgraduate research students
5. Prerequisite condition: indications of scholarly maturity
6. Language prerequisites: IELTS 5.5 or 5.0, 10 weeks ELICOS in Australia
7. Relevance of program content achieved through collaboration with supervisors
8. Negotiated individualised program and assessment tasks
9. Assessment by LLS lecturer and supervisor
10. Outcome: of 23 trial students, all were assessed ready to enrol.

Student satisfaction with this program was very high. During the evaluation of this program the suggestion was made by some participating students and supervisors that all incoming international postgraduate students would benefit from such an induction. Some students even went so far as to suggest that their 'more successful' colleagues who had achieved IELTS >6 may in fact have been short-changed in the long run.

### **Research findings: CEP students and IELTS>6 group**

This suggestion gave added impetus to our already keen desire to follow the progress of the CEP cohort through their candidatures. Initial investigations indicated that students and their supervisors were generally satisfied with students' language performance and were noting improvement as candidatures proceeded (Cargill and McGowan, 1993). A wider study was then undertaken to compare the CEP cohort with students who enrolled at a similar time but at IELTS>6, and therefore without the contextualised support provided by the CEP. Complete results of that study may be found in McGowan and Cargill (1994), but a brief summary is relevant here.

The comparison study used an aggregate of responses to 20 items on a seven point scale, with questionnaires distributed to both students and their supervisors. The study was undertaken when students were between 2 and 2.5 years into their candidatures. Results indicated that:

1. CEP students were keeping pace with the IELTS>6 group, in spite of their lower initial IELTS score.
2. CEP students were markedly more confident than IELTS>6 students: 81.1% of CEP student responses rated themselves in the good to excellent range, while only 58.8% of the responses by the IELTS>6 students fell in this range. (It should be added that, although the supervisors of CEP students were not as enthusiastic as their students, their responses in the good to excellent range (60.6%) were similar to, and indeed a little higher than, those of the supervisors of the IELTS >6 group (57.9%).)
3. More of the IELTS>6 students rated themselves as not adequate (16% of responses) than did CEP students (2%).
4. More supervisors of the IELTS>6 students reported inadequacies (20% of responses) than did supervisors of CEP students (13.5%).

### **Precursor 2: Research and Presentation Skills for Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences (R&PS for A&NRS)**

In the meantime things had been moving. An internal teaching development grant had been awarded to Margaret Cargill and David Liljegren, the Associate Dean Postgraduate of the A&NRS Faculty, to develop a semester-length, discipline specific, credit-bearing course for incoming international LBOTE postgraduate students, building on the CEP approach. The development and trial of this course involved collaborative input from six of the eight departments in the Faculty, and the title of the course as given in the heading above reflects this. The course underwent two trials: in Semester 2, 1993 with 5 students; and in Semester 1, 1994, with 18 students on two campuses. The second trial group included two students of long standing who had requested permission to participate as a result of word-of-mouth advertisement.

The features of R&PS reflect its origin in the CEP. It was designed to take place in a student's first semester of enrolment, and used the methodology of discipline-specific tasks with parallel language support sessions. The major tasks were the production of a limited-scope research proposal and the presentation of a seminar to justify it, and a variety of feeder tasks were assigned leading up to these. Assignments were assessed jointly by the language teacher and the student's supervisor, with each providing comments on his/her own area of expertise. Negotiation also took place with supervisors regarding departmental and individual requirements for written and oral presentation. The support part of the design was provided by class sessions running parallel to the tasks, where models were analysed and specific language skills developed and practised.

Evaluations of the two trials of R&PS were very positive, with both staff and students involved recommending that the course should continue. Comments and suggestions made as part of the evaluations were fed into the curriculum design process at every stage. However R&PS for A&NRS did not continue under that name (for which we can be very grateful). It was agreed that the concept be widened to produce a program that could be taught across the university, to coursework students as well as research students, and this came to be entitled the Integrated Bridging Program.

### **Pilot of the Integrated Bridging Program**

Funding was provided by the Senior Management Group of the university to run a pilot of the IBP in Semester 2, 1994. Although final marking and evaluation have not been completed at the date of presenting this paper, it is possible to present a good deal of information about the pilot because an extensive mid-course evaluation was carried out. This was necessary if the relevant policy and funding decisions were to be made in time for university-wide implementation in 1995.

The pilot was run on an invitation basis: memos went to all relevant staff members in May outlining the program and asking for expressions of interest in participating. It was felt that it was important to accommodate all departments which responded, in order to build goodwill and enhance networking possibilities for other language and learning approaches. Seven IBP pilot groups were therefore established, five for research students (of between 6 and 16 students) and two for coursework students (of 3 and 8 students). The integrated nature of the program requires that groups be made up of students from the same or very closely related disciplines (or postgraduate courses) and so ideal numbers are not always achievable. In addition, the funding received did not

permit the full program to be delivered, and a number of curriculum changes were necessary. Thus the results of the mid-course evaluation were keenly awaited.

Evaluative information was collected from participating students, their supervisors/ course co-ordinators and the IBP teaching staff, and questions were asked regarding the appropriacy of the stated objectives and expected outcomes, as well as how the program was operating in practice. Results were analysed for each group individually.

Results indicated that most students and staff were very supportive of the program and appreciated the contribution it was making. However, in all areas where provision had been cut because of funding constraints these cuts showed up as perceived deficiencies. Particular problems identified were: timing and intensity of provision for coursework students; and insufficient liaison with individual supervisors in some research groups. In addition, the evaluation produced suggestions for improvement which could be incorporated into the ongoing program, either immediately or in future offerings. As a result of the information provided by the pilot evaluation it has been decided that, as indicated earlier, the Integrated Bridging Program will be available for all international postgraduate students from language backgrounds other than English enrolling at The University of Adelaide from the beginning of 1995.

### **1995 Plans**

Group structure for 1995 will be refined as a result of the pilot experience. Separate groups will be maintained for research and coursework students. The research groups will follow the model outlined previously for R&PS. Coursework groups will have a basic structure of two weeks of intensive teaching before the start of lectures, limited contact during lecture weeks, and a further block of teaching time to be allocated after negotiation with the department concerned; this could well be before the research or project component of the students' program commences.

The IBP objectives and expected outcomes have remained substantially unchanged and appear in Appendix A.

### **Conclusion**

After reflection on the process of developing the IBP, a number of key factors emerge as having been important and being likely to remain so. These are

- 1 the establishment of successful collaboration on the ground: with supervisory staff experienced in working with LBOTE postgraduate students and interested in improving outcomes;
- 2 support at the institutional level;
- 3 the ability to retain flexibility within the program to meet changing student groupings/needs;
- 4 a recognition of need for employment conditions which will attract and retain appropriate staff;
- 5 the development of mechanisms to reconcile 3 and 4 above.

We began with a conviction that at least part of the language preparation of LBOTE students cannot be done adequately before students enter the new research environment and that the best 'bridging' is, of necessity, integrated into the content. Comments by students and staff who have participated thus far have borne this out and lead us to believe that the IBP is set to become a systematic and non-discriminatory provision of appropriate support for all international full-fee paying postgraduate students as required by the AVCC's *Code of Ethical Practice in the Provision of Full-fee Courses to Overseas Students by Australian Higher Education Institutions*.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **Appendix A**

#### **INTEGRATED BRIDGING PROGRAM Objectives and expected outcomes**

**The objectives** of the Integrated Bridging Program for International Postgraduates are:

1. to focus attention early in students' candidatures on the writing and presentation skills that are part of postgraduate study, and to develop strategies for their ongoing development;
2. to assist students to progress from a general language proficiency to the specific language competence required for higher degree studies in their chosen field;
3. to provide induction into the academic, linguistic and cultural conventions relating to postgraduate study at the University of Adelaide and in the students' own disciplines;
4. to develop the English language proficiency of postgraduate students within the context of their own area of specialisation;
5. (for research students) to support the development of language skills and understandings needed to undertake research in the students' departments of the University of Adelaide.

**The outcomes** for the student are expected to be:

1. an understanding of the nature of a higher degree in an Australian university;
2. familiarity with own department;
3. language and learning skills appropriate to own postgraduate coursework or research;
4. skills and methodology appropriate for own literature search, literature review and research proposal/essay;
5. experience in producing limited-scope documents to own department's requirements;
6. skills in seminar preparation and presentation.

## POSTGRADUATE WRITING INSTRUCTION: GENERAL VERSUS DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC

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### ABSTRACT

Much attention has been given in recent years to the language and learning needs of novice undergraduate students, both native and non-native speakers of English, who have been provided in most Australian institutions with a number of support staff and programmes to help them succeed with tertiary study. The needs of postgraduate students, however, seem to have been relatively less well catered for despite the fact that the language skills of many may be far from adequate. This presentation represents a case study of two different approaches to meeting postgraduate language and learning needs undertaken at the authors' university: general classes or workshops on writing research papers and discipline-specific workshops on postgraduate study and thesis writing. The details and effectiveness of these programmes will be discussed from the perspective of both the teachers and the students.

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### **Introduction**

#### **Postgraduate writing instruction**

Many universities are seeking to improve the provision of induction programmes for postgraduates. Reasons for this include the recent quality movement in Australian higher education; an increased awareness of the diversity of the student population whose needs are very different and more varied than in the past; and increasing enrolments of postgraduate students, particularly from international and local non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB). In establishing such programmes, decisions have to be made about who is responsible for providing these induction programmes and whether to make them general or discipline-specific. In some cases, decisions are made by policy-level research committees and in others by discipline-based honours and postgraduate committees, or by language and learning specialists.

In this paper we present case studies of two approaches to writing instruction used with honours and postgraduate students at Murdoch University and Monash University<sup>1</sup>: a general approach and a discipline-specific approach. After a brief and selective survey of the historical background of these approaches, the key features of the workshops conducted by the authors are explored in detail. This section also includes the teachers' evaluations of the advantages/successes and disadvantages/failures of these materials and approaches, as well as the evaluations of the students who participated in these sessions. In the concluding section, guidelines and suggestions are offered for those interested in embarking on similar programmes.

#### **Historical background**

Since the sixties, there has been considerable linguistic work investigating differences between language varieties based on use or *registers* (Halliday et al., 1964; Crystal & Davy, 1969). This early work concentrated on the lexical and grammatical level and described the features of English used in different broad domains such as science, medicine, business and law and was instrumental in the development of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses and materials.

This focus on specific differences between disciplines or domains has been accompanied by a proliferation of courses and materials in the general area of English for study or Academic Purposes (EAP) to prepare international and local NESB students for higher study in English speaking countries such as the UK, US and Australia. The assumption that there are substantial elements in common "forms the basis of many academic writing courses for students drawn from different disciplines; the student's work on writing tasks based on

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general, non-subject oriented topics" (Kusel, 1992: 460). Materials such as Jordan's (1980) *Academic Writing Course* identify broad features such as more formal lexis, impersonal style, and use of qualifications or hedges and focus on the lexico-grammatical patterns for important academic language functions such as defining, exemplifying, classifying, interpreting data, developing an argument, and drawing conclusions.

Parallel to the growth in EAP courses, the writing across the curriculum movement (WAC) has been very influential in first language (L1) writing instruction advancing the view that every classroom teacher should be a writing teacher. The growth of ESP courses is an extension of this movement and has led to much recent debate on the issue of EAP/ESP course design. According to Johns and Dudley-Evans (1991), the debate centres on whether to adopt a "wide-angle" or "common core" approach as advocated by R. Williams, H. G. Widdowson and R. Spack and EAP materials such as Jordan's (above) or a "narrow-angle" approach (ESP) in which the focus is on the discipline-specific needs of students. On the one hand, Spack (1988: 30) argues that language teachers cannot adequately teach the writing demands of specific disciplines and "should leave the teaching of writing in the disciplines to the teachers of those disciplines". On the other hand, Johns (1988) and Swales (1990) propose a collaborative approach with discipline specialists in order to produce relevant materials that will promote an awareness of the specific requirements and discourse conventions of the discipline. This is also the approach adopted by proponents of the *adjunct* model of language instruction at tertiary level (Snow & Brinton, 1988; Benesch, 1988; Beasley, 1990).

One of the criticisms of the wide-angle approach has been its failure to recognise different audiences and their individual needs and the consequent problem of overgeneralising. Johns & Dudley-Evans (1991: 304) and Swales (1990) argue that while the wide-angle approach may be suitable for pre-study courses (e.g. pre-tertiary EAP courses such as those offered by the ELICOS industry in Australia), it is not suitable for all EAP/ESP courses, in particular, for postgraduate students and professionals in many situations.

In Australia, language instruction in the EAP/ESP field has been greatly influenced by recent linguistic work at the discourse and genre levels. Much of this has been from the systemic-functional approach (Halliday, 1985; Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Martin, 1992), but important work on academic writing has also been done by others such as Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993) who utilise the notion of *discourse communities* to define genres. This concept clearly has relevance to students at tertiary institutions who frequently interact in an apprentice-like role with a number of academic and professional discourse communities in the course of their tertiary studies. As Nightingale (1988: 278) observes,

Study of student writers reveals that those who have problems often fail to analyse and address readers' needs in the light of the purpose of the communication. In addition, they are not initiated into the styles and expectations of their disciplines. Research is also improving understanding of the different requirements of writing in different disciplines. It is now clear that these differences go much deeper than the obvious ones between scientific report writing and analytic essay writing.

There has been a general trend to identify the differences between academic tribes and territories (Bazerman, 1988; Dudley-Evans & Henderson, 1990; Becher, 1989, 1994) confirming the need to make the disciplinary discourse conventions explicit. Bizzell (1986) writes of three types of problems that 'basic' writers face at tertiary level: a "clash among dialects" (standard versus non-standard English), a "clash of discourse forms" or genres, and a "clash of ways of thinking". Students are confronted with an academic community that uses different language and discourse patterns that constitute a different world view, a world view with no "absolutes". She writes that:

basic writers, upon entering the academic community, are being asked to learn a new dialect and new discourse conventions, but the outcome of such learning is acquisition of a whole new world view ( 297).

Bizzell is describing then the epistemological shifts that are a necessary part of the acculturation process faced by all students entering the university discourse community. Students from minority groups, lower socio-economic backgrounds, and other languages and cultures experience the greatest degree of "culture clash", of language or dialect, genres, and world view. Ballard and Clanchy (1988: 19) make a similar point when they write that university literacy "involves becoming acculturated: learning to read and write the culture" (i.e. the "culture of knowledge and its disciplinary sub-cultures").

## Features of the two approaches

This section (summarised in Appendix A) compares and contrasts the general and discipline-specific approach used in the workshops for postgraduate students in terms of the following features: the theoretical approach adopted, the audience, the use of needs analyses, collaboration with subject-specific staff, the organisation (scheduling) of classes, the materials used, the activities involved, the topics covered, the evaluation procedures employed, the teachers' evaluations of the advantages/successes and the disadvantages/failures of the programmes. Appendix B summarises the students' evaluations of the two programmes in terms of good/most useful and bad/least useful points, and recommendations.

### Theoretical approach

#### *General*

The workshop materials have been developed from linguistic work on discourse and genre from the functional-systemic tradition (Halliday, 1985; Halliday & Hasan, 1985; Martin, 1992) in general and other applied linguists such as Swales (1984, 1987, 1990), Hopkins & Dudley-Evans (1988) who explored academic research writing across disciplines, focussing on research articles (RAs) in particular.

Swales (1990) examines the structure of the research article genre in terms of its overall schematic structure of Introduction - Method - Results - Discussion (IMRD) and the various moves and sub-moves or steps that typically characterise each section. Swales explores the range of linguistic realisations of the moves and steps of the various sections of research articles across many disciplinary fields. While acknowledging that there is certainly some degree of variation between disciplines "in the degree of standardization and of the presence of the nominalized impersonal style" for example, Swales demonstrates in considerable detail that there are "certain characteristics of RAs which, by and large, tend to occur and recur in samples drawn from an extensive range of disciplines" (175). According to Swales, there is a widespread lack of conscious knowledge of the schema of research articles and that there "may be pedagogical value in sensitising students to rhetorical effects and to the rhetorical structures that tend to recur in genre-specific texts" (213).

Webb (1991: vi) places her centre's materials and approach within "the tradition of 'genre' theory and pedagogy". Murison and Webb's materials are designed to be utilised in a writing workshop situation which combines process and genre approaches in that extended writing exercises can involve group and individual conferencing with the workshop leader. The materials are largely based on authentic texts (i.e. excerpts from research articles) and thus this material is clearly in the ESP tradition and based on the assumption that making the generic structuring and linguistic features of research papers explicit to students will improve their own research writing. It is presumed that students "have sufficient 'expert' knowledge about research methods in their fields to be able to transfer generalisations made in the course to their own practice" (Murison & Webb, 1991: 80-1).

#### *Discipline-specific*

The theoretical approach fits within an eclectic tradition of teaching writing which is an adaptation of the process and genre approaches outlined above. ESP has tended to be a "needs and materials-led movement" (Johns and Dudley-Evans, 1990: 305), providing a system of analysis and an approach to the teaching of writing "that successfully combines the consideration of end product with the writing process" (Weissberg and Buker, in Johns and Dudley-Evans, 1990: 305). Although the two programmes discussed in this paper share the same theoretical approach, in the discipline-specific programme "rhetorical consciousness" (Swales, 1990: 213) is developed through reading and writing tasks based on specific, subject-oriented topics. The teachers were able to provide a comprehensive learning experience because of their knowledge of departmental requirements, thereby allowing treatment of the relevant linguistic features and research skills i.e. language and learning skills development. Thus, this programme is distinguished by the attention given to research training so that a coherent framework for the research writing process is provided.

### Audience

#### *General*

The audience was mixed: classes on writing research papers were offered to postgraduates across campus. Over forty students (Honours, Masters, M Phil, and PhD) expressed interest and some thirty students attended an

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initial session at which the decision was taken to divide the class into two more manageable groups: one for students in the Humanities and Social Sciences and the other for students in the Sciences<sup>2</sup>. The classes comprised a mixture of English speaking background (ESB) and non-English speaking background (NESB) students, with the latter predominating.

Murison and Webb (1991: 80) write that “the target learners for this course are postgraduate research students, academics, and professional scientists, whether of English-speaking background or of a language other than English”.

#### *Discipline-specific*

The target learners for this course were ESB and NESB students enrolled in honours and postgraduate programmes from five departments in the Faculty of Computing and Information Technology at Monash University and the Computer Science and Information Systems programmes at Murdoch University. Because students had homogeneous disciplinary interests it was possible to group them into classes by department(s). Of the honours and postgraduate students enrolled, a consistently high attendance rate was achieved. ESB and NESB students participated in nearly equal numbers at Monash University, whereas more ESB students participated at Murdoch University because of the higher enrolments in this group.

### **Needs analysis methods**

#### *General*

Apart from the text analyses that were an integral part of the development of the workshop materials, there was no needs analysis conducted of the individual students who enrolled for the programme. The materials were developed from text analyses of authentic papers from research journals in a wide range of disciplines in the social sciences, education, and physical, biological and health sciences. Unit 1 entitled “Your professional writing profile” involved a student questionnaire which focused on the types of writing that the students were engaged in. Its intention was to develop students’ awareness that writing varies depending on the purpose (why) and audience (who for) and to relate writing purposes to the structure or staging of a journal article.

#### *Discipline-specific*

Three methods of needs analysis were used during the development of the materials for the workshop series. This work has been ongoing using formative and summative methods to assess students’ level of English proficiency and their approaches to learning.

#### Text analysis

A selection of writing samples comprising theses (passed/bound and in draft form), research proposals, and working papers was examined from five departments in the Faculty. These were examined for features such as each department’s preferred referencing conventions, organisation of content (sections, sequence, treatment of data, approach to topic, handling of sources), formal requirements, and features of written style (grammar, conventions of academic writing, level of formality, tense usage). The analysis of representative discourse has been ongoing with most of the material obtained from individual consultations as we have attempted to define students’ more specific needs, such as the actual language difficulties that they face in their writing. Consultations with students working on drafts of thesis chapters and research proposals provided valuable input for the materials design. These documents gave an overall guide to the distinctive disciplinary language of the respective departments.

#### Staff and student questionnaires

Needs analysis questionnaires were used with students to determine the topics and materials to be included in the workshop series so that we could meet their needs as developing writers. They also gathered information about students’ writing problems as perceived by students and staff themselves to find out about their knowledge of writing (and reading) strategies.

Co-ordinators of the honours and postgraduate programmes and heads of department were surveyed to prepare for the Thesis Writing workshops to define the range of theses across the Faculty, and in particular to identify the

features which characterised departmental theses as well as features common to all departments. Questionnaire responses from the departmental representatives showed that these staff had quite different opinions about the nature of the thesis in terms of audience, purpose, conventions, style and format, and the amount of stylistic and grammatical polishing expected of us. This indicated the varying expectations of our role and what students must learn in a thesis writing course to fully address the demands of writing in the discipline. Such knowledge alerted staff to potential sources of conflict. We were also alerted to the varying information students would be given as they worked with individual supervisors.

The staff questionnaires were a valuable source of needs determination because their views on writing were subjective as well as representative of more objective and common features that define their discipline; this information helped define the distinctive features of theses by revealing important defining characteristics of each department's theses. The questionnaire responses were used cautiously as their inherent weaknesses were recognised (i.e. they were personal views and in some cases institutional ones, and their interpretations of practice may or may not have been accurate). However, the use of experts as accepted members of the discourse community was invaluable in suggesting and confirming the hypotheses from our discourse analyses.

#### Observations/interviews

Observations and interviews allowed for specific interpretations of practice. In the case of the former, students' difficulties in giving seminar presentations were noted so that the correct focus for the Oral Presentations workshop could be determined. Interviews with staff were arranged to obtain information about departmental thesis requirements, or to clarify points which were raised in individual consultations.

Using the combined needs analysis methods it was possible to ascertain the students' *writing needs* from staff and student perspectives. The comments elicited helped determine their writing needs from a social and contextual point of view. With their stated needs in mind, ideas were formulated about the content and format best suited to such learners.

#### Staff collaboration

##### *General*

There was little or no consultation or collaboration with subject specialist staff in these workshop programmes.

##### *Discipline-specific*

In an integrated programme such as this, extensive consultation is essential with co-ordinators of honours and postgraduate programmes; consultation included key staff with expertise in thesis writing, staff who were sensitive to NESB students or who had an interest in writing pedagogy. We sought to ensure that the materials were appropriate and the topics were relevant.

This co-operation played a staff development role where disciplinary staff acquired knowledge of text construction, the research writing process (some supervisors are inexperienced or find it hard to articulate their knowledge of these processes<sup>3</sup>, and of stylistic and grammatical matters and the use of samples as teaching resources in their own teaching. We benefited by gaining awareness of disciplinary practices and learning what were the valued texts of the discipline. Other benefits of this consultation is that it manifested discrepancies, tensions, and interdepartmental differences, which gave us a broader understanding of such matters and highlighted the fact that we needed to be careful not to make any assumptions.

It is to be expected that there would be clashes with subject-specialist staff because of the different interests and expectations of participants represented in this programme. For example, on one occasion the existing departmental tensions were exacerbated in a workshop which was held for three departments over the role of the literature review. There were other conflicts which arose because some staff were concerned that we were "interfering with content" (!), and one department felt that giving advice on structure was the exclusive responsibility of the supervisor. As we worked out our new roles and responsibilities, we tried to effect strategies such as better communication and more systematic feedback to overcome these conflicts.

## Organisation (scheduling)

### *General*

This programme involved a workshop series of six sessions of two hours' duration (units 1 & 2, unit 3, unit 4, unit 5, unit 6, and units 7 & 8). The workshops were advertised to all currently enrolled postgraduate students and not necessarily timed to suit students' progress. The course has sometimes been offered on demand, i.e. in response to the requests of students who could not attend previous series. The workshops were complemented by individual consultations which could more fully explore students' problems with language, style, and structure.

### *Discipline-specific*

This programme involved a workshop series of five sessions of between one to two and a half hours' duration. It was advertised to all currently enrolled honours and postgraduate students in five funding departments. The workshop series was launched with the induction programme/orientation for new students provided by separate or mixed departments in the Faculty. The workshops were timed to suit students' progress (especially honours). Because we worked with a single disciplinary group it was important to be seen as an "insider". Such visibility was crucial from the point of view of gaining acceptance. "As the structured program is a more 'visible' form of higher degree teaching" (Martens, 1994: 41), collaboration between supervisors and language and learning staff was seen as an important means of gaining acceptance.

## Materials

### *General*

The workshop materials comprised the student course booklets (Part B: manual for students) for the 8 units of Murison & Webb's (1991) *Writing a research paper* which were ring punched so that students could keep them in a file for future reference. These units covered a total of 78 pages and were progressively given out as the course unfolded. The materials also consisted of two other sections: Part A, a 10 page introduction to the series written by the series editor Carolyn Webb, and Part C, a 46 page set of notes for workshop leaders containing teaching points and suggestions and suggested answers to most of the exercises designed to be easily reproduced as overhead transparencies.

As mentioned above, the materials relied heavily on extracts from authentic texts mainly research articles from biological and health sciences and education such as *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, *Journal of Nutrition Education*, and *Higher Education Research and Development*. The full references for all the extracts appeared at the beginning and end of the student manual. The materials also made use of some student drafts as well as some contrived data.

The instructors also supplemented the students' booklets with material from Swales (1990) on the "CARS" (*Create a research space*) model for introductions, Bhatia (1993) on writing abstracts, and Jordan (1980) on the language of comparing and contrasting and interpreting data.

### *Discipline-specific*

Five course booklets, which are still being adapted, were prepared during the first year of the work. The specific conventions relating to the writing of the thesis/proposal were made explicit with a range of authentic examples. Samples of work were drawn from departments across the Faculty and were used to provide examples (good and poor) of thesis writing and to raise awareness of their rhetorical features. Written guidelines provided the ground rules by outlining the responsibilities of student and supervisor, by detailing the components of the thesis, as well as defining other requirements, particularly stylistic considerations, referencing conventions, and the purpose of the literature review in the proposal/thesis. Specific examples were given from students' work e.g. on a correction code to illustrate typical errors, for teaching referencing, and treating stylistic problems.

Other material included adaptations of the work of Swales (1990) on creating a research space and metadiscourse and the work of Weissberg and Buker (1990) on citation style and organisation and tense usage. General hints were taken from general handbooks on thesis and proposal writing and research guides, and suggestions were included from style manuals, in-house guidelines on written presentation, other discipline-related documents, and

materials designed by other language and learning staff. Each booklet conformed to a consistent format to provide continuity. In each booklet students were referred to learning resources with a bibliography (sometimes annotated) which included specific guides on writing and research, thesis/research proposal writing, useful references for NESB students, study skills texts, references for citations, and grammar references and style guides.

The booklets were supplemented by examples from students' work taken from research proposals/theses in each department shown on overheads or in handouts. Other materials included possible questions to ask your supervisor, a supervision agreement booklet, a student/supervisor role perception exercise, bound theses, and handouts on expectations of supervisors/students.

## **Activities**

### *General*

The workshops encompassed a series of reading and writing activities based around extracts from authentic research papers, texts adapted from students' work, as well as contrived texts and data. The exercises frequently involved matching and labelling activities in which students were required to identify the moves or stages in extracts from introduction and discussion sections of research articles according to the models and labels provided by Swales (1984, 1990) and Hopkins & Dudley-Evans (1988). The workshops also involved analysis of drafts of short student introductions to determine structuring problems (as well as surface language errors) and contained guided writing exercises in which text was reconstructed from the information given.

As well as concentrating on the generic structuring (the moves or stages) in research papers, the materials also focused on important lexical and syntactic features of research writing such as the language and style of reporting the literature (i.e. the types of reporting verbs and their connotations and the use of "strong", "weak" or "no specific" author orientation) in introductions. Later units drew attention to the noun-verb collocations, the lack of temporal conjunction and the use of passive voice in materials and methods sections, through fill the gap activities, scanning exercises, and reconstructions of adapted sections (e.g. original text rewritten entirely in the active voice) of research papers. Contrived data was utilised in one unit to review the setting out of results in tables as well as the written description of such tables. Another unit employed a reordering exercise of a discussion section of a research article, the sentences and paragraphs of which had been jumbled.

The general thrust of the courses and materials in this series have been described in the following terms by the series editor:

the courses which have resulted from these research studies aim to present to learners explicit information about the way successful writers structure their writing, and the register of language appropriate for particular purposes. Each of the courses works from this stage of text deconstruction in which learners identify relevant features, through a stage of text reconstruction in which they are given opportunities to practise writing within specific tasks, to a stage of text construction in which the practice becomes more open-ended, to manipulate ideas and language in creating their own written texts. (Webb, 1991: vi)

### *Discipline-specific*

The reading and writing activities included practical exercises using authentic texts to encourage students to take note of the ways previous successful student researchers had written up their work. We emphasised the need to use the work of others as resources not as recipes (Viète, 1993). Reading activities included examining theses to identify their variable features, reading students' excerpts from thesis/proposal sections; following this, students and teachers commented on the samples of short extracts and or examples (good and bad). Some of the writing activities included writing a provisional outline for the table of contents for the thesis, editing excerpts from theses, paraphrasing paragraphs, and labelling headings in sections of a research proposal. Note that distracting or trivial matters were taken up in individual consultations which complemented the workshops. In these consultations matters of style, form, clarity, language of particular sections, and research techniques were dealt with individually and in greater detail.

Former students were asked to talk about their experiences writing the proposal/thesis. They were briefed beforehand and assisted with preparing overheads. Because they made direct reference to their projects their

contribution was highly valued, as revealed by the students' evaluations. In one workshop the co-ordinators of the honours and postgraduate programmes were invited to form a panel to answer students' queries.

We felt it was important to emphasise that our approach was a descriptive one rather than a prescriptive one when we provided guidelines and suggestions: *this is how it appears to be done* versus *this is how it is done*. We stressed that there were choices to be made and took care to provide examples of different treatments and styles so that no one particular example was seen as best, or in cases where it was singled out, we indicated why or asked students to explain why the work had been successful. Our purpose was to raise awareness of specific language points to increase students' ability to make informed choices.

## **Topics**

### *General*

The topics of this course were built around the generic structure of research papers. After a brief introductory unit on academic and research writing, units 2 and 3 examined the introduction section in detail both in its overall staging and reporting of research or literature review. The remaining five units each dealt with another section of the research paper, namely materials and methods, results, discussion, conclusion, and abstract.

### *Discipline-specific*

The workshop topics and booklets covered five areas: Planning and structuring the thesis; Research proposal writing; Thesis writing - key components; Thesis writing - grammar and style; and Oral presentations. The selection of topics was based on the responses obtained from the needs analysis questionnaires which reflect consideration of the products and tasks involved in thesis writing and postgraduate study. Broad coverage was given to include general and specific topics related to the writing of the thesis and the proposal. General topics related to the writing process, thesis requirements and writing techniques and style. These were supplemented by mention of the specific departmental/faculty requirements of special components such as a concluding section on future developments, and specifications about the literature review. Special topics included student/supervisor relationships, management skills, linguistic features of some thesis sections, the research writing process, writer's block and helpful solutions.

## **Evaluation procedures**

### *General*

The workshops were evaluated by means of a simple questionnaire administered at the final sessions which sought feedback about the perceived usefulness or otherwise of the course and materials and suggestions for their improvement, as well as details of topics that were not covered that students felt would be useful. The evaluations received were mixed and contained a number of criticisms of the materials, but they were very positive overall about the classes. The evaluations were for in-house reporting purposes only; that is, to monitor and improve the effectiveness of the teaching provision for postgraduate students.

### *Discipline-specific*

Each workshop was evaluated by staff and students using a brief questionnaire to obtain feedback on the good and bad points, recommendations; specific questions solicited feedback about the workshop material and the teaching. The return rates were very high and contained comments which were mostly positive and constructive. Detailed end of year reports were prepared for each departmental head and the Dean of the Faculty. Adjustments were made to the materials and delivery in successive workshops to incorporate our own suggestions and those of staff and students. There have been ongoing changes as a result of continuous feedback from student evaluations and greater familiarisation with the thesis requirements through the work with students and staff in the departments.

## **Teacher evaluations (advantages)**

### *General*

The first and obvious advantage of this approach and the materials was the fact that it could potentially be of assistance to a wide audience. The materials tried to draw on the differences between disciplines in some of the units while overall proposing a coherent general framework for research writing. Secondly, because the materials are commercially available, to mount this course is organisationally very easy and teacher preparation time is drastically reduced. The materials contain comprehensive teaching notes many of which can be easily made into overhead transparencies, as discussed above. In addition, the materials were quite inexpensive and since purchase does enable multiple copying of the student manual, these classes arguably have considerable cost advantages. The matter of cost effectiveness is not so clear cut and will be discussed further below.

Another clearly positive benefit of these classes was the opportunity they provided for social interaction between postgraduates. The classes helped to promote a sense of belonging to a wider research community and lessened students' feelings of isolation enabling students to realise that they often shared common concerns despite their differences in discipline etc. This effect is independent of the materials as such, but was an important by-product of these classes which brought students together from a wide range of disciplines and higher degree programmes.

The materials also clearly improved students' knowledge and understanding of the components and structuring of research writing which could be easily transferred to the thesis writing situation. Students also gained insights into many aspects of the language (e.g. lexis and syntax) of research writing. It was felt that this helped to build students' confidence with the research writing process.

### *Discipline-specific*

Our observations and feedback from the staff indicated that the workshops and materials were valued by them - they learned about the standards they imposed with their own writing and their particular stylistic preferences and learned that they may be intolerant of other acceptable practices. They also became aware of how samples could be used in their own teaching, as well as gaining an awareness of students' needs (areas of confusion or concern).

The strongest advantage of the discipline-specific approach is that it can assist a specific audience as confirmed by particular students' comments on the use of departmental theses, excerpts and other workshop activities. Through the use of explicit examples we were able to inform students more clearly of the nature of what they were attempting to compose because of the relevance of the material ensured by the needs analysis methods. Because the focus of the instruction was on teaching at the departmental level, the teaching practices focused on general and specific topics, ranging from the research writing process to editing strategies. Through the guidelines provided students learned about their own writing processes and gained a better understanding of how to manage the tasks involved in postgraduate writing.

We noticed that the social interaction provided in the workshops created a sense of belonging to a research community which lessened feelings of isolation and built group cohesiveness. Students appreciated the language and learning staff members' specialist knowledge of theses in the discipline, especially in areas such as the possible variations in terms of thesis components and structure gained through exposure to theses across the Faculty. This built confidence and often promoted further contact in individual consultations. It is noteworthy that there were few staff who had an overview of the requirements of each department because of the specialisation which occurred at the departmental level.

We were able to ensure that the workshop materials and activities were pitched at an appropriate level through individual work with students and information gained from ongoing needs analyses which allowed for fine-tuning. Guest speakers were prepared in advance so their comments were relevant and the advice they provided was appropriate.

The workshops were valued by discipline staff because they felt that students benefited from this forum which provided explicit guidelines and a convenient way of disseminating information to all students about aspects of thesis writing. Our work helped clarify matters of concern and some departments were able to be more precise about their requirements and define more explicitly the desired types of thesis structures. Staff who attended benefited from learning more about the needs of NESB students who made up a significant proportion of enrolments in the Faculty.

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## **Teacher evaluations (disadvantages)**

### *General*

By definition, general courses are not tailored to specific disciplinary needs which is an obvious shortcoming. A further problem experienced resulted from the mixed language ability levels of these classes, which included both L1 and NESB students. Many of the NESB students took far longer to read and complete the exercises than the L1 students. The NESB students often needed a lot more work at the lexical and grammatical levels than these workshops could accommodate. Furthermore, the fact of using a completely prepared course has the inherent disadvantage of locking participants into a predetermined curriculum which makes it impossible to meet the individual needs and concerns of students as they develop.

Looking at the materials themselves, the teachers (and students) were irritated by the many typographical errors throughout the units. Some of them were trivial but others did at times impede comprehension. Particularly bothersome were the errors in some of the exercises that made it much more difficult to understand and complete the tasks and achieve the desired results. Some of the contrived data and modified texts were also problematic because of lack of background contextual knowledge that would make them more meaningful to the students. This was, in fact, one of the consistent problems with these materials: the fact that the excerpts from the academic research articles were completely decontextualised. Apart from the citation of the author and date, there was no other information (title, journal name or abstract) which accompanied the often very short excerpts. The full bibliographic details were at the beginning and end of the whole manual but should have accompanied the excerpts for greater ease of comprehension. Consequently, it was very difficult (if not impossible) for students to accurately comprehend some snippets and how they fitted into the structure of the research papers they came from without their background contexts. Furthermore, the material was dominated by texts from the sciences, particularly biological and health sciences and there were virtually no texts from the humanities much to the displeasure of students from those disciplines.

### *Discipline-specific*

It became apparent that in some cases we were unable to meet staff and students' expectations (where unrealistic expectations were expressed) because we were not content experts. It is not possible, nor is it our role, for writing teachers to master the content of every discipline and to read and evaluate arguments the way discipline staff do. Language and learning staff members are usually not content experts; as such, they cannot fully understand content or use discipline-specific language. However, they are able to recognise distinctive features and provide the skills of an outside critical reader. It was also not possible to address the needs of all students due to their varying linguistic competence and educational backgrounds, cultural knowledge and degree programme enrolments (e.g. honours/PhD disparity); however, recognising this showed the need for complementary approaches such as individual consultations with students as they drafted chapters.

The task of designing the materials has been quite an onerous one as our role has been to discover the specific needs of specific subject-disciplines, such as the specialised lexis and rhetorical structures to gain a greater understanding of their situation. Initially, a great deal of time and effort was expended in preparing the materials involving planning and liaison with disciplinary specialists who also have busy workloads or who may have little interest in our work. Extensive (and intensive) collaboration is needed in all aspects of this approach requiring pre- and post-workshop analysis of needs. It takes time to build relations with staff in departments; however, this type of interaction is often very valuable for the development of both collaborators' skills.

The examples used were authentic; however, because they were decontextualised problems can occur in their interpretation causing confusion or their being overprivileged in the minds of some students. When using students' work it was necessary to obtain their permission. This was done efficiently by requesting that students who attended individual consultations sign a release form such as the one used at Language and Learning Services at Monash University to consent that they allowed their work to be used for applied research. Direct permission was sought where students had not come through this channel.

## **Student evaluations (Appendix B)**

### *General*

By and large, the student evaluations concurred with the teacher evaluations as outlined above. The overall feelings of both groups were positive, however. The most useful points about the course included the understanding of the components and generic structuring of research writing, such as different ways of reporting and the moves involved in introductions. Students could relate the work on research papers to the framework and structuring of their theses and could see its usefulness. The other current of responses involved the affective domain with students testifying to the value of sharing their ideas with others and the gaining of confidence and reassurance through the workshop experience.

Students expressed annoyance at the typos as well as some of the exercises which were felt to be repetitive and sometimes fairly pointless. The decontextualised nature of many of the extracts and exercises was also criticised for making "following the intentions of the exercises more difficult" for students: Humanities students were indignant because there was an almost complete absence of any texts from their area.

Recommendations included retyping the materials and the incorporation of the extra handouts provided by the teachers into the materials proper. Humanities students, of course, recommended that the materials be revised to include relevant texts from their disciplines. Some students wanted other specialised types of postgraduate writing courses and some NESB students wanted classes that would deal with developing more basic writing skills.

### *Discipline-specific*

Many of the comments made by students concur with those discussed above in the teacher evaluations section. The majority of students seemed comfortable with the approach as the students' comments were mostly positive. Specific comments which validate the approach are shown in Appendix B under "good points" and have demonstrated the value in preparing students for thesis writing in a formal way. These positive comments show that students have gained specific knowledge such as rhetorical awareness, strategies for overcoming writer's block, and practical hints on style and grammar. In particular, students stated that they appreciated information about examiners' expectations, explanations of academic conventions, discussions of different writing styles, editing strategies, and common writing problems. The range of comments in the evaluations indicated the diversity of students' academic, institutional, social and affective needs. Other comments indicated that they liked the format and delivery of the workshops and the involvement of guest speakers.

Negative comments related to the unsuitable timing of a particular workshop; however, this was not within our control because Masters and PhD students have flexible starting times. Some students requested more handouts and examples which is a natural outcome of the ongoing refinements to the materials, but also a matter of personal preference. We noticed that there was a tendency for students to be reluctant note takers and for some to be drawn to using students' work as models rather than as resources. Another criticism related to the coverage and amount of time spent on topics which did not allow students enough time to copy material, which was not our intention anyway. A few students commented that some examples were not clear: this point was taken up in the section above where the problem of decontextualisation was noted.

Recommendations related to the organisation (scheduling) of the workshops so specialist assistance could be given to different groups. Other recommendations called for more examples of excerpts (good and bad), sample research proposals, tables of contents, and specific information about the interrelationship of the thesis sections.

## **Conclusion**

The locus of responsibility for postgraduate writing instruction differs in different institutions largely due to historical and political factors. There are many possible organisational arrangements for postgraduate writing instruction, including one-off workshops; a series of workshops; workshops linked to part of a research methodology programme which may be a formal course for credit; part of a bridging program; team taught workshops; as well as the discipline-specific and general approaches outlined in this paper. A prime consideration in the present climate is the question of funding which may make it difficult to provide the ideal infrastructure support for students. Some universities are querying the cost effectiveness of individual consultations and propose a teaching methodology for language and learning skills based on the lecture style

instruction model. The adoption of this methodology will clearly diminish the learning outcomes and are false economy. To be successful language and study skills instruction needs to be conducted in small groups, activity-based and clearly linked to the content work of the students. It also needs to be supplemented with individual support. As the teacher and student evaluations in this study have shown, materials such as Murison and Webb's, while being cheap to purchase and use, are not as successful as discipline-specific materials which, unfortunately, require significant investments in time and money to produce. The approach used (general or specific) will depend on other factors such as staffing, policy, the co-operative arrangements in place and other constraints.

In determining the most suitable approach, special attention is required to ensure that a flexible approach is used and one which is sensitive to individual needs. Through our contact with students and the evaluations of the workshops we have become attuned to the diverse needs of students. Thus, varied strategies in postgraduate writing instruction are needed as this is seen to be crucial for the success of the students and their development as writers. There is no one correct way of providing this kind of instruction due to the nature of thesis writing; however, ideally it should be tailored as closely as possible to the individual needs of students and integrated with a discipline-based structured programme. While discipline-specific postgraduate writing instruction is favoured by the authors, there are limits to its effectiveness, as individual instruction is the most effective way of meeting students' various needs for support because the skills are developed in the context of their own research work. We believe that such instruction is more effective if it is part of a series of workshops/seminars for honours and postgraduate students from the same discipline area and is not seen as an 'add on' course run by outsiders. It is important that this work forms part of a programme for these students so that their experience is not fragmented. The formal instruction can be complemented by individual work such as meetings with supervisors and individual consultations.

Collaboration with disciplinary staff ensures a coherent approach through the sharing of ideas, expertise and materials necessary for specialised programme offerings. Having knowledge of discipline-specific practices and co-operating with subject-specific staff allows for a cross-fertilisation of ideas. This is the ideal scenario for a discipline-specific approach; however, in considering using such an approach it must be ensured that mutual gains will be made and that there is the potential for successful collaboration. Case studies of collaboration with disciplinary staff, such as those shared at this conference, have shown that these considerations are worthy of attention. We disagree with Spack's (1988) notion that the teaching of writing should be left to teachers in the disciplines as we know that some subject-specialists are reluctant or unable to do this. It is, after all, a shared responsibility and language and learning staff have an important role in staff development in linking the content and the development of language and learning skills.

There are however, situations where classes are made up of students from a broad range of disciplines. AIDAB induction courses<sup>4</sup> at the authors' university typically include students from a range of disciplines providing an example of a teaching situation where there is a need to provide general and discipline-specific instruction. This type of instruction sometimes occurs at the departmental/faculty level; however, because incoming student numbers may be low or departments do not provide induction themselves, this is often an unlikely occurrence and the provision of such courses is entrusted to a learning skills centre.

As discussed above, the student group will dictate the approach to writing instruction (although this is not always the sole determinant). For example, with a mixed group of AIDAB postgraduate students a general approach (e.g. the use of the Murison and Webb materials) is very suitable, but these materials and activities need to be supplemented with specific activities which get students to supply their own texts (e.g. theses recommended by their supervisors, research articles etc.). Swales (1990: 215) notes that it is possible to sidestep "the problem of heterogeneous content interests in the class ... [by] introducing rhetorical structure as a central element in a course". This suggests that we can work with general texts from disparate disciplines to discuss generic features, but we should also set tasks which get students to identify the specific features of their department's theses by getting them to investigate similarities and differences in their own specialist disciplines and helping them "become better amateur ethnographers of their own communities" (Swales, 1990: 202). Swales identifies the problems associated with teaching students from a narrow or broad range of disciplines:

While the discipline-specific class provides a *rhetorical* challenge to the instructor, the multi-disciplinary group offers more of a *managerial* problem (Swales, 1990: 216).

Both approaches outlined in this paper are linguistic-based writing pedagogies falling under the ESP rubric because of their use of specialised language and practice, but with different features and emphases and, as such,

both have a role in ESP teaching. Because both programmes share common theoretical approaches they have similar aims and features such as the explicit teaching of rhetorical awareness (generic staging) and other lexicogrammatical features. However, as this paper has shown, there are several features which distinguish these approaches and programmes such as the target audience, the needs analysis methods, the amount of collaboration with staff, the scheduling, the materials used, and the topics and activities covered.

The work described here represents our reflections which we hope have illuminated the decision-making process for postgraduate writing programme design. Self-reflection on the approaches we are using and the evaluations of students and staff have strengthened our commitment to individualising instruction, collaborating with subject-specialists and developing the discipline-specific approach. There is a need for further work in the area of postgraduate writing instruction as "tertiary writing pedagogy is an under-theorised area" (Lee, 1987: 74). Swales (1990: 188) observes that little research has been done on these, largely due to their length and the time required to conduct analyses. Thesis analysis of particular subject disciplines is also an area of research which is in need of investigation in order to improve our teaching effectiveness and to refine the instructional materials (in-house and commercial) used in postgraduate writing. Because it is difficult for an outsider to obtain information about departmental differences and disciplinary practices the checklist in Appendix C will help with effective planning of postgraduate writing programmes.

### Endnotes

- (1) The work for Monash University was faculty-based as Sally Knowles was employed by the Faculty of Computing and Information Technology to work with five out of six departments to establish a series of workshops, and to provide individual assistance to students writing up their research, as well as research and design an overall plan for improving the levels of competence of students. Harriet Searcy from Language and Learning Services at Monash, who co-produced the booklets and taught on the workshop series, also worked (and continues this work) with three of the departments. This work came about as a result of a perceived literacy problem and complaints from supervisors, as outlined in the Knowles Report (1993).
- (2) The Humanities class was taken by an experienced part-time ESL lecturer who was also in the final stages of completing a PhD thesis in the Humanities at Murdoch University. She thus was fully conversant with many of the content and process issues of postgraduate research writing in the Humanities. The Sciences group was taken by Colin Beasley, a lecturer in English as a second language who has recently completed a research Masters in applied linguistics and also holds a pass degree in Science.
- (3) Computing and Information Technology being a relatively new discipline, some departments in the Faculty were establishing a research base; consequently, some staff were quite inexperienced researchers or were working to create a research culture.
- (4) AIDAB (Australian International Development Assistance Bureau) induction courses typically provide intensive EAP-type instruction for small groups of newly-arrived government-sponsored overseas students.

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**APPENDICES**

**Appendix A**

**POSTGRADUATE WRITING INSTRUCTION: two approaches**

<b>Features</b>	<b>General</b>	<b>Discipline-specific</b>
<b>Theoretical approach</b>	adaptation of process & genre approaches (eg. Swales, 1984; 1990) ESP	adaptation of process & genre approaches (eg. Swales, 1990) ESP
<b>Audience</b>	mixed, but from same subject discipline, eg. Sciences &/or Humanities - mixed disciplines Honours, Masters, M Phil, PhD ESB & NESB (but mostly NESB)	single department or may be mixed departments, but same subject discipline Honours, Masters, M Phil, PhD ESB & NESB
<b>Needs analysis methods</b>	study of theses across disciplines: text analysis student questionnaire: (Unit 1) (writing awareness)	study of theses in the subject discipline: text analysis student & staff questionnaire observations, interviews (writing needs)
<b>Staff collaboration</b>	limited consultation with subject discipline staff	extensive consultation with subject discipline staff staff guest speakers (supervisors/co-ordinators)
<b>Organisation (scheduling)</b>	workshop series sometimes on demand not necessarily timed to suit students' progress	workshop series integrated with subject discipline seminar series & timed to suit students' progress
<b>Materials</b>	course booklets (8 units): Murison & Webb (1991), <i>Writing a research paper</i> supplemented by material from Swales (1990), Bhatia (1993) and Jordan (1980) and others	5 course booklets: Searcy & Knowles (1993) supplemented by examples from students' work & material from Swales (1990), Weissberg & Buker (1990) and others
<b>Activities</b>	reading & writing activities: short extracts from journals in the social sciences, physical sciences, biological and health sciences (authentic texts) some contrived data and texts	reading & writing activities: commentary on examples and short extracts from subject-discipline theses (authentic texts) guest speakers (students)
<b>Topics</b>	Unit 1: Your professional writing profile Unit 2: Introduction: Staging Unit 3: Introduction: Reporting on the research Unit 4: Materials and methods Unit 5: Results Unit 6: Discussion Unit 7: Conclusion Unit 8: Abstract	Planning & structuring the thesis Research proposal writing Key components Grammar and style Oral presentations Special topics: - student/supervisor relationships - management skills - features of some thesis sections -research writing process
<b>Evaluation procedures</b>	in-house reporting	detailed formal reporting to subject discipline Heads of Department

<p><b>Teacher evaluations: advantages</b></p>	<p>can assist a wide audience          organisationally easy for staff - minimal preparation due to commercially available materials          cost effective?          provides social interaction          sense of belonging to a research community; lessens isolation          improves knowledge of thesis components and structure          builds confidence          guidelines and knowledge</p>	<p>can assist a specific audience          format can be adapted          can inform students more clearly about the nature of what they are attempting to compose          provides social interaction          sense of belonging to a research community; lessens isolation          students appreciate specialist knowledge of theses of discipline, components and structure          builds confidence          guidelines and knowledge          pitched at appropriate level          valued by discipline staff</p>
<p><b>Teacher evaluations: disadvantages</b></p>	<p>not tailored enough to specific disciplinary needs          can't meet individual student's needs in terms of levels          locked into a pre-determined curriculum          some errors, typos, and contrived examples &amp; data          very few examples from the Humanities          inappropriacy of some tasks          examples decontextualised</p>	<p>unable to meet staff/students' unrealistic expectations as not a content expert          can't meet individual needs in terms of levels          labour/time-intensive - demanding in terms of planning &amp; liaison with staff specialists          examples authentic, but decontextualised          need to get students' permission to use their work</p>

**Appendix B**

**Student Evaluations**

	<b>General (n = 15)</b>	<b>Discipline-specific (n = 200)</b>
<b>good/ most useful points</b>	<p>1) understanding the various issues required in structuring the components of a thesis, eg. how to write introduction</p> <p>2) most importantly, the idea that there is an appropriate structure for differing genders (<i>sic</i>) of writing</p> <p>3) how to write to “report” and “inform”, most materials in the course are very useful</p> <p>4) overall I feel heartily reassured because I know that I can write now - rather than just hoping</p> <p>5) in addition to writing techniques, it was useful to formulate my idea for the dissertation since I was constantly required to think about the thesis of the dissertation implicitly</p> <p>6) getting an overall idea of what is required, understanding the framework/objectives of each section of a thesis</p> <p>7) gaining confidence in assessing requirements of a research paper and feeling more able to approach my own dissertation</p> <p>8) listening to tutor’s personal experiences of writing PhD dissertation</p> <p>9) interaction with other postgraduates many from non-English speaking backgrounds; sharing other people’s ideas on thesis writing</p>	<p>1) discussions of different writing styles very useful, comments on editing also enlightening, “Generally I found one can use a more structured approach to writing with some of the pitfalls on the writing highlighted”.</p> <p>2) liked the way the presenters illustrated their arguments from theses from last year</p> <p>3) helps immensely in the structure &amp; style of thesis writing, especially good for technically oriented courses with little emphasis on structured writing or grammatically correct documents</p> <p>4) clear &amp; simple &amp; concise explanations</p> <p>5) discussion on writer’s block and the writing process</p> <p>6) better than a boring style guide! interactive</p> <p>7) made many points about the style of the thesis especially in the area of intro. and conclusion, provided many different points of view &amp; approp. advice on plagiarism</p> <p>8) very helpful on the specific writing skills needed, good exercises</p> <p>9) social gathering, exchange ideas with other students, some ideas on what the dept. wants in a thesis proposal, time to clarify doubts, very helpful, subject matter appropriate</p> <p>10) incorporated real live students &amp; their experiences, right length</p>
<b>bad/least useful points</b>	<p>1) ploughing through unfamiliar/dense text which has made following the intentions of the exercises more difficult</p> <p>2) some parts of the course state the obvious (which is fine) but then proceed to <u>repeat</u> the obvious endlessly (eg. how different verbs suggest different levels of agreement/disagreement), all examples taken from scientific papers</p> <p>3) to answer silly decontextualised questions!</p> <p>4) material mainly geared for a science research paper &amp; had to be adapted for humanities; rather confusing at times</p>	<p>1) session should be <u>after</u> we have decided on our topic so that it is more relevant</p> <p>2) like to have more handouts, examples</p> <p>3) some points were not treated as deeply as they could have been</p> <p>4) very little chance to copy/absorb material on O/H projector</p> <p>5) some examples not clear</p>

<p><b>recommen- -dations</b></p>	<p>1) retyping to correct the typographical errors! Inclusion of tutor's extra handouts 2) more specialised writing courses (eg. journals, tech reports, theories) for the many different types of postgraduate writing needs; a course lecture on how to build the thesis as you go could be quite useful 3) provide an outline of a typical research paper at the commencement of the w/shop 4) improve text materials, use humanities examples for humanities students 5) some examples of previous theses' frameworks could perhaps be given 6) how to improve basic writing skills to an extent that my skills will be good enough to complete my PhD 7) organise a course especially for an overseas student</p>	<p>1) have several common sessions and then separate ones for honours &amp; PhD students to address issues specific to them 2) more handout examples, good &amp; bad, would be useful 3) more about how conclusions/ discussions are constructed - how it is picked up from the results &amp; elaborated; how research is tied back into the literature review 4) it would have been interesting to see reprints of the indexes of various theses to have a feel for structural variety of theses 5) would like materials to borrow because difficult to absorb everything in one hour 6) need some formal set-out of a mock thesis: references, bibliography, sectioning, paragraphs etc. 7) give us a sample research proposal</p>
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## Appendix C

### Needs analysis checklist for preparing discipline-specific postgraduate thesis writing workshops

- **Questionnaires to students and supervisors/co-ordinators of research**  
find out about students' preferences on the timing of the workshops/induction, background of students, perceived difficulties, recommendations for staff  
find out about supervisors' views on distinguishing features of the thesis, preferences, perceptions of roles, thesis audience, expectations of supervisor with regard to selection and arrangement of material
- **Observations**  
attend seminar presentations
- **Text analysis**  
study of theses/research proposals/working papers to identify textual features:  
text conventions (lexical, grammatical, stylistic)  
preferences for referencing (endnotes, footnotes, quotation etc.)  
methods of argumentation (introduction, literature review, discussion)  
degree of subjective opinion/personal reference tolerated  
rhetorical structures of introduction, conclusion etc.
- **Interviews with staff**  
particular difficulties students experience with thesis writing/research proposal/seminar presentation from the supervisors' point of view  
supervisor's/co-ordinator's preferred means of communication (e-mail, questionnaires)
- **Research of faculty requirements and practices**  
policy on supervisor's/student's role (e.g. who is responsible for the final production of thesis, stylistic and grammatical polishing, are students allocated an area of research or do they nominate one?)  
degree requirements: assessment criteria (examiners' expectations - quality, thesis length), assessment tasks (coursework, exams, thesis)  
teaching and learning methods: departmental practices in postgraduate teaching and academic skills development, kind of opportunities for speaking, reading and writing students have had as undergraduates/honours candidates e.g. experience with extended writing and giving seminar presentations  
training of supervisors, training of students in research methods  
use of technology  
departmental/faculty seminars, concurrent assistance provided  
expected readership and level thesis is pitched at: internal/external examiners, specialists, successive student researchers, directors of sponsoring firms, lay reader  
provision of guidelines for the presentation of written work (in-house/commercial)  
prescribed texts for referencing, attitudes to plagiarism  
course outlines (recommended texts, supplementary reading material)

**TEACHING ACADEMIC DISCOURSE TO INTERNATIONAL PHD STUDENTS FROM THE  
DEPARTMENT OF ELECTRICAL AND COMPUTER ENGINEERING**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper focuses on the way five of the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering's PhD students, for whom English was not the first language, were taught academic discourse by an LDC lecturer using plain English rather than the discipline-specific language of Electrical and Computer Engineering. The teaching is discussed in the context of a minimal, but satisfactory, degree of collaboration between academic staff of the students' Department and the Learning Development Centre.

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Towards the end of Autumn session last year a senior lecturer who supervises many overseas PhD students in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, stood at our Learning Development Centre reception desk tearing out his hair in frustration. He showed me a bundle of student writing heavily marked in red pen and asked if there was *anything* I could do to help.

The vocabulary of Electrical & Computer Engineering was totally foreign to me, so it was going to be quite a challenge. A sentence like "The analysis of the error surface of comb filters motivates the proposed notch filter model for harmonic cancellation" meant nothing. Even the word "algorithm" which leapt from the pages with alarming frequency, I could not fully comprehend.

But the outcomes of the course I designed and taught over the Spring Semester were very pleasing and, even now, twelve months later, that supervisor tells me he can clearly understand what his students have written on the **first** reading and he no longer tears out his hair in frustration.

The degree of collaboration between the academic staff of the Electrical & Computer Engineering Dept and myself was fairly minimal. Initially the supervisor and I talked for about an hour one lunchtime. He showed me the problems he faced in student papers and told me of the hours spent in trying to correct the grammar so that he could unpack students' understanding of content and their ways of expressing their contributions to the field. He spoke of hours spent telling them how to structure their writing, how to express their views and how to show that their thinking was analytic and critical. Although his concerns were numerous, the greatest of them, he said, was that these students **could not even write a simple sentence**.

Before I began the teaching the supervisor and I spent another hour and a half conferring over the course design. He itemised the journals his students should be reading but weren't, and reiterated the needs he thought should be addressed. It was clear from their thesis work so far that simple and clear sentence writing would be a major priority.

I immersed myself in Electrical and Computer Engineering texts seeking a key among this 'foreign' terminology with which to fine-tune my course, but found none. About the only key I discovered was that one student had actually plagiarised his own supervisor. Depressingly, I also discovered that I would not grasp enough of the E&CE language to teach academic discourse effectively *within* that language.

The five students I dealt with were all men who were about 18 months into their Australian studies. One was from China and four from Iran. A Korean who attended the first lesson did not reappear and his writing is reportedly still very problematic.

Initially I worked along the lines proposed by Osland, Boyd, McKenna & Salusinszky (1991), beginning with simple and compound sentences intending to build towards paragraphs, essays, chapters and whole theses. I used

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a modified version of Atwell's (1983) language metaphor in which an inner core of meaning is wrapped in outer layers of grammatical and graphophonic systems and the context. I added pragmatics as a final outer layer. I took, as always, a holistic approach, assuming each student's writing to be an extension of the person, and that each person has their own learning style and expectations as well as cultural and language background.

Whilst teaching the early stages, I conducted student needs analyses of the work presented by each student in response to the workshops. Hoping to learn more of the discipline-specific language of E&CE, I asked students to explain and use words like sinusoid, sinusoidal interference rejection, gradient-based algorithm, taken from their own thesis writing, to develop their ability to create meaningful text. I got them to write about their Faculty, their particular type of engineering and the research activities of their Department as the content of their sentence, paragraph and essay building.

The writing thus generated enabled me to confirm that the main problems of these students were much more complex than simple sentence formation and that plagiarism was certainly an issue for all of them. My greatest concern, though, was their apparent inability to respond appropriately to set tasks and directions. They needed to realise they had to respond to reader expectations; to know, for example, that a numbered list of sentences is not a good enough response to "Write a paragraph". Under these circumstances they could not be expected to independently construct a satisfactory Literature Review or Materials and Methods chapters. I understood their supervisor's frustrations.

Using weekly sessions of two, and then three hours, I taught according to my own developing perceptions of the students' academic discourse needs. I taught critical thinking, analysing and arguing from Clanchy & Ballard (1981 1991), Literature Reviews from Bell (1987) and Lindsay (1992), paragraphing from Blicq (1986) and Osland, Boyd, McKenna & Saluzsinsky(1991) and reading strategies from Gawith (1991). I encouraged the speaking aloud of personal understandings and critiques of written texts in order to more fully develop their English language skills. For practical experience in the skills of academic reading, annotating, summarising and avoiding plagiarism I used, as texts, the IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers) *Spectrum* magazines which are written in a layperson's version of E&CE language. I was trying to meet the students on their own ground whilst keeping my own: I needed to use language we could all understand.

I tried to ensure the students understood the expectations for the various sections of a thesis in terms of content, verb tense, layout and style and what writers would need to do to satisfy markers' expectations. Their written responses frequently defeated my hopes and expectations because they would interpret the instructions to suit themselves and leave me uncertain as to what they had understood.

The students willingly accepted a weekly take home writing assignment to which I would provide written analytic feedback. I attempted always to provide developmental encouragement and yet not gloss over the serious problems of discourse that were so evident to me but not to them. Often I transcribed their handwritten texts to OHTs, in anonymous print form, so that they could give feedback to each other. They all enjoyed this and found it very useful.

But every week my frustration level rose again. Although each student would show improvement in one area or another at one time or another, at no point did every student respond appropriately to the question or set task, and not one student got it right every time. They seemed to be locked into their own mode and I hadn't the key to loosen them - until the day I asked them to write a description!

Using Blicq (1986) to support my contention that description was necessary for Materials and Methods chapters, I told everyone to write a description of the wristwatch they were wearing. I collected the writing. Next week the watches would be pooled and the descriptions read out to enable us to select matching watches. My instructions were very clear and the purpose of the writing task was very clear. It all seemed so easy. This time we'd get it right! Next week I brought in two extra watches to add some fun and a degree of difficulty.

That only three watches from the pool could be selected by listening to the descriptions made the students realise, I think for the first time, that what they wrote really had to have precision and had to suit the purpose.

From that day on I rejected any inclination I might have to get them to use academic language, and concentrated on plain but precise writing with immediate built-in purpose. The purpose was always related to some follow-up action of the reader just as the purpose of well written experiments is that they may be replicated by others. The vocabulary we used was becoming quite remote from the discipline-specific E&CE language - no mention at all of 'algorithms' or 'notch filter models for harmonic cancellation'...

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