

**STUDY SKILLS  
CENTRE**

Policy and Practice  
of  
Tertiary Literacy

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Selected Proceedings of the  
First National Conference on Tertiary Literacy:  
Research and Practice  
Volume 1

edited by Zofia Golebiowski

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# Introduction

The First National Conference on Tertiary Literacy: Research and Practice was held from 14 to 16 March 1996 at Victoria University of Technology. About 270 academics from Australia and overseas took part in the Conference's deliberations and shared their tertiary literacy experiences. The Conference examined the role of literacy as a foundation for knowledge acquisition and dissemination, and, thus, as a major factor influencing academic success of tertiary students. It addressed the question of responsibilities of higher education institutions for tertiary literacy and provided a national and, in many cases, international perspective on tertiary literacy and its reflection in the quality of university learning and teaching.

The Conference's call for papers asked for contributions within four main themes: *policy and practice of tertiary literacy, inter-cultural variation of academic communication, discipline specific discourses and research English*. The papers selected for these proceedings have been divided into two major groups: Policy and Practice of Tertiary Literacy in Volume 1, and Academic Communication across Disciplines and Cultures in Volume 2. However, the division of papers into these two volumes is to some extent arbitrary, as the practical models and applied knowledge provided by many papers spread across the themes.

This volume opens with plenary presentations by Richard Baldauf, Lesley Parker, Barbara Kamler and Terry Threadgold. Baldauf views literacy from an equity perspective, reviews existing tertiary literacy policies or efforts towards their formulation, and presents strong arguments for the introduction of literacy policies in all Higher Education institutions. Parker presents an example of what appears to be the most comprehensive institutional framework for the development of communicative competence introduced in an Australian university, while Kamler and Threadgold analyse the discourses and cultures of postgraduate pedagogy.

The papers in Volume 1 present a number of tertiary literacy case studies. The authors seem to be in general agreement about the need for institutional policies to regulate and legitimise literacy practices in Australian universities. Many papers emphasise the changing context of tertiary literacy, related to the extensive changes in the position and the role of tertiary institutions in the last two decades. The increased diversity of student population is being reflected in the increased diversity of tertiary curricula. The flow of global information is increasing, demanding new techniques and computer literacy. Additionally, the placement of prominence on communication skills by employers exercises pressure on universities to adopt policies and practices which would produce graduates with high level of literacy and communication skills.

The volume closes with a panel presentation "What will count as Tertiary Literacy in the year 2000?", which summarises the Conference deliberations, as well as throwing some light on future prospects in the field.

Due to a variety of publication and editorial problems, as well as the large number of papers submitted for consideration, these proceedings appear a little later than initially anticipated. I apologise to all Conference participants, as well as those who were not able to attend the Conference but ordered the proceedings, for having to wait for their appearance. As indicated to presenters when papers were requested for submission to the Conference proceedings, to limit the time lag and production costs, in most cases, the papers are published with minimum editing. The proceedings do not include all papers presented at the Tertiary Literacy Conference. Unfortunately, because of space constraints, we were forced to make some difficult decisions about which of the submitted papers to select.

*Zosia Golebiowski*  
*Conference Convenor*  
Melbourne, December, 1996.

# Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to the members of the Tertiary Literacy Conference Reference Committee and various experts in Tertiary Literacy for their assistance in the process of the Conference organisation. I would particularly like to acknowledge Doug Absalom, Richard Baldauf, Brigid Ballard, Helen Borland, Kate Chanock, Wally Evans, Mark Garner, Susan Kaldor, Barbara Kamler, Andy Kirkpatrick, Jane Madden, Petre Santry and Terry Threadgold. Without their generous help and valuable advice the Conference would not have been the success it was.

I wish to thank the Conference sponsors: David Lawson on behalf of the VUT Faculty of Human Development, Liz Collins from Victoria University Equity and Social Justice Department, Ron Toomey from Victoria University Department of Education, Rosa McKenna, on behalf of National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia, and Helen Borland from Victoria University Department of Communication and Language Studies. I would also like to acknowledge Grace Pulis and Kim Borg for their invaluable administrative assistance and Phil McCluskey for his patient typesetting revisions.

I am indebted to the Conference presenters for submitting their work for this collection. The success of any conference is primarily the result of the quality of the presentations and informal interactions of conference participants. My thanks are wholeheartedly extended to all who attended, and especially to those who presented papers on such a broad range of interesting topics. I trust these proceedings will make a valuable contribution to disseminating research and practice in Tertiary Literacy in Australia and internationally.

*Zosia Golebiowski*



# Tertiary Language, Literacy and Communication Policies: Needs and Practice

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Tertiary literacy consists of developing a complex set of skills which few if any students bring to the tertiary education. To meet tertiary literacy needs, higher education institutions (HEIs) should develop comprehensive language and literacy policies, as such policies could improve institutional efficiency through better quality student work, improved rates of student success and produce better cross-cultural interactions. Coherent language policies could be developed in most HEIs by developing or formalising programs addressing six student equity and six institutional discourse issues. Examples of each issue and of aspects of overall language policy are discussed.

## INTRODUCTION

While many university staff may still implicitly believe that high school / secondary school / college training provides, or at least should provide, students with the language and literacy skills necessary to gain a tertiary degree, many would also acknowledge that these skills must be developed and learned as part of tertiary study. While some staff may still yearn for the 'good old days' when tertiary literacy *may* have been less of a problem, but when only 4 out of 10 students completed a secondary education and where the secondary education system had as its prime focus tertiary study, most would acknowledge that the current more broadly based provision is more equitable and better suited to society's needs. However, it is not only secondary education and university selection that are different, but modern society has also changed, surrounding us with audio and visual material, partially displacing the written word, or making text available electronically via the Internet or on CD ROM. In today's world, even well prepared students may not be prepared for the oral, written and electronic discourse rigours of tertiary life. Nor in fairness should they be; tertiary study, like other social activities, has its own language domains, jargon and discourse, and its own way of being which neophytes must learn to be a success at the discipline(s) that they have chosen to study.

However, it is not only students' backgrounds and societal communication which has changed in the last thirty years. Universities themselves have significantly diversified their intake of students, both in terms of sheer numbers<sup>2</sup> and in terms

of student backgrounds<sup>3</sup>. They also offer a wider range of programs of study (e.g., nursing, primary teacher education) and choices of subjects within those programs. It would seem self-evident that modern tertiary institutions are, like other modern institutions, actually more diverse and demanding in their requirements than they previously were, including the requirement for a wider range of literacy skills. While HEIs have increased their support for students to help them cope with the new language, literacy and communication rigours which they must face, much remains to be done and some questions need to be asked. Why do so many students fail to complete their degree work or take longer than necessary to do so? Has the literacy support offered been adequate, coordinated and focused on students' real needs? Are lecturers and other staff aware of student literacy needs or have they forgotten what it was like to be a student? Why do university staff rate content knowledge so much more highly than language, literacy and communication skills, when professional bodies in those same disciplines rate those same skills as their highest priority for graduates?

From this brief introduction it should be clear that the principal issue in tertiary literacy is not about declining literacy standards but rather is about meeting changed social, cultural and informational requirements and circumstances (e.g., Luke 1993). The changing nature of language, literacy and communication means that HEIs must continually re-examine their language related strategies to see that they are meeting current demands. Given the complexity of the tertiary language, literacy and communication situation, HEIs must now go beyond individual programmatic solutions, and develop an overall language, literacy and communication strategy or policy. My thesis is that if HEIs had clear formal language, literacy and communication policies, they could more systematically meet student needs and would have mechanisms in place to meet the changing nature of tertiary language and literacy provision. As a result there would be efficiency gains in terms of time and money, but most importantly some of the current waste of effort and human potential would be avoided.

The Tertiary Literacy Conference Proceedings are organised around four themes. This paper addresses problems related to the *policy and practice in tertiary literacy* theme. I have chosen to develop this theme by focusing on twelve issues around which a tertiary language, literacy and communication policy could be based. In examining these issues, I argue that tertiary literacy can be viewed in terms of two general perspectives: 1) from a student equity perspective, with a focus on the needs and skills that individual students bring to the HEI situation, and 2) from an institutional discourse perspective, with a focus on those things that the HEI requires or has carriage of as part of the academic certification process. The issues found in the first of these two perspectives, "student equity", also relate to the proceedings' theme of the *inter-cultural variation of academic communication* while the second perspective, "institutional discourse", relates to the themes of problems found in *discipline specific discourses and research English*. For each of these two perspectives, I will argue there are six major issues which a HEI confronts. These twelve issues, which in reality overlap in a number of ways — as suggested by the four themes in the proceedings, form the basis of

what a HEI language and literacy policy might contain. The twelve issues are, in outline form:

1) the *HEI Student Equity Perspective* suggests the need for a tertiary language, literacy and communication policy to service:

- most secondary graduates,
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students,
- mature age students returning to studies,
- deaf and blind students,
- students from Non-English speaking backgrounds, and
- overseas students.

2) the *Institutional Discourse Perspective* suggests the need for a HEI language, literacy and communication policy to address:

- discipline specific literacy skills,
- the use of non-sexist (non-discriminatory) language,
- the acquisition of literacy skills in a LOTE,
- credit for recognition of prior learning (RPL) and LOTE skills,
- computer-related literacy skills, and
- electronic literacy and collaboration

In the following sections which briefly develop these issues I have tried, where possible, to provide a few specific, published examples. However, tertiary education is a broad canvas with much variation. Other papers in these conference proceedings provide much of the detail needed to understand these issues in the Australian context. To help inform this paper, I have examined some university handbooks / calendars, and have faxed a brief questionnaire to universities, to develop a tentative map of what universities say they provide in the way of literacy services for their students, and what specific institutional literacy requirements they make. Handbooks were taken as the starting point because they are HEI's official statements on student course and program requirements. These public documents and sets of requirements should, if they are not faulty, provide an indication of the language, literacy and communication requirements and provisions available to students<sup>4</sup>. Where possible, I have briefly discussed these findings as part of the discussion on each of the twelve issues. In the final section of the paper, some examples of university language and literacy policies are cited, and some overall conclusions are drawn.

## **STUDENT EQUITY PERSPECTIVE**

The issue of ensuring equity in higher education, although not necessarily specifically related to language, literacy and communication needs, has been an Australian government priority for some time (e.g., see Postle 1995 for a recent review). While the term equity is normally used in the context of particular disadvantaged groups, in this paper I will use it to include all those disadvantaged. The six equity groups discussed in this section are somewhat arbitrary, in that the categories are not mutually exclusive (i.e., there are mature age Aboriginal

students, blind NESB students, English mother-tongue overseas students, etc.) nor fully inclusive (i.e., the usual equity issues of rural, isolated and low socioeconomic status students, while important in their own right, are not primarily language issues and are therefore subsumed under the variation that most secondary graduates bring to university)<sup>5</sup>. While there are many individual equity programs already in place in HEIs, there is a need to locate such language focused solutions in a holistic language, literacy and communication policy framework which would more comprehensively meet students' needs, and which would better prepare students for their studies and the world of work beyond the university. Jernudd (1994) has argued for this to occur, students must experience writing as a meaningful activity. This accords with the views presented in many papers in this Conference Proceedings that professional literacy is best taught in relation to discipline studies, combining language and subject expertise.

Finally, it is easy in discussing tertiary literacy in general and equity groups in particular to get caught up in a remediation mentality or to frame the language, literacy and communication issues just in terms of accommodation to the new university or subject specific cultures that are to be learned, rather than acknowledging the positive language, literacy and cultural contributions that the diverse groups of students bring to the HEI. Many current programs seem to be set up on a "fix the problem" model, although particular individuals working in these programs may operate from quite different perspectives. The advantage of a university language, literacy and communication policy approach to tertiary literacy is that it can be more than the sum of its parts. It can stress that language problems are not just issues for students, but for staff, and that there are not only problems to be solved, but cross-cultural understandings and information to be gained. Ultimately, HEIs will be most successful in dealing with language, literacy and communication issues if these matters are defined and supported at the top ("top down"), provided for through expert assistance where necessary, but contextualised across the HEI's curriculum by individual university staff. That is, policy needs to be developed in consultation with and have the commitment of those working most closely with the students ("bottom up").

#### 1. MOST SECONDARY GRADUATES

While many people would probably be surprised to see the group *most secondary graduates* under equity perspectives, as McLoughlin (1995:38-39) points out, "the demands of academic literacy are quite unique to the context of the university culture" and there is, therefore, a case "for teaching of text structural patterns to *all* university students". Lee (1991: 133) has argued that language and literacy are the "vital keys to powerful learning, at *all* levels and in all disciplines." While not wishing to minimise the greater relative disadvantage particular groups may face in gaining a tertiary education, it needs to be said that, for most students, going to university is a cross-cultural experience and many students need assistance to make both the general transition to university life and to deal with a whole new set of literacy requirements for which they are often at best poorly prepared. As Bartholomae (1988: 276) puts it, tertiary students

have to appropriate a specialised discourse, and they have to do this as though they were easily or comfortably at one with their audience. If you look at the situation this way, suddenly the problem of audience awareness becomes enormously complicated.

In Australian tertiary education, unlike North American universities where composition, writing and rhetoric courses are (and have been for many decades) requirements for all first year students<sup>6</sup>, the development of a specialised tertiary discourse and audience has traditionally been left unstructured. Most Australian institutions don't have an introductory year in the North American sense, and don't offer "for credit" tertiary literacy courses, as such skills are still seen as "remedial", although more universities are beginning to require all disciplines to include communication skills in their programs. Literacy support for most students comes from learning assistance type centres, college tutors, first year lecturers<sup>7</sup> and tutors or from students' own experiences through trial and error, rather than being based on a general university policy designed to support students literacy needs.

## 2. ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS

Many HEIs have recognised the special responsibility Australia has for its indigenous people by developing specialist support programs for them and, more importantly, increasingly with them. Indigenous Australians bring to tertiary settings varying degrees of cross-cultural and linguistic differences with which both they and the HEI must accommodate if they are to succeed. Draisma et al. (1994: 39) state that "students entering university through equity programs are often inexperienced in understanding the language of the disciplines they have chosen". They then describe a successful initiative for teaching chemistry to Aboriginal nursing students using compatible learning techniques. The program demonstrates the need for early intervention and the article discusses the nature of the support and academic development that students require at university, and demonstrates the content, forms and processes of tutorial assistance that are required.

McDonald (1993) reports on the literacy development of a mature aged Aboriginal woman, Bernice, who was enrolled in a tertiary education degree. Bernice reports that when she first came to university, "I'd never even seen an essay so when we were told we had to write one, I didn't have a clue" (p. 5). Important to Bernice's development as a writer was her sense of Aboriginality, the ability to get lecturers to make their assignment requirements explicit and being able to engage in oral discussion with her fellow indigenous students about their writing.

In discussing the findings of the study with Bernice, Bernice was particularly concerned that [McDonald] should not underplay how hard participating in university education is for Aboriginal people. For marginalised minorities, becoming competent in the literacy practices of the dominant society involves more work than it does for those students

who come from backgrounds that more closely reflect world views, norms and values of the dominant literacy practices of the university. (McDonald 1993: 13)

While the need to support indigenous Australians in tertiary study, where they are proportionally underrepresented, can not be over emphasised, other students have legitimate literacy needs as well. In this context, I would evaluate some of the “racist” comments I have overheard on HEI campuses about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support programs as reflecting a realisation by other students that they too need literacy support, but haven’t been getting it. As a part of a university wide language and literacy policy, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support and studies initiatives would be contextualised as part of a range of literacy support structures. Perhaps more importantly, some of the things learned from these programs could be shared with the wider university community. These are comments that I think apply to most equity programs.

### 3. MATURE AGE STUDENTS RETURNING TO STUDIES

Dodson, Sharma and Haydon (1996) in a study which compared the performance of all categories of students entering undergraduate courses in 1993 and 1994 found that all groups performed comparably, with only those with prior tertiary experience showing better results. While mature age students (aged 25+) were shown to do as well as school leavers at HEIs, anecdotal evidence suggests that this may be because of greater maturity and commitment rather than equal language and literacy skills. Many mature aged students are returning to HEI study not having had the opportunity to finish secondary school. According to McCormack and Pancini (1991) what these students need

to be able to do well at further study [is] to be able to write and that writing can be taught. Academic understanding is never just a matter of being able to discuss in class, or read and understand ideas. Not to teach writing is not to prepare students for the task ahead. (p. vi)

The first step in this process, as developed by McCormack and Pancini (1991) is to teach students to demystify and reframe notions of learning so as to understand the culture, context and conventions of knowledge. This provides a foundation on which writing can subsequently be taught and developed. In a further development of this work Moraitis and McCormack (1995) argue that

to help students write a good essay we had to help them understand both ‘ideas’ (including their relationship to those ideas) and the structures and conventions of language which typically realised those ‘ideas’. (p. 4)

These materials, which are based on years of teaching experience with mature aged students highlight the need to “enable students to participate in the powerful discourses used to shape, understand and reflect on modern society” (p.4). These are the discourses of higher education and students need to understand them and be able to control them to do well in tertiary study.

#### 4. DEAF AND BLIND STUDENTS

Much of the work published on disabilities at the tertiary level deals with these issues in general terms rather than in terms of literacy specific concerns (see e.g., O'Connor and Watson nd, Power forthcoming). The government's emphasis on equity programs in recent years has increased disabled student participation rates and according to Power (forthcoming) since 1989 coherent policy driven disability support programs have become much more common in HEIs.

Griffith University, where disability programs are driven by an explicit policy document which is widely circulated within the University, provides a specific example of some of the types of disability services provided by HEIs.

At the direct student service level the University provides interpreting, tutorial and aids support for deaf and hard of hearing students, a note taking service for any students who require it temporarily or permanently, Braille and large-print and screen magnification facilities for blind and low vision students, curriculum development and alternative assessment practices advice to staff and counselling support from a specialist Disability Support Officer. ... In most areas efforts are made to "mainstream" support services into those provided for all students, though it is acknowledged that some services are so specialist that special provisions need to be made. (Power forthcoming: 10-11)

Griffith and La Trobe (and through extension work Deakin and Monash) also teach Auslan providing some access to this language for all those in the university community who are interested to learn.

#### 5. STUDENTS FROM NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING BACKGROUNDS

Dobson and Sharma (1993) in a study of determinants of student progress in Bachelor courses in Victorian HEIs in 1990 found that students who spoke English at home out-performed non-English-speaking students in terms of student progress rates. The nature of the language and cultural aspects of this issue is illustrated (in an American context) by Fiore and Elasser (1988: 287) in an article called "Strangers No More" which describes how the authors developed a writing skills curriculum for Chicanos, Blacks, Anglos and Native Americans

which would help them succeed at [university] and carve a place for themselves in society. [The] students found themselves strangers in a strange world. A wide gulf stretched between the classroom curriculum and their own knowledge gained in the barrios of Albuquerque and the rural towns and pueblos of New Mexico. Confronted by a course that negated their culture, many failed to master the skills they sought. Others succeeded by developing a second skin. Leaving their own customs, habits and skills behind, they participated in school and in the world by adapting themselves to fit the existing order. Their acquisition of literacy left them not in control of the social context, but controlled by it.

While the TAFE situation is undoubtedly different from that found in universities,

the findings of a study by Lewis (1994) for NESB TAFE students in Western Australia may have some relevance to our understanding of this issue. Lewis (1994: 14) states

[o]verall, it would seem that the situation is not as good as it should be for NESB migrant students in full-time TAFE courses, with the possibility they are disadvantaged in relation to ESB and overseas fee-paying students. While it has not been possible to date to separately identify these students as a group, 75% of the replies from lecturers indicated that they thought that NESB students as a group did not have sufficient English skills as a group to cope with their studies. Yet there are few resources devoted to helping migrants who are having trouble coping, either in terms of language support, ESL materials in libraries or professional help from staff who have designated responsibility for the well-being of these students and/or have undertaken some form of cross-cultural awareness training to make them more aware of the sorts of problems such students face.

While much is often made of the needs that some NESB students bring to tertiary settings because of their limited English literacy skills, these students may be doubly penalised as they often have home language skills which HEIs fail to recognise. In fact, background speakers in language classes can be seen as a problem, rather than a resource. Such bilingual literacy should be more effectively linked to educational outcomes and could contribute more to the cultural richness of university life.

#### 6. OVERSEAS STUDENTS

Dobson and Sharma (1993) in a study of determinants of student progress in Bachelor courses in Victorian HEIs in 1990 found that Australian born students produced higher mean progress scores compared with overseas born students in a majority of institutions studied. However, McLoughlin (1995) in a study of Australian, Malaysian and Singaporean students' awareness of text structures found no significant differences between Australian and Singaporean students, but differences between both groups and the Malaysian students. These results suggest that while language is an important influence on students' abilities to cope with tertiary study, that it is also important not to stereotype students and to consider culture and other factors.

Nicholls (1995) has described the impact that overseas students have had on universities in general and at the University of Adelaide in particular. With the coming of the era of no quotas and full fee paying overseas students, universities have begun to market themselves overseas, raising substantial funding in this manner. Numbers of students are rising each year (69 819 in 1994) and at the ten HEIs attracting the largest number of overseas students, average enrolments amount to 10.1 per cent and enrolments have been steadily increasing. Nicholls makes some suggestions about how the lot of the seven per cent of students from overseas at the University of Adelaide could be better supported including: by improved academic support, special bridging and university introduction

programs, writing some theses in a LOTE, twinning with a student trying to learn the overseas student's LOTE, offering Bahasa Indonesia/Malaysia — the language of many overseas students at the university, staff development related to NESB students and a greater appreciation of cultural and linguistic diversity.

Finally, Nicholls (1995:45) comments:

Today, language specialists suggest academic language is a problem for all new enrolments. As McGowan writes, “[f]or any student who enters university, there is a bewildering variety of language to be learnt in their different subjects and social encounters” (“Modelling” 2). This causes ESL lecturer, Barbara Wake to wonder why insights “applicable to 16 000 students at Adelaide University are in the main offered only to FFPOS and NESB students.

#### STUDENT EQUITY SUMMARY

This brief overview of six student equity perspectives indicates while there are major differences across groups, that most groups face many of the same general literacy problems, but these manifest themselves in different ways and from different perspectives. These groups also bring linguistic and cultural skills to HEIs which are often under-valued. Many commentators on these equity issues have noted the similarities and suggested the wisdom of sharing knowledge. A university wide language policy could provide more effective and coherent language and literacy planning thereby improving opportunities for all students to succeed.

#### INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSE PERSPECTIVE

To be successful in any organisation or field, one must learn the specific domains of discourse relevant to that field. At the tertiary level, a number of different discourses must be mastered depending on the situation. For example, a first year education student (in a concurrent 4 year BEd) may not only have to learn the epistemology and citation rules for education, but to keep them differentiated from those of English, History and Psychology. Thus the discourse to be learned is not only new, but often conflicting with others to be learned. Furthermore, much of this discourse knowledge is what Martin (1990) has referred to in the Aboriginal context as ‘secret knowledge’. Although my limited survey results suggest this may be changing, in general lecturers do not teach much of their disciplinary discourse explicitly, or even point it out. Rather they assume such things are taught elsewhere or that it will be part of HEI's rites of passage (i.e., if you aren't smart enough to figure it out, you shouldn't be in a HEI.).

In addition, some of the groups mentioned in the previous section, under student services may bring their own epistemology of language, which frames their views of textual authority and discourse argumentation, to the HEI setting (see e.g. McKnight 1994 for Chinese, Eggington 1992 for traditional Aboriginal people). While the 8th Mayer competency, culture, suggests that such skills and perspectives should be valued for what they can add to a situation (Cope et al.

1995), it is uncertain at best whether this is the case. Now let us turn specifically and examine the six institutional discourse issues.

#### 1. DISCIPLINE SPECIFIC LITERACY SKILLS

Every discipline has its own discourse and set of citation and presentation rules. Baldauf and Jernudd (1986) have outlined some of these language use issues as they relate to cross-cultural psychology and Jernudd and Baldauf (1996) have prepared an overview paper on the field of language use in the journal literature more generally. It is clear from this work that many university researchers themselves do not really consider or understand the language use decisions of their discipline, and, as editors of disciplinary based journals know only too well, some academics don't fully understand the formal discourse structures or requirements of their discipline, probably because their own supervisors never taught that discourse to them.

If many in the academy are under-prepared for writing for their discipline, how well can these staff prepare their students to be able to comprehend and write these discourse forms (both in the formal presentational sense and in terms of making meaning of the discourse)? In a paper prepared for a national review of education literacy training, Lee (1991: 139) found student preparation wanting and has recommended that "the undergraduate curriculum should include specific training in literacy related to the disciplines." How and to what extent is this being done? Are the presentational and discursive forms formally discussed or are students just expected to be able to "pick it up"? The survey results suggest this is a matter of Faculty or Departmental policy. My own experience as a lecturer in education where students were concurrently doing other disciplines as major and minors is that even by the final year of the education program, many students had still not fully untangled the discipline specific literacy skills. A HEI language and literacy policy would make clear the responsibilities both students and staff had to learn and use discipline specific literacy and discourse forms.

#### 2. THE USE OF NON-SEXIST (NON-DISCRIMINATORY) LANGUAGE

Universities all are required to have policies related to equal opportunity provision and the use of non-sexist language. Although non-sexist language is becoming a part of standard English expression, Pauwels (1993) among others would argue that non-sexist language issues have not found their way more generally into language policy. As a matter of policy, how do HEIs handle the issue of non-sexist language in student work? Is it assumed it is the norm now in English and therefore can be ignored, or is it formally presented in discipline based subjects? Do lecturers call it to the attention of students, or is it like many other language matters, a non-content issues to be ignored? A HEI language and literacy policy would focus attention on the norms expected of students and staff in this area.

### 3. ACQUISITION OF LITERACY SKILLS IN A LOTE

Rado and Foster (1991) have argued, albeit not in the tertiary education context, that the advantages of bilingual literacy can be justified on pedagogical, personal, social and economic grounds. To what extent does a HEI promote the development of bi-literacy and for what purposes? Can language studies be done in conjunction with other degrees (e.g., such as a concurrent language diploma at Melbourne or in combination with other studies as at Monash and Griffith)? Should a HEI language and literacy policy promote bi-literacy, even if only for the potential advantages it provides for its graduates (see e.g., Cavalier 1994)?

### 4. CREDIT AND RPL FOR LOTE

The acceptance of credit transfer between universities and the recognition of prior learning (RPL) (from TAFE or other outside work/study) has become more prevalent in HEIs in recent years. Haydon (1994) reports that the total intake into higher education accepted with RPL increased from 7.1 per cent in 1991 to 16.4 per cent in 1993. At the post-graduate level the NLLIA has completed a project which aimed to facilitate RPL in the language and literacy area. The project examined some of the options available for cross-accreditation and the recognition of prior learning in the "language" area, a report was produced and a database (XCREDIT) was established on which this information is available (Baldauf, et al. 1995).

In the context of tertiary language and literacy, credit for LOTE skills are the most obvious candidates for RPL. Are students able to get credit for either placement credit or credit toward their degrees for language skills they possess? If so, how is this done, through advanced standing in beginning courses based on HSC / VCE results, through placement exams, etc.? Or, are student's language skills ignored or seen as uncreditable for university purposes? My own experience with RPL dates back to my undergraduate days in the United States when after taking national advance placement exams, I received 12 placement credits (nearly a semester's credit) for two introductory history subjects. Because of this I was able to replace 1/3 of my subjects in my major with advanced work, and my study of history was far more interesting. To give another example, at the University of Hawaii, overseas students could not be credited with basic or intermediate ESL subjects, but having successfully completed them they were able to sit for exams in their own languages and get RPL credit for an equivalent amount of study in their language as their ESL. A HEI language policy would make the position of RPL in LOTE much more transparent to students entering university programs.

### 5. COMPUTER RELATED LITERACY SKILLS.

Many students enter HEIs with computer skills that are equal or better than those of their lecturers or tutors. Some universities in the United States make the purchase of a computer a compulsory part of university tuition charges and student rooms in colleges are all wired into the computer network. Most universities in Australia provide easy access to their computer facilities for

students through computer labs and dial in modem access. In other words, in HEIs, as in many businesses, there is a growing expectation that students will be computer literate - in both the technological and literacy senses. Leaving aside the questions of equity of access to equipment, which relate to the equity issues previously discussed, does the university offer students computer literacy training or is this a skill students are expected to bring to university? Are there policies related to the use of computers for assignments, are standard programs required (e.g., Microsoft Word 6 format, Autocad, or Statistica)? Can students use on line dictionaries, reference grammars and translation programs in language courses? Computer literacy raises both questions of the provision of skills and those of access and equity? Such questions should be addressed as part of an overall language and literacy policy.

#### 6. ELECTRONIC LITERACY AND COLLABORATION

In an article in the 13 February *Australian*, Marc Rotenberg was asked whether there is "a coming conflict between copyright and cyberspace". His answer was that

We're in for some big changes on the copyright front. It's a mistake to regard the Internet as a distribution mechanism for copyright materials. One of my criticisms is that some of the copyright proposals represent attempts to transform the Internet and make it accommodate copyright. It may be the case that copyright-holders are going to have to adjust the way they work to the nature of the Internet rather than the other way around. (1996:28)

The impact of computers in the wider world is having an impact on student writing beyond the technical questions discussed in the previous section. Computer access to text and graphics as well as the ability of individuals and groups of students to co-author, edit and comment on other students' work, is having a significant impact on the quality and nature of university work produced and potentially on rules for citation and plagiarism. Winkelmann (1995: 431) argues

that teachers in the humanities must relinquish the vestiges of non-electronic criteria in their assessments of electronic literacy. Instead, the interplay of human and technological factors in the classroom leads to a reaffirmation of literacy as a social process. ... The viability of static criteria for good literacy practices vanishes with electronic literacy.

What guidelines do universities have in place to deal with electronic literacy? Survey results indicate some HEIs have guidelines in place which allow electronic collaboration. What experience do most lecturers have with this phenomena? These issues are not just related to the humanities, but to all disciplines, and to all levels. The 8th grade assignments my wife receives from her Indonesian language students in Canberra are almost all done on the computer and many already show the early signs of electronic literacy through the use of maps and graphics. How much easier is it at HEIs where students are all networked and

where they are increasingly accustomed to work collaboratively on group projects for electronic collaboration to occur?

#### INSTITUTIONAL DISCOURSE SUMMARY

The six institutional discourse perspectives do not as yet seem to have become university issues, but by their very nature seem to be left mainly to Faculties, Departments or even individual lecturers to handle. A university wide language and literacy policy would make for a more equitable administration of these policies and would help students to more quickly and accurately obtain the skills necessary for their discipline studies and ultimately for their professions.

#### DEVELOPING A UNIVERSITY LANGUAGE POLICY

The idea of developing a university language policy seems to be a relatively recent one. Dines (1994) proposed the idea in a paper to the Australian Linguistics Society in 1993 when "thinking aloud" about all the issues related to linguistics which had recently come across her desk as Academic Registrar at the University of Adelaide. She noted that:

[a]s a policy maker I think it is folly to try to deal with a smorgasbord of issues which clearly are interrelated. What universities need is a way of bringing these issues together so that they can be systematically addressed within a cohesive framework and linguists are the people professionally equipped to do this. (p. 14)

She went on to argue that there is a need

... to lobby for the development of language policies in your institutions. Every university needs a language policy which addresses language issues across the whole university in a coordinated and systematic way. It should not be just a language centre policy or a section of the Faculty of Arts' strategic plan. It needs to be a university wide language policy, embracing all the diverse issues which university senior management need to address: (p. 15)

After examining the dramatic growth in overseas and NESB students, Mühlhäusler (1995b) and Bennett (1995) have continued to argue the case for the University of Adelaide developing a language policy, but Mühlhäusler (1995b) concludes the response to date has been ad hoc rather than driven by clear long term goals. He notes that while language policies have been developed at the Commonwealth and State levels, universities, despite their increasing internationalisation, have generally failed to take up the challenge. Mühlhäusler (1995a) has also argued cogently for the inclusion of low candidature languages in any university language policy.

While not a language and literacy policy per se, the *Report on Learning Assistance Provision* at Griffith University (Gardner 1994, Parra 1995) has many of the features of a literacy policy, only it is broader. It takes up many of the literacy issues discussed in this paper and commits learning assistance at Griffith to

form a coherent whole which supports lifelong learning. It looks at meeting the needs of many of the equity groups and supports information literacy. The Universities of Canberra and Newcastle (Woodward-Kron 1995) have also completed literacy surveys to gauge staff perceptions of students' literacy needs.

The University of Western Sydney - Macarthur has a "competencies policy" in place which states that "all students commencing an undergraduate degree course from 1993 onwards must satisfy non credit competency requirements in computer literacy and communication skills" (Calendar 1996: 52). This policy, which initially was instituted on a top down basis to help "sell" UWS-Macarthur graduates to employers, has much to recommend it, but also has its pitfalls (Catterall and Martins 1996, this volume). Taken together with policies on credit transfer and plagiarism, these policies go some way to form an explicit communication and literacy policy. The Conference Proceedings (may) also contain a number of other examples of university literacy policies including those for Curtin University of Technology (Fiocco 1996, Reid 1996, Reid and Mulligan 1996).

The *language* policy challenge has been taken up by Monash University and based on a study by Clyne, Pauwels, Newbrook and Neil (1995), which surveyed university language needs, a fifteen point language policy was developed and accepted. The twelve substantive recommendations include 1) explicit communication activities be made part of all discipline training, 2) staff induction include cross-cultural communication training, 3) the use of non-discriminatory language, 4) a language and learning centre be established, 5) standard faculty correction guides for student work be produced, 6) cultural variation in the perceptions of plagiarism be recognised, 7) combined language and professional training programs be established, 8) the purchase of LOTE software be made, 9) a commitment to teach some languages of limited enrolments be made, 10) the offering of Aboriginal languages and Auslan be explored, 11) class sizes in practical LOTE classes be limited, and 12) proficiency levels across languages be pegged to international standards.

From these brief examples it is clear that universities are already beginning to think about language and literacy policies and some have even made important progress in developing a comprehensive approach to language or literacy issues. However, what has been done to date does not amount to a coherent broadly based language *and* literacy *and* communication policy as advocated in this paper. The Curtin, Griffith and Western Sydney - Macarthur materials fail to confront the language specific issues, while the Monash language policy doesn't address some of the broader questions of tertiary literacy. Some of the papers in the Conference Proceedings will undoubtedly address the communication issues (i.e., professional needs), but will they do this in terms that consider language and literacy?

## DISCUSSION

This paper has outlined the rationale for developing a HEI language, literacy

and communication policy, has indicated some of the student equity and institutional discourse needs which might make up such a policy, has provided some preliminary examples of how HEIs are meeting their language and literacy responsibilities and has looked at a few examples of how such a policy has been attempted. Perhaps because the development of a comprehensive language, literacy and communication policy is so complex, it is a job which still largely remains to be done. However, if the bipartisan development of the National Policy on Languages shows us anything, it is that the development by HEIs of language and literacy policies in situations of conflicting interests is possible. The question is, "Do those involved with tertiary language, literacy and communication feel it is important enough to do?"

Part of the answer to this question will depend on the necessary research being done. Lo Bianco (1993) has said that in adult literacy, there isn't much published research which establishes the links between literacy data and social consequences, in this context between literacy skills and success at university. The conference and these Conference Proceedings, have put a focus on tertiary literacy and have provided a forum for raising questions and for presenting much needed data on tertiary literacy issues. Perhaps, it may also eventually be the stimulus for developing tertiary language, literacy and communication policies.

While the focus of this paper has been on arguing the case for a language, literacy and communication policy, the problem is, of course, embedded in a much deeper set of issues. It is not "merely" a question of dealing with literacy issues or even of cross-cultural issues, but with all the issues that implicate the whole cultural ambience of the university.

Regardless of language background, people from cultures of poverty see the world differently (see the work of S. B. Heath and James Gee). This problem implicates modes of dress, modes of social discourse, attitudes toward information, skills involved in identifying and locating material, personal hygiene, hair styles, etc. [Just as a 'language-across-the curriculum course' or a 'foreign students centre' or an 'Aboriginal studies centre' does not deal with the problems HEIs face,] a language policy, as desirable as it is, can be a snare and a delusion because, by itself, it does not address the fundamental issues and may even obscure them because it looks like a solution. (Kaplan 1996: personal communication).

There is a need to see all of these issues as part of a world view which informs the university's whole outlook on students and which would then provide a general framework for the successful implementation of a language, literacy and communication policy.

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<sup>1</sup>The focus of this paper is primarily on universities and I use HEIs mainly in that sense, although some of the issues clearly relate to TAFE literacy needs, and to the need for language and literacy policies in that area. The paper relates to what is referred to by Brennan (1993) as the adult and community education and to the school literacy sectors only indirectly in as much as these two sectors provide clients for universities.

<sup>2</sup>In 1939 there were about 14 000 students while in 1995 there were around 600 000. The proportion of the 17-22 year old age cohort in under-graduate HEI programs rose from 3.75 per cent in 1955 to 16 per cent in 1975 to about 30 per cent in 1995 (Postile 1995: 1).

<sup>3</sup>Ian Reid (1995: 4) writes that "it has been estimated that students whose native language is not English now comprise up to 25 per cent of the university population in some states. At least one-third of these are from overseas, largely from the Asian region. Most of them have considerable bilingual skills and bring rich linguistic potentialities to what they study. But not only do Australian universities often fail to draw creatively on those resources to enhance the scope for cultural exchanges across the whole learning community, they also often fail to provide adequate support — inside or outside the classroom — for students whose own first-language literacy practices differ significantly from those that are normative in Australian academic settings".

<sup>4</sup>It should be noted that university handbooks / calendars are complex documents and it was not always easy to find or identify information relevant to all of the 12 sub-headings. The author would welcome any further information related to any of the issues presented in the paper.

<sup>5</sup>The depth of the urban-rural divide is great. It has been said that people living in Athens, Tokyo or Sydney have more in common with each other than they do with their own rural and isolated citizens.

<sup>6</sup>However, Emeritus Professor Robert B. Kaplan (1996: personal communication), who has worked in this area for many years would argue that the very existence of such courses is a problem.

People have come to believe that because the requirement exists, the problem has been eliminated. Wrong! Freshman composition courses teach the wrong literacy — a literacy literacy, not an academic literacy. They tend to ignore the categories of students enumerated in the paper — Blacks, Chicanos, resident and alien non-native speakers, blind, deaf, Native Americans, Puerto Ricans, Samoans, Haitians, Vietnamese, Hmong, etc. — in part because these populations are under-represented in the tertiary population, in part because — having opted for "open admissions" — HEIs have to have some weeding out mechanism. When I was an undergraduate it was organic chemistry, but now its basic literacy.

<sup>7</sup>A lecturer, who had recently spent a number of years teaching ESL undergraduates overseas, once commented on how when blind marking final exam papers, she was surprised to find she had so many ESL students in her first year education class. When she came to record the grades in the mark book, she realised that almost none of these students came from an ESL background.

# Institutional Practices in Promoting Tertiary Literacy: The Development and Implementation of a University-wide Policy for Enhancing Students' Communication Skills

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This paper reports on the strategies adopted at Curtin University of Technology to provide systematically for the development and enhancement of students' communication skills. It provides an overview of the development and dissemination of a University-wide policy, which took account of the major strengths and weaknesses revealed by an institution-wide survey of the provision for communication skills. The paper focuses in particular on the "communication-in-context" approach advocated in the policy, an approach which supports attention to students' literacy skills within the context of the various disciplines in which they are working. It then provides some examples of what we at Curtin see as best practice in the implementation of this aspect of the policy, drawn from a variety of disciplines across the University. The paper concludes with a short discussion of what can be learned from the Curtin experience.

## **THE CURTIN CONTEXT**

Curtin University of Technology is a relatively large, multi-campus institution, with approximately 21,000 students and 3,000 staff. It was established as a university in 1987, 20 years after its founding as the Western Australian Institute of Technology. Structurally, the University has four teaching divisions (Curtin Business School; Engineering and Science; Health Sciences; Humanities), two Branches (the Muresk Institute of Agriculture, approximately 140 km from Perth; the Western Australian School of Mines, at Kalgoorlie, approximately 500 km from Perth) and three support divisions (Academic Affairs; Finance and Property; Research and Development). Each of the Divisions and Branches is further subdivided into School and Areas, which are regarded as the basic organisational units of the University. The institutional administrative structure is rather flat, with considerable responsibility and authority devolved to Divisions/Branches

and Schools/Areas. Decisions regarding University-wide policy on academic matters are made by the University Academic Board (UAB) and passed on in the form of recommendations to the University Council for final approval. UAB and its sub-committees (which include the Teaching and Learning Advisory Committee) are all bodies with representation from across the whole University, thus providing structures within which, at least potentially, the University as a whole can "own" and address issues.

For many years, Curtin, like other universities, has had in place a number of initiatives to assist students with literacy-related skills. In September, 1993, however, a paper produced by a member of staff from the School of Communication and Cultural Studies drew attention to the ad hoc, uncoordinated nature of these initiatives and raised serious questions regarding their effectiveness (Macintyre, 1993). UAB considered the paper. With some urging from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the Division of Humanities, (whose concerns in this area were well known [e.g. Reid, 1994]), UAB agreed to provide funding for a project to be undertaken by the Teaching Learning Group, to explore the questions and issues which had been raised. Essentially, there were three stages to the project, involving first, an analysis of background documents and research bearing on the issue of tertiary literacy; second, an analysis of the current provision within Curtin for supporting the development of students' communication skills; and, third, a stage which ultimately became one of policy formulation and promulgation.

### **STAGE 1: ANALYSIS OF THE LITERATURE**

The literature review conducted during the first stage of the project revealed that increasingly, in English-speaking countries, literacy and communication skills are being recognised as having considerable bearing on many aspects of tertiary students' academic and professional progress. These skills and abilities are identified as fundamental to an individual's effectiveness as a professional practitioner and lifelong learner (Candy, Crebert & O'Leary 1994) and are shown repeatedly to be a key issue in graduate employability (Australian Association of Graduate Employers 1993; Bate & Sharpe 1990; Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia 1994). Thus it was clear, from a number of different sources, that because highly developed communications skills, including, especially, the ability to communicate in a variety of contexts, are essential outcomes of a university education, they need to be planned for systematically.

For Australia, it was also clear that the increasing internationalisation of universities and the increasing cultural diversity of the university student population are adding a further imperative to the above case for systematic planning. There was considerable evidence that growing numbers of cross-cultural, overseas and Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) students are having a profound impact on teaching and learning in universities. In many cases, providing these students with an effective learning experience was identified as a considerable challenge for university lecturers, because the language, learning

styles and modes of communication of the students and their lecturers derive from very different cultural, intellectual and pedagogical traditions. Indeed, researchers such as Burns (1991) have shown that even migrants who have studied English for most of their school days experience considerable linguistic problems at university level. Highlighting the obligation of higher education in regard to this issue, the Ethnic Communities' Council of New South Wales has emphasised that universities need "to recognise that admission to courses, *per se*, is not enough" and that strategies must be developed and monitored to ensure that linguistic and cultural backgrounds are taken into account in the teaching of NESB students (Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, 1990, p. 117).

Part of the literature review also involved the synthesis of information about tertiary literacy provided by key practitioners in Australian and overseas universities (e.g. Cowen 1993; McLeod 1990; Puhl 1992). This synthesis indicated that contextually-based approaches to the development of students' communication skills were proving to be particularly effective at the tertiary level. Approaches identified as less effective were those which relied on one-off out-of-context, sessions (e.g. "essay writing"); those which focused on surface features of communication rather than seeing communication as an extension of thinking and an aid to learning; and, worst of all, approaches which relied on the enthusiasm and goodwill of a handful of staff to provide support for student literacy.

In general terms, the successful, contextually-based approaches involved the introduction of students to the conventions and genres of particular disciplines as an integral part of teaching within that discipline. They tended to encourage student-centred learning, based on real-life experiences, which were seen as authentic by the students. They also focused on a range of communication skills (including, as appropriate to the discipline, graphics, team-work and negotiation) and, in many cases also developed other important life-skills such as problem-solving, time-management and leadership. They were closely integrated, not only with the teaching of the discipline, but also with the assessment, in that the kinds of assignments set, the criteria for marking, and the timing and quality of the feedback given all reflected the high priority placed on communication within the discipline.

## **STAGE 2: A CASE STUDY**

The second stage of the study focused specifically on Curtin. It consisted essentially of a survey of units with a communication-skills focus available to undergraduate students at Curtin in Semester 1, 1994; and follow-up interviews with 25 University staff either directly concerned with these units or with a special interest in students' communication skills.

This stage provided the basis for a critique of strategies used traditionally at Curtin for the development of students' communication skills. It revealed that, historically, the major provider of communication skills assistance was the School

of Communication and Cultural Studies (CCS), which had been offering communication units since the mid-1960s. Elsewhere within Curtin (i.e. independent of CCS) other attempts to develop and enhance students' communication skills were occurring through:

- the implementation by many individual staff of strategies for improving the quality of students' writing;
- generic and discipline-specific foundation/ bridging/ support units offered by individual Schools and the Centre for Aboriginal Studies;
- study skills/writing sessions provided by the University Counselling Service and the International Office;
- individual support available on a limited basis through the University Counselling Service and the International Office;

The success of this combination of strategies was difficult to gauge. Over the years, very few of these efforts had been monitored or evaluated in any formal or documented fashion, so there was no reliable information to use as a basis for making any judgments. There was one piece of data bearing on students' communication skills, namely the responses of Curtin graduates to a questionnaire item focused on communication skills, in the 1993 Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) administered by the Graduate Careers Council of Australia (Curtin University, Institutional Research Office, 1994). More than two thirds of those responding to this item indicated that their courses had improved their written communication skills, but the degree to which a University-wide response to such a global item is useful was somewhat questionable.

This stage also revealed a number of weaknesses in the Curtin system. It was found (and reinforced later by the research of Bell [1994]), that the communication skills support which was available at Curtin was not being utilised fully and further, that there were a number of reasons for this underutilisation, for example:

- timetabling constraints;
- lack of lecturer awareness regarding the necessity for the communications support, stemming from a belief that students have achieved the English entry standard and therefore do not require further study in this area;
- traditional attitudes amongst other staff – in the words of one staff member: "Everyone thinks students' communication skills are important, but many lecturers still want someone else to provide them or fix them";
- late recognition of students' need for further language studies (e.g. not until near the end of Semester 1, when first assignments are submitted);
- lecturer stereotypes of certain nationalities (e.g. a belief that Singaporeans do not require language/cultural support because so many of them have studied within an English-medium system).

Overall, the review established the need for:

- a formal structure to facilitate system-wide coordination of the provision

- for students' communication skills development/enhancement;
- a clear system for assessing and channelling students into support units;
- students (especially NESB and off-campus students) to receive communications skills support within their courses of study, provided in an integrated, ongoing, systematic way throughout their whole course of study;
- evaluation of units or support offered;
- systematic monitoring of the quality of students' communication skills.

In the interim report produced at this stage of the project an attempt was made to conceptualise the existing strengths of Curtin in the area of communication skills development, and to indicate that much could be learned from, and built upon, some of the traditional ways of operating. At the same time, the draft report identified weaknesses such as those outlined above and proposed ways in which the institution needed to change in order to take account of recent research in this area and its application to the changing context of Curtin (in terms, for example, of the increasingly multicultural student body). The analysis presented in the draft report provided a basis for framing some draft recommendations for future action in this area. In preparing the draft recommendations, cognisance was taken of resource constraints (especially in relation to the high cost of mandatory, universal literacy testing procedures, or of individual, one-on-one support for communication skills development) and of the need to not impose additional burdens on teaching staff.

### **STAGE 3: POLICY FORMULATION AND PROMULGATION**

The third stage of the project began with the circulation of the draft report and recommendations throughout the University. There followed several months of consultation, discussion and negotiation of the recommendations with a number of key groups and individuals and the incorporation of the reactions of these bodies into the final report of the project. Overall, the responses to the draft report indicated a preference for communication skills to be defined broadly (i.e. to include not only oral and written communication, but also graphical communication, and interpersonal and negotiating skills), and for these skills to be assessed and developed in the context of disciplinary studies. A number of Divisional and School responses cited research promoting the idea of "discipline-specific" or "domain-specific" skills development, rather than the development of "content-independent" communication skills and strategies. During this stage, it also became clear that at least two other strategic initiatives at Curtin were congruent with and supportive of recommendations for a system-wide approach to the teaching of communication skills within the context of disciplines. These were the Strategic Plan for Teaching and Learning (see Latchem & Parker, 1995) and the Cross-Cultural Education Policy (Campbell, 1994).

The final report and its recommendations (Latchem, Parker & Weir 1995) were approved by the University Council in December, 1994 and endorsed for University-wide distribution. The report contained the following statement of

University policy:

Curtin University recognises the diversity of social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds among its students, and is committed to the development of programs and practices which aim to provide all graduates with:

- a high level of oral, writing, graphical, interpersonal and negotiating skills;
- the ability to obtain, organise and communicate information from a variety of sources and for a variety of audiences in general, discipline-specific and professional contexts;
- the ability to present, discuss and defend views with superiors, colleagues, subordinates and the general public;
- the ability to empathise and communicate with persons from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

The University also endorsed a system of pathways for developing students' communication skills (as shown in Figure 1) and approved the establishment of a widely representative Communication Skills Reference Group to advise on institution-wide coordination in this area. As shown in Figure 1, although the pathways included some specialist support units for students with specifically diagnosed needs, the aim ultimately was for all students to be developing their communication skills "in context", through School-based units and programs, conducted with the assistance, where appropriate, of staff from the School of Communication and Cultural Studies or the Teaching Learning Group. Thus the project as a whole resulted in a framework for a new, more systematic approach to the provision of communications skills for all Curtin students, with an emphasis on "communication-in-context" approaches.

**CURRENT ACTIVITIES: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLICY**

In many ways, the flagship of the implementation of Curtin's new policy took the form of two series of weekly lunchtime seminars (running over a six-week period, during each of Semester 1 and Semester 2, 1995). These were organised by the Teaching Learning Group, under the auspices of the Communication Skills Reference Group. At these seminars, a number of experts in the communications area, together with practitioners who were implementing, or planning to implement, a "communication-in-context" approach in their teaching, shared their strategies and experiences with other staff.

INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES IN PROMOTING TERTIARY LITERACY

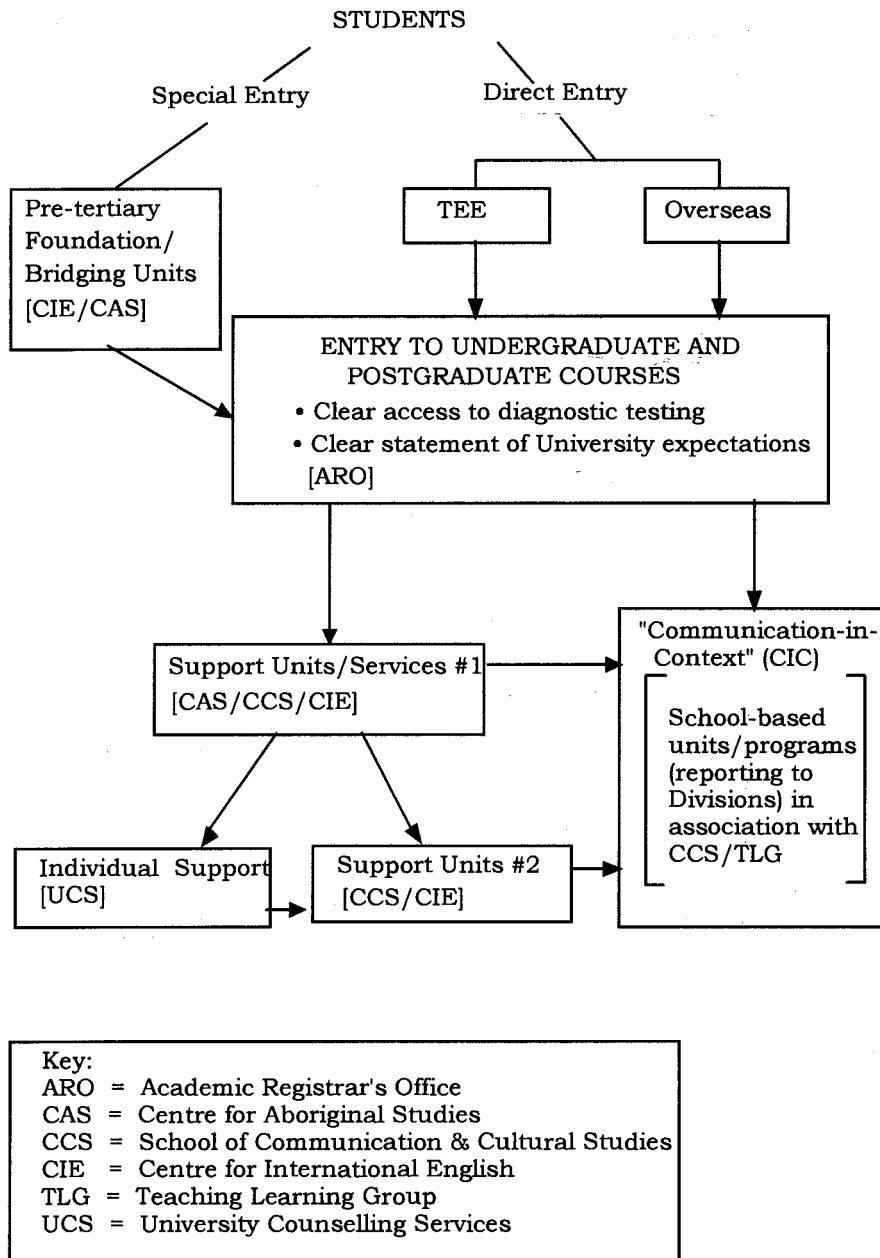


FIGURE 1: PATHWAYS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS AT CURTIN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Although many of the presenters had been active in the area of communication for some years, the new policy gave their activities extra legitimacy and a higher profile and, at the same time, stimulated other staff to develop and implement innovative approaches. As shown in the complete list of contributors to these seminars (see Appendix 1), the 41 presenters included a wide range of academic staff (and, in some cases also students) from across the University and presentations covered topics as divergent as project and thesis writing, plagiarism, special needs of NESB students, graphical communication skills, oral presentation, and effective assessment strategies for developing communication skills. Most seminars were well-attended and, from staff comments and from activities subsequent to the seminars, it is apparent that many staff both enjoyed and learned from the wide variety of approaches presented.

The following seven examples capture something of the variety of approaches stimulated by the communication-in-context policy, or implemented in association with it. Some of these projects are being developed further in 1996, under the auspices of a Commonwealth Office of Staff Development Grant.

#### 1. A COMMUNICATIONS UNIT IN PHYSICS: A STUDENT-ORGANISED CONFERENCE

In the Department of Applied Physics, a staff member involved with the communications unit offered to second year students considered that this unit could be improved in terms of its relevance to students' needs. He restructured the unit around the range of communication skills required to organise a professional conference. As described in Zadnik and Radloff (1995), the new approach involved students taking the initiative in the planning and presentation of an actual physics conference for staff and Year 11 students from local high schools. The physics students engaged intensively in the following sequence of activities: negotiating the conference theme, arranging for an external keynote speaker, preparing papers, publicising and organising the event, and editing the conference proceedings. In the monitoring and evaluation of this program, students' responses to the mid- and end-of-semester questionnaires showed that they felt that they had acquired many useful life skills and had been actively involved in a highly relevant learning experience.

This restructured unit has now been offered twice, with the second version placing more emphasis on teamwork and interpersonal skills. The feedback from students was again very positive. A resource package to assist staff in the adaptation of this approach to use in other disciplines is currently being developed,

#### 2. CROSS-CULTURAL NEGOTIATIONS IN MARKETING VIA VIDEOCONFERENCING

The Curtin Business School has, for some time, provided a semester-long program in negotiation skills for third year students of Marketing. As described by King and Hedges (1995) and Puls and King (1995) this has been developed, more recently, into a cross-cultural negotiations training program. In this program, 10 final year Curtin Business School Commerce students on the University's main campus in Perth engaged in an extended period of negotiation with 16 Singaporean students of Chinese, Malaysian and Indian backgrounds, enrolled

in a program run in conjunction with the Singapore Polytechnic. Two-way video/two-way audio compressed digital video-conferencing facilities were used to link the two campuses thousands of kilometres apart. Through two elaborate role-plays, involving negotiations over possible joint ventures in the People's Republic of China, the two groups of students, working from their different social and business cultures and traditions, were able to experience the challenges, uncertainties and rewards of taking, keeping and yielding power in cross-cultural business negotiation. From students' reactions to the program (Figgis, 1995), it is clear that, although this particular learning experience left the students feeling rather vulnerable at times, its success lay in its realism and its stimulation of a self-reflective approach to planning and engagement in the process of negotiating.

### **3. LITERACY IN MEDICAL SCIENCE: A SCHOOL-BASED POLICY**

In the School of Biomedical Sciences it was found that a major obstacle to the development of literacy among students was the lack of a policy on literacy and writing quality. As described by Budd (1995), the nature of communication in Medical Science demands an integrated approach to the teaching of literacy-based skills, because no one single dimension of literacy can be treated without reference to the others. In order to develop an appropriate School-based policy, Budd began with a thorough assessment of current practices within the School and of resources available within the School. At the same time, she identified, especially from the Competency-based Standards for Medical Scientists (Commonwealth Information Services, 1993), the literacy skills considered essential for Medical Scientists, together with a range of strategies for integrating these skills into students' courses of study. All of this material was used as the basis for a policy to be implemented across the whole School. To date, Budd considers that a major benefit of the project has been the increased interaction among staff members from different disciplines within the School, and greater cooperation and collaboration in relation to the achievement of common, literacy-related objectives for students. She anticipates, however, that the policy will have a number of benefits for students in terms of

- emphasis on the importance of literacy in Medical Science
- establishment of firm standards of literacy in Medical Science
- familiarisation of students with literacy conventions in their academic field
- promotion of a consistent set of literacy practices among various disciplines within the School
- production of quality graduates, meeting the expectations of professional and employer bodies.

### **4. STAFF FRAMEWORKS FOR ACTIVE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS' LITERACY SKILLS: CENTRE FOR ABORIGINAL STUDIES**

Since the beginning of 1995, the Centre for Aboriginal Studies has been piloting some literacy initiatives in its Health Work courses. These include mapping some of the course competency statements on to the National Framework of Adult Literacy and Numeracy Competence and using the learning cycles and

pointers provided in the National Framework documents to facilitate the use of language and literacy in a highly conscious way in teaching and learning. In addition, a literacy profiling tool has been developed and used, and has proved to be successful in providing detailed linguistic and cognitive descriptions of the language behaviours that students demonstrate in their work. This is useful both to students and to lecturers, with the latter able to be far more conscious of their own linguistic behaviours when structuring lecturing. In 1996, some staff at the Centre are implementing an extension of the earlier work, through a project which sets out to give teachers and students more opportunities and confidence to experiment with mainstream literacy skills in a way that is focused and also contextualised politically and historically.

##### **5. SCHOLARLY WRITING FOR POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN HEALTH SCIENCES**

This project is being conducted in the Division of Health Sciences, using a six-stage action research approach, beginning with one series of focus group sessions involving postgraduate and senior undergraduate students, and a parallel series of sessions for staff who are supervising students. The purpose of the sessions is to document any difficulties students encounter with scholarly writing, from both student and staff perspectives. A workshop and self-paced materials on scholarly writing are being developed based on information obtained from the focus group sessions and will be piloted later this year with volunteer students and staff. The pilot will be evaluated and the materials modified in accordance with the findings of the evaluation, and published (Taylor, O'Connell & Radloff, forthcoming).

##### **6. COMMUNICATION AND INTERPERSONAL SKILLS FOR COMPUTER SCIENCE STUDENTS**

Another example of the teaching of communication skills "in context" comes from the School of Computing, where feedback from employers of Computer Science graduates provided the stimulus for development of two units dealing with technical writing. As described by Kessell & Kessell (1993), the first unit, which is taught jointly by the School of Computing and the School of Communication and Cultural Studies teaches written and keyboard communication in the context of describing a computing process and product. The second unit focuses on communication in the context of real-world tasks, such as a 20-minute oral presentation, the preparation of a tender or sales proposal, and the composition of a memo to a client or to a colleague working on a team project. It also includes a "mock" job interview, which is conducted in front of a panel consisting of both staff members and experienced interviewers from outside the University, and which is videotaped so that students can critique their own performance. Feedback on this unit, from students, graduate and employers has been very encouraging. A somewhat similar major initiative is being implemented by the Muresk Institute of Agriculture in 1996.

## 7. COMMUNICATIONS ACTIVITIES IN THE SCHOOL OF NURSING

The School of Nursing has implemented a number of initiatives in the area of communications, including a School-wide policy on incorporation of communication skills in syllabuses and assessment procedures. One especially interesting example of the implementation of such a policy involves a group who worked with a theatre professional to use drama to teach about death and dying in general and maternity settings. O'Connell, McNae, Watts, McKelvie and Burgum (1995) provide an account of this initiative. They describe the development of the drama script from an interview with a patient with a life-threatening illness; indicate how the script centred on the patient's thoughts, feelings, responses, perceptions of exemplary care and views about incidents which generated anxiety or anger; and outline how the script was acted out to Nursing students by students from the University's theatre-arts section. Both short-term and long-term feedback from the Nursing students on this teaching strategy were overwhelmingly positive. O'Connell et al (1995) summarise the benefits of using drama as a teaching strategy in terms of "making links" – "linking students to the realities of practice, linking students to the ones experiencing care, linking students and staff to other sources of learning, and strengthening the links between learner and teachers" (p. 193).

### WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM THE CURTIN EXPERIENCE?

Standing back from this Curtin experience in the development, dissemination and implementation of a University-wide policy focused on the enhancement of students' communication skills, it is important to consider both the positive and negative aspects.

Clearly, Curtin "got it right" in a number of ways. First, and partly fortuitously, the activities contained a complementary blend of top-down, bottom-up and stakeholder input. In a "top-down" sense, there was, at an institutional level, a structure (namely, the widely representative University Academic Board) which facilitated University-wide ownership of the issue. There was also, at senior executive level, an advocate for the issue, in the form of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Division of Humanities. In addition, there were other strategic initiatives already in place (e.g. the Strategic Plan for Teaching and Learning and the Cross-Cultural Education Policy) which provided important points of intersection with the issue of communication skills. At the same time, in a "bottom-up" sense, there were concerns at the grass-roots level, which committed staff found both the time and the energy to formalise as well-argued documents (e.g. Macintyre, 1993). Further, both ends of this continuum were reinforced by feedback from employers which highlighted the importance of students' communication skills.

Second, the policy development stage was based on an analysis which was both broadly comprehensive and Curtin-specific. It acknowledged the existing strengths of Curtin in this area and incorporated these in the new policy and pathways wherever possible. In addition, the process of development of the

policy was based on extensive consultation and negotiation, involving the reconciliation of at times conflicting perspectives and agendas.

Some of the barriers to the success of these processes are also readily identifiable, however. As with any innovation in a university, one of the major barriers is time – staff already feel overburdened by heavy workloads and, quite reasonably, feel unable to take another initiative on board in their day-to-day work. In addition, amongst some staff, there are entrenched attitudes which work against the idea that communication skills are the responsibility of all staff – these staff see themselves only as subject matter specialists and prefer to shift responsibility for students' communication skills to the students themselves, the secondary schools, the University admissions procedures, or "specialists" located elsewhere. Finally, there is the problem of effective dissemination of exemplary practice in this area and the need for innovative approaches in this regard is paramount. These are all challenges for staff development – challenges which dictate the need for special funding if they are to be met effectively. Thus, in the context of the the ever-present budgetary constraints in universities, communication skills initiatives have to compete for their place.

### CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This case study of Curtin's approach to the enhancement of students' communication skills has reinforced a point made by many speakers at this conference, namely, that a relevant policy, preferably explicit, is a necessary starting point for improvements in this area. The policy gives legitimacy to activities in the area and provides at least one criterion for individual lecturer, School-based and Divisional accountability, especially if linked to criteria for promotion and to measures of accountability stated in Schools' and Divisions' strategic plans. The Curtin case study has also shown, however, that a policy, while necessary, is not a sufficient condition for constructive action. Commitment from staff at all levels of the organisation is required and, in this sense, we recognise that the implementation of Curtin's "communication-in-context" policy requires a cultural change. For many staff, it entails a shift away from practices which involve "someone else" taking responsibility for students' communication skills, towards a model where each individual lecturer assumes this responsibility, within a discipline-specific context. Clearly, staff development and School-based initiatives are essential for the implementation of Curtin's new policy. Indeed, as demonstrated in the examples provided in this paper, such initiatives have begun already, and now need to be consolidated through a variety of avenues for disseminating best practice.

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

This paper encapsulates the work of many staff at Curtin who have shown an outstanding commitment to the enhancement of students' communication skills. In particular, I wish to acknowledge the input of my own colleagues in the Teaching Learning Group – Associate Professor Colin Latchem, Ms Alex Radloff

and Ms Jennifer Weir. In relation to the first section of the paper, describing the development of the policy, I also acknowledge feedback from colleagues at the Annual Conferences of the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australia (Rockhampton, July, 1995) and the Australian Association for Institutional Research (Perth, November, 1995).

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**Appendix 1: PARTICIPANTS IN THE “COMMUNICATION-IN-CONTEXT” SEMINARS CONDUCTED AT CURTIN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SEMESTER 1 AND SEMESTER 2, 1995.**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Division</b>	<b>School/Area</b>	<b>Title of Session</b>
Professor Ian Reid	Humanities	Teaching Learning Group	What is the Communication-in-Context Policy and how does it relate to the Teaching and Learning Strategic Plan?
Associate Professor Colin Latchem	Academic Affairs	Teaching Learning Group	
Associate Professor Lesley Parker	Academic Affairs		
Ms Maria Fiocco	Humanities	International English	What do staff, Students, employers and professional bodies consider to be the key communication skills which graduates need?
Ms Jennifer Weir	Academic Affairs	Teaching Learning Group	
Ms Alex Radloff	Academic Affairs	Teaching Learning Group	
Associate Professor Andy Kirkpatrick	Humanities	International English	What communication skill needs do different student groups (NESB, ESB, undergraduate, postgraduate, off and on campus) have?
Ms Chris Kaputin	Academic Affairs	Teaching Learning Group	
Mrs Daphne Sands	Postgraduate Student		
Ms Melissa Robinson	Student Guild		
Ms Sue White	Humanities	Library and Information Studies	
Mr Bob Fox	Academic Affairs	Teaching Learning Group	
Ms Di Courtney	Health Sciences	Biomedical Sciences	What are some ways in which communication skills can be developed in context?
Mrs Judy Sampson	Health Sciences	Biomedical Sciences	
Ms Jeanne Dawson	Curtin Business School	Accounting	
Dr Mario Zadnik	Engineering & Science	Applied Physics	
Mrs Joanne Samson	Humanities	Education	

Ms Dianne Budd  
Mr Clive Maynard  
Ms Lorraine Haw  
Associate Professor Owen Watts

Health Services  
Engineering & Science  
Health Sciences  
Humanities  
Biomedical Sciences  
Computer Engineering  
Nursing  
Education

What policies and procedures relating to curriculum and assessment which support communication-in-context are Schools/Faculties developing?

Ms Barbara de la Harpe  
Ms Alex Radloff  
Mr Peter Radloff  
Associate Professor Darrell Fisher

Humanities  
Academic Affairs  
Health Sciences  
Engineering & Science  
Education  
Teaching Learning Group  
Nursing  
SMEC

What are some effective teaching and assessment strategies which support the development of communication-in-context?

Professor John Robins  
Professor Peter Reeves  
Ms Kate Caelli  
Leanda Verrier

Academic Affairs  
Academic Affairs  
Teaching Learning Group  
Teaching Learning Group

#### **Project and thesis writing**

Supervisor perspectives  
Supervisor perspectives  
Student perspectives

Associate Professor Steve Kessell  
Dr Matthew Allen

Engineering & Science  
Humanities  
Computing Science  
Social Sciences & Asian Lang.

**Discipline specific communication skills**  
Improving communication skills in science degrees. Thinking better means better communication: the experience of teaching and learning in Applied Reasoning 200

Ms Tonia Naylor  
Associate Professor Kevin McKenna

Academic Affairs  
Curtin Business School  
Teaching & Learning Group  
Economics & Finance

#### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism: the Curtin context  
Development of a policy on plagiarism in the School of Business

Associate Professor Andy Kirkpatrick Ms Ursula Pantelides	Humanities Humanities	International English Comm. & Cultural Studies	<b>Communication skills support for ESB and NESB students</b> Intercultural Communication units Communication skills units
Dr Ric Lowe Mr George Borzyuskowski	Humanities Humanities	Education Design	<b>Graphical Communication skills</b> Graphics and communication Visual communication skills
Mrs Judy Sampson Ms Alex Radloff	Health Sciences Academic Affairs	Biomedical Sciences Teaching Learning Group	<b>Classroom strategies to improve student communication skills</b> Group learning and oral presentations Peers giving feedback on student drafts: how they do it at Harvard
Ms Cathy Bowen Ms Libby Weatherford	Mursek Mursek	Mursek Mursek	<b>Communication skills at Muresk</b> Communication skills: student needs The Writing Centre
Ms Louise Horgan	Health Sciences	Nursing	Communication in cross cultural settings From Brunei and beyond: facilitating cross cultural communication in Nursing education
Ms Chris King	Curtin Business School	Marketing & Management	Facilitating cross cultural communication in the classroom

# Some Questions about Integrated Communication Skills Programmes

Discussion of plenary panel session: Institutional Practices in Promoting Tertiary Literacy, by Lesley Parker (pp 20-36 of this volume) and Roslyn Petelin (not included in the proceedings).

**Mark Garner**

*Educational Services Unit, La Trobe University, Bendigo*

We have been presented at this conference with a number of very imaginative courses which integrate literacy and communication skills into the academic disciplines. I have been asked to comment on them, and in doing so, I will not comment in detail on their obvious merits. I want to run the risk of playing leader of the opposition, and ask some serious questions. The risk is that, like many an opposition leader, I will seem to be merely sniping and point-scoring. There is nothing I can do about that, except to hope that my sniping and point-scoring may help us to do a little better our difficult job of improving students' communication skills.

I speak from experience with integrated courses, indeed, I introduced several such courses at my own university. Despite all I am about to say, I still believe in them - I think. And let me point out in advance that this is not a carefully argued paper based on painstaking research. I shall refer mostly to courses centring on writing skills, as most of those we have seen of that sort, but my comments apply equally well to oral communication skills. Those comments will consist simply of a few stories and a few questions. They are questions easy to ask but hard to answer, but answer them we must if our work is to be effective.

The essence of integrated courses is to incorporate communication skills into mainstream academic subjects. The subject-matter of the discipline becomes the material on which the students' skills are practised. It is obvious that no-one communicates in the abstract. Communication is always about something, and what better for the students than to communicate about the subjects they have chosen to study? In this way we enhance their motivation and their focus.

Integrated courses also involve subject specialist lecturers. These lecturers need to co-operate with us in reorienting their curriculum, assessment, and teaching. The skills focus alters - one might almost say disrupts - the normal flow of the subject, and requires a very great collaborative effort. We must ask if that effort is well directed.

First, consider the role of the subject specialist in integrated courses. When it comes to communication, the majority of academics probably range from just competent to utterly incompetent. It is rare to find someone who is both an

expert in a particular discipline and an expert at communicating. Most articles and books published in every discipline are not very well written. I know from experience in teaching courses on writing for students of engineering, science, social science, and even the humanities, how hard it is to find good examples of academic writing. Of course, every discipline can point to a few of its eminent figures who are (or were) outstanding writers. But they are not many, and the same writings tend to recur in exemplary anthologies. In case you think I am being hypercritical, try a little test. If you had to provide some first-rate models of writing within your discipline, would you recommend the latest issue of an academic journal? How many of the introductory texts would you recommend as fine examples of clarity and style?

Let me relate a little scene, which I transcribed from memory immediately after it occurred. A first-year primary education student, a keen learner, fresh from a successful teaching round, came to me for help. He had the air of exhaustion, tinged with panic, of one who had to lead a tutorial that afternoon on a reading he had wrestled with in vain. "I just can't get my head round it," he said, rapping himself on the forehead. "I seem to think I'm all right, then I get to this sentence and it all goes blank again." I took the book, an introduction to classroom teaching, and read the sentence, brightly highlighted and surrounded with his desperate handwritten notes:

Effective communication and instruction enhance intrinsic motivation indirectly through their influence on teacher-related, subject-related, and school-related affect.

For just one moment, I thought it was a brilliant stroke. Were the authors emphasizing the need for effective communication by deliberately writing in such an obscure manner? A brief glance through the book disappointed. The whole text was a miasma of deadening verbiage.

With sigh, I translated: "It means that good teaching motivates the students, because they like the teacher, the subject, and the school."

"Oh, is that all?"

"In essence, yes."

His face lit up. "They're right, you know. That's exactly what I found on the teaching round."

Perhaps the saddest thing was that he seemed to feel no impatience that such a simple, important point should be expressed so obtusely. There was no impatient shaking of the head, no cry of "Why can't they say what they mean?" He seemed to have accepted that academic writing is just like that; it's not meant to be accessible to a mere undergraduate.

Whatever the *intellectual* merits of that particular book (or of the journals I have asked you to imagine) it was scarcely an example of the sort of writing we would choose for our students. And the likelihood is that the subject specialists who will collaborate with us in integrated skills courses will write (if they write

at all) in much the same way. To some extent, this is perfectly understandable. It is a rare gift to be able to detach oneself from the meaning of a text enough to notice the language by which that meaning is expressed. But unless our colleagues can do so, and can express themselves in a sufficiently exemplary way, their participation in our courses may have quite the opposite effect to what we hope.

The situation can be even worse. Some years ago, I was asked by the staff in one of our major medical faculties to help design a course on communication. Some members of the faculty felt that too many medical graduates lacked the interpersonal skills which are vital to successful medicine. Our planning was well advanced when a very senior member of the faculty, an eminent surgeon, stopped us dead. There was no room in the crowded medical curriculum for such distractions, he told us. The solution was quite simple: "If any of the students want to learn about communication, just tell them to follow me on one of my ward rounds." I am sure I do not need to tell you that it was precisely his type of brusque, condescending approach to communicating that the more progressive members of staff were hoping to avoid in their students.

It is bad enough if the academic staff we try to involve in our integrated communication skills courses are themselves not good models of communicating. But what if they imagine they are? It may be worse for the students to be taught by such self-confident but inept people than to have no specialist teacher at all.

There is yet another problem. Recently, at a seminar on postgraduate supervision, the issue was raised of the role of the supervisor in developing the student's writing ability. I pointed out there is no particular reason why a supervisor - even one who is a good writer - should be able to teach students how to write: even many professional writers can't. It seemed to me, during the discussion that followed, that nobody quite understood the distinction. The assumption is widespread that being able to write implies being able to teach others to write. Not long before, a science lecturer had asked me to help him with an honours unit, *Writing in Science*. A senior colleague of this lecturer objected. "Why should you have to spend your time doing that?" he asked me, "He's one of the best writers in the faculty."

So we cannot simply assume that collaboration with the subject lecturers will result in good communication courses. What if they are themselves not good communicators - and, worse, what if they imagine they are? In any case, why should we assume they will be able to teach communication skills? The most sensible approach may be that taken by the head of Engineering at my own university. After an unsuccessful attempt at involving one of his staff in a report writing course I teach in the department, he said to me, "Look at it from an engineer's perspective. If we need a specialist job done on site, we sub-contract an expert; we're not interested in doing the job badly ourselves. You're the expert: we'll sub-contract you."

Now for another little vignette. It takes a bit of stretching to make this one fit the question I want to raise, but it's such a good story that I can't resist using it. A few years ago, a student came to me for help. He was worried because he was

becoming so stressed in the weeks leading up to the exams that, so his friends told him, his personality changed. He became argumentative and aggressive, impossible to get along with.

I talked to him about relaxing. Had he any hobbies; did he like listening to music, going to films, reading? Did he like sport? No, to all of them. Trying another tack, I asked if there was any way he had of releasing his aggression. A sauna or spa? What about vigorous physical activity: long runs to get rid of pent-up emotion? Did he visit the gymnasium and lift weights or hit the daylights out of the punching bag? I struck a chord. Yes, he did visit the gym, he said, every week: to judo classes. Didn't judo relax him? No, he didn't know judo himself. Then why did he go to the classes? To teach them meditation, he said.

At last! "Well, there's your answer," I said. "Meditation is an excellent way of coping with stress."

"Oh, no, I only teach it for the money; I think it's a load of rubbish."

This is another issue we have to face. What if our academic colleagues teach writing, as it were, for the money, but actually think it's a load of rubbish? In case you think this improbable, reflect for a moment. How seriously are communication skills courses regarded by staff - or students? How highly regarded, as academics, are those who teach them? If you gain the collaboration of a subject specialist, is it more likely to be the professor or a young sessional tutor? How many academics would drop one of their specialist units to work with you?

Of course, very many academics deplore the standards of literacy among students. Quite a few are pleased when they hear that a course in communication skills is being offered. I suspect it will be along time, nonetheless, until these courses are regarded as anything more than a regrettable evil, until they are seen as a proper scholarly activity, worthy of serious academic attention.

I come to my final little scene, and the doubt it raises in my mind. I began my academic career twenty-odd years ago as a lecturer in language studies for trainee secondary English teachers. The English Education world had just discovered the wonders of language across the curriculum. It was an exciting discovery. "Every teacher an English teacher" was our catch-cry, and we showed how communication and language skills could be, should be, and would be taught through every possible subject in the curriculum. Books were published; conferences flourished; academic reputations were made. I was at an international conference of English teachers, listening with fellow converts to a paper on language across the curriculum. In the discussion, someone said, "I'm a primary teacher, and we discovered integrated language skills programmes years ago. They've even started going out of fashion now. Why is secondary education so far behind?"

I have a niggling worry about my present involvement in integrated skills courses at university. It is that, very soon, in a conference just like this, a secondary

teacher will stand up and say those same words. And, in twenty years' time, shall we be looking back at the nineties and saying, "Oh, integrated programmes were all the rage then; we do things differently now"?

These, then, are my stories, my doubts, and all but one of my questions. I have no doubts about the way in which these programmes we've been shown here are designed. On the contrary, I wish I'd thought of them myself. They are the result of tremendously hard, collaborative and imaginative work by many people throughout the institutions concerned. But there are questions needing to be continually asked - and answered.

Integrated courses draw on reserves of goodwill, skill, dedication, energy, and usually money, and this reminds me of one more question, with which I shall finish. In the scramble to fill quotas and ensure funding, our universities are admitting students with ever lower entry scores. It is because of these students, in the main, that there has been so much emphasis on developing communication skills courses in recent years. To be sure, we know from studies that there is no direct correlation between entry scores and success at university. We also, nonetheless, know from experience that those with low scores are more likely to be unmotivated to learn, more likely to be unsure why they are at university at all. They are less likely to bring to their studies the critical mass of background knowledge and understanding that is essential in a good university education.

Those of us who advocate integrated skills courses have to make a decision, one based partly on economics, but, more importantly, on ethics. At what point should we tell our university administrators that it is both uneconomical and unethical to admit students whose chances of passing are remote, and then to devote enormous efforts to trying to help them to pass? Is there a point at which it is proper to allow a form of natural attrition to occur? When do we say that these wonderful programmes, of the sort we've had demonstrated to us here, are simply not justifiable?

Or will that time never come?

# Which Thesis Did You Read?

**Barbara Kamler**

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**Terry Threadgold**

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We have observed over the past twelve months an increasing tendency for examiner's reports on higher degree theses to award radically different and often incompatible results to the same thesis. The problem is not entirely new but it does seem to be becoming more frequent. In this paper we will attempt to make sense of some of the reasons for these incompatible readings, making reference to the examination of theses in at least two disciplines and at different universities. We will suggest the need for more task specific criteria and a better theorised postgraduate pedagogy.

Our paper emerges from the increasing concern we have both had with the large numbers of contested PhD results we seem to be seeing, with the unhappy supervisory relationships we see around us, and with the damaged people we see emerging from these relationships.

We want to begin by saying very firmly at the outset that neither of us believe PhD Supervision is or should be a soap-opera. But by the time we have finished, we hope our use of that metaphor in this paper will prompt you to think about aspects of the process of postgraduate supervision, thesis writing and examination that you may not have been thinking about. In fact, we think it's very easy not to think about the problematic aspects of PhD examination when these processes are obfuscated, as they are, by contradictory bureaucratic, commodity, quality and Oxbridge derived discourses about what these processes are or should be.

In preparing this paper, we have had access to a large number of paired conflicting examiner's reports, from a wide range of disciplines in the Humanities - English, Cultural Studies, Women's Studies, Education, Sociology and Anthropology - and from a wide range of tertiary institutions in Australia. Because issues of confidentiality and ethics make it difficult to use such materials directly, we have, in what follows, constructed our examples and our stories. We have modelled the grammar, genre and rhetoric of the originals, and we have used a collocation of actual stories to make the supervision and examination story we will perform for you later in the paper (complete with music). We can only promise you that the real stories we have been told and have documented are every bit as convoluted and difficult as the one we have written for your benefit.

Our concern here is not with the student's literacy problems - although many papers could be written around that. Such papers would have to explore the

demographic changes in recent years of the postgraduate population in Australian universities, the fact that class, race and gender are now issues in that space, as are the much larger numbers of women students, interdisciplinarity, and the vulnerability of overworked and underpaid staff both as supervisors and as examiners. Our concern, rather, is with our literacy - with policy that never addresses the right issues - with all the things we no longer know or know only imperfectly given all these changes. We want to make the following points at the outset of this paper:

1. Doctoral supervision and examination is pedagogy, it is a process of teaching and learning.
2. We actually have no postgraduate pedagogy - what we have is the inheritance from a colonial past - the British Oxbridge system of the research doctorate, and many staff whose only training to do supervision and examination comes from their own experience of supervision and examination within that system.
3. Our commitment to confidentiality and 'objectivity' in the PhD examination process needs to be rethought in more complex ways which call into question traditional models of postgraduate supervision.

### CONFLICTING EXAMINER'S REPORTS

To explore in greater depth the issue of PhD examination, we present two conflicting examiners reports which prompted us to ask the question: Which thesis did you read? As you read excerpts from these reports you must keep in mind that Examiner A and Examiner B actually read the same thesis.

#### Examiner A

It is rare to be invited to examine a thesis which proves pleasurable as well interesting to read, but Ms. X's work prompted both responses. It is very impressive and shows an immensely thorough knowledge of the texts under discussion, while drawing on a widely varied range of scholarly background material in support of its arguments.

One of the great strengths of this thesis is the way Ms. X examines this apparent discrepancy by exploring the writer's stratagems for asserting her role as a writer in a phallogocentric society.

The entire thesis, however, is full of illuminating insights.

The observation on page x that y is a characteristic of all textual examples is a good one, but I think it is also interesting to consider other contrary examples.

There are one or two other points which could perhaps be qualified a little.

The point made on page x of the thesis is very interesting and in most cases accurate.

Ms. X's discussions of B's debt to C's theory is important and useful.

Ms. X has succeeded admirably in the task she has undertaken. I strongly commend her thesis and hope very much she will publish her findings either in the form of a book or of journal articles.

## WHICH THESIS DID YOU READ?

### **Examiner B**

As I cannot give a positive reply to any of the questions listed under (1) on this form, I believe I have no choice but to recommend that the candidate be not awarded this degree. This is the first time I have ever made such a recommendation - I am not prepared, however, to see the thesis awarded a masters degree, nor do I believe that any amount of revision would improve the thesis.

This is a harsh judgment and I have not made it lightly.

The candidate's tendency to assume and generalise, rather than question and analyse, is apparent throughout the thesis.

Ms. X uses both her primary and secondary material in too unquestioning and uncritical a way.

She constructs her arguments on limited evidence and so is led into over-general and often incorrect conclusions.

Her own theoretical position appears to be a very naive and essentialist one.

I have several pages of detailed notes but I do not believe this thesis can be revised. I am therefore not going to waste any further time writing these out. There is nothing here fit for publication and no evidence of original or independent thought. There is one sentence on nearly every page that is incomprehensible and the candidate's English expression is poor.

To tease out the differences in these discrepant reports of the same thesis, we can highlight and contrast the use of lexis and modality in the two texts as follows:

### **Lexical Analysis of Examiner Reports**

#### **Examiner A**

rare  
pleasurable  
interesting to read  
impressive  
immensely thorough  
knowledge  
widely varied range  
scholarly  
great strengths  
illuminating insights  
important and useful

#### **Examiner B**

unquestioning  
uncritical  
limited evidence  
over-general  
often incorrect conclusions  
very naive  
essentialist  
nothing fit for publication  
no evidence of original or independent thought  
incomprehensible  
poor English expression

**Modality/Polarity Analysis of Examiner Reports**

<p><b>Examiner A</b>  a good one  but also interesting to consider other  could perhaps be qualified a little  in most cases accurate</p>	<p><b>Examiner B</b>  cannot give  no choice  not awarded  no amount of revision  have not made  do not believe  not going to waste any further time</p>
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Both analyses reveal the construction of sets of oppositional terms. While Examiner A's report is generous with positive evaluative terms (e.g. *pleasurable, interesting, illuminating*) Examiner B's report abounds in negative judgments (e.g. *unquestioning, uncritical, incomprehensible*). When Examiner A wishes to make critical remarks, the language used is modalised (e.g. *perhaps, a little*) and carefully qualified (e.g. *a good one but, in most cases*). Examiner B, by contrast, qualifies nothing and the assertion of student failure is justified and constructed through the repetitive use of negative polarity (*no* and *not*).

While such an extremely oppositional reading of a student thesis is rare, conflicting examiner reports are relatively common (Ballard 1995). Consider the figures taken from the record of one meeting of one university's PhD & Scholarship Committee, which meets every six weeks:

**PhD & Scholarship Committee Meeting Report**

# PhD's satisfactorily completed	17
# PhD's awaiting action arising out of examiner's reports	40
Minor Amendments	16
*Major amendments	1
*Revise and Resubmit	13
*Amendments to satisfaction of dissenting examiner	7
Amendments to satisfaction of head of department	1
Awaiting adjudicator's report	2
* These three categories are the institutional names for the phenomenon of conflicting examiner's reports—a phenomenon which is not explicitly named.	

## WHICH THESIS DID YOU READ?

These figures suggest at the very least that PhD Examination is a contested process and that examination itself is becoming part of the pedagogic process. While universities are beginning themselves to research this phenomenon (e.g. Monash Statistical Report 1993-1995), there is still little useful data available, although it is clear that the effort involved in getting a student through is long and involved and does not simply end when the thesis is submitted. If examiners are now also playing a part in teaching students how to produce a satisfactory thesis, the labour involved needs to be taken more seriously (more so than the \$200 - 240 examiners are paid for what is often a week's work to complete an examination).

We can certainly hypothesise some possible explanations for this increase in contested readings and subsequent revision activity-reasons which are multiple and overlapping rather than simple cause-effect relations. One of these is the increase in numbers of students now enrolled in PhD programs. Leder (1996:5) argues that:

the proportion of Australians completing secondary school and the demands for tertiary places, both undergraduate and postgraduate, have increased dramatically. For example, the number of students enrolled in PhD studies increased from 7,035 in 1983 (Castles 1990) to 13,623 in 1992 (Castles 1995). The rise has been particularly striking for women. Their enrolment almost tripled over that period: from 1,897 in 1990 to 5,123 in 1992 (compared with 5,138 and 8,500 for males in 1983 and 1992 respectively).

Clearly the larger numbers of women in the academy construct a new set of unexplored gender issues (see for example Monash Postgraduate Association Equity Project, 1996; Australian Institute for Women's Research and Policy Report, 1995). The increase in numbers more generally produces a more diverse and variable population in terms of ability and raises new problems in relation to being positioned within white Anglo-Celtic elite culture and the implicit understandings of PhD elite culture. These in turn may contribute to an increase in contested examinations, as might the breakdown of clear distinctions between disciplinary fields and the impetus, for example, to border crossing in the humanities and education as well as to increasing numbers of students negotiating interdisciplinary work rather than locating their work more neatly within single paradigms to which traditional examiners may be accustomed.

Given that PhD candidature has become more frequent and a requirement of an increasingly diverse range of professions, Yeatman (1995:9) argues that traditional patterns of PhD supervision (and we would add examination) can no longer work.

It is simply inadequate to the demands of a situation where many supervisors are barely socialised into the demands and rigours of an academic scholarly and research culture. It is especially inadequate to the needs of many new PhD aspirants who, by historical-cultural positioning, have not been invited to imagine themselves as subjects of

*genius*. These include all those who are marginalised by the dominant academic scholarly culture: women, and men or women who come from non-dominant class, ethnic or race positions. When PhD candidature was infrequent, the rare ones of these could distinguish themselves as an exception to the rule of their particular gender, class, ethnic or class category, and show that by their highly exceptional qualities, they deserved to be admitted as a disciple...Now, however, there is a high proportion of PhD candidates who do not fit the old mould, and whose numbers belie any exceptionalist approach.

In such a context, it surprises us that the rhetorical demands of PhD production continue to be ignored. In most other contexts of education, it is commonly acknowledged that assessment shapes curriculum and needs to be regarded as part of pedagogy. Not so in PhD work, it appears, where the selection of examiners, for example, is often not addressed until the latter stages of thesis production. Thinking about who the examiners are, will/must shape the thesis and a variety of questions related to its production, including what are the interdisciplines it will cross and what tendacious issues it might address and how. Failure to consider such issues seriously may relate to what we perceive as an increase in discrepant examiners reports and to a more general failure in the academic community to regard doctoral supervision and examination as pedagogy - as interrelated processes of teaching and learning.

#### **POSTGRADUATE PEDAGOGY: BEYOND MARKETIZATION AND OEDIPAL DISCOURSES**

In so far as the question of postgraduate pedagogy has been addressed at all in Australian universities, it has been addressed in terms of contractual obligations between supervisor and supervisee (and by implication between those two parties and the university as institution), and in terms of an increased panopticism. This manifests itself as the need to discipline (control) the student's labours in order to categorise and improve levels of research output - so many words in such and such a genre in six months, so many more in twelve - and so on.

There have been similar moves to quantify, categorise and give economic value to the kinds of staff time and energy that might be devoted to the project of supervision - appointments every three weeks of an hour or more, the need for academic staff loads to take account of this, the need again to behave in ways which increase student output or perhaps 'throughput'. That is, the need to keep them moving on the assembly line of knowledge production, because there are others waiting, and because successful throughput means money for the institution. Postgraduate students are worth more in EFTSU dollars than undergraduates and that matters as undergraduate loads are reduced by the technology of DEET and government intervention into higher education; but it matters only for the period allocated normatively for the successful completion of higher degree (e.g. 3 years full-time study, 5 years part-time). After that the EFTSU dollar is lost and so is the economic value of that postgraduate student.

## WHICH THESIS DID YOU READ?

This kind of quality-speak, this 'commodification' and 'marketization' of public discourse as Fairclough called it in 1993, has been typical of the post-Dawkins era in Australian higher education. It has been both 'productive', in Foucault's or Hunter's (1994) sense of producing the things of which it speaks - greater surveillance and control and a recognition of the need to think seriously about what postgraduate pedagogy is or should be - and at the same time amazingly negligent. What it neglects includes many things of importance: the fact that postgraduate supervision and research is part of a process of the making, not just the transmission of knowledge; the fact that that knowledge has both symbolic and cultural as well as economic value (to use Bourdieu's (1991) formation; the fact that any making of knowledge that goes on involves people, people who have bodies, sexed bodies, and that that process is never free of desire, power nor of class, race and gender struggles and inequalities. And even all of this does not yet address the question of just how 'professional vision' (Goodwin 1994) and disciplinary knowledges are actually to be taught, or contested, in these fraught, collaborative and sometimes hostile encounters.

Knowledge cannot be produced without the making of texts and texts always carry the marks, the traces of the labouring subjects who produce them. That labour involves 'work on and with signs, a collaborative (even if hostile) labour of reading and writing' (Grosz 1995:20). This feminist and semiotic formulation is one that should be central to our attempts to understand what we do when we engage in a postgraduate pedagogy. Feminist psychoanalysis has been challenging for a long time now the public face of the 'marketization' discourse, insisting that relations which that discourse would relegate to the private sphere (the somewhere else of domestic or feminised space) actually permeate our educational and indeed governmental institutions as well; insisting that a feminist (or indeed any) pedagogy cannot ignore the sexuality, the unconscious desires, the will to power and the making of the relations of ruling (Smith 1990) and thus of the relations of sexual, class and racial difference, that are made on a daily basis in these very public spaces. What the marketization discourse never allows to be spoken is the fact - not the imaginary but the fact - of these differences in supervisory relations.

Some time ago John Frow (1988) bravely attempted to put some of these issues on the agenda, only to be challenged some time later by Giblett (1992), his PhD student, for the things he had not said, had not managed to move beyond. His failure is itself instructive. What Frow attempted to do was to construct a transference model of postgraduate pedagogy. Giblett (1992) challenged the blindness to gender in Frow's construction, pointing out that he had effectively gendered the supervisory role masculine, assuming that 'erotic' questions (of relations with male students, sexual harassment and so on) would be a problem for female supervisors occupying that 'masculine' role, but never addressing the question of his own sexuality in relation to male and female students.

Giblett's critique was based in the fact that Frow had maintained a transmission model (from male knower to male apprentice) of pedagogy, ignoring the possibility of a counter-transference situation in which the student would know

'that s/he knows but also for the analyst/supervisor to know that s/he does not know' (1992:139). Frow set out to use psychoanalysis to make a radical intervention into questions of postgraduate pedagogy but actually allowed himself to be positioned by an Oedipal scenario which reduced his story of the supervisory relationship to one of the 'oppressive rituals of the patriarchal family' (Gilbert 1992:144). This failure is instructive because of what it tells us about the persistence of that Oedipal narrative as a way of life in Australian universities. In 1993, the Gallop Seminar at ANU tried to address these questions. Lee and Green (1995) have recently published another interesting paper which is beginning to explore the whole issue of postgraduate pedagogy from very different perspectives.

In some ways, the attempt to open up these issues for discussion in the Gallop Seminar Papers founders around the same set of questions: the ubiquity of the Freudian family narrative as both the reality of institutional existence and the only alternative discourse we have for interrogating these relationships - the only major theoretical discourse which gives woman any place at all, even if it is still a place in *his* story. We wish to ask, is there no other position for women in higher education to occupy than that of the desexualised mother or the dangerous seductress? And what of relations between women in those public spaces? How do we theorise and deal with that? On the one hand, as Jessica Benjamin, among others, has argued convincingly (1990:185): 'The social separation of public and private spheres ...is patently linked to the split between the father of autonomy and the mother of dependency.' John Frow is caught up still in that problematic. On the other hand, there is the question of a different model of the mother and of mother-daughter relationships, of different kinds of performances of the relations of ruling among women in the academy:

What if your mother refuses her gaze, turns her attention elsewhere?  
Does not serve as your mirror, your nurturance, your ground of  
continuity of being or of the semiotic, fertile source of aesthetic  
meaning ungoverned by the Father's Law? If she is no longer outside,  
but inside, power? If she wields power not as care, nurturance,  
preservative love, but as assertion, need, desire of her own? Or if she is  
off playing, with other women or men? Or in her own head? Can  
daughters (or your sons) stand to be cut off, outside the dyadic circuit?  
(Flax 1993:67) (our underlining)

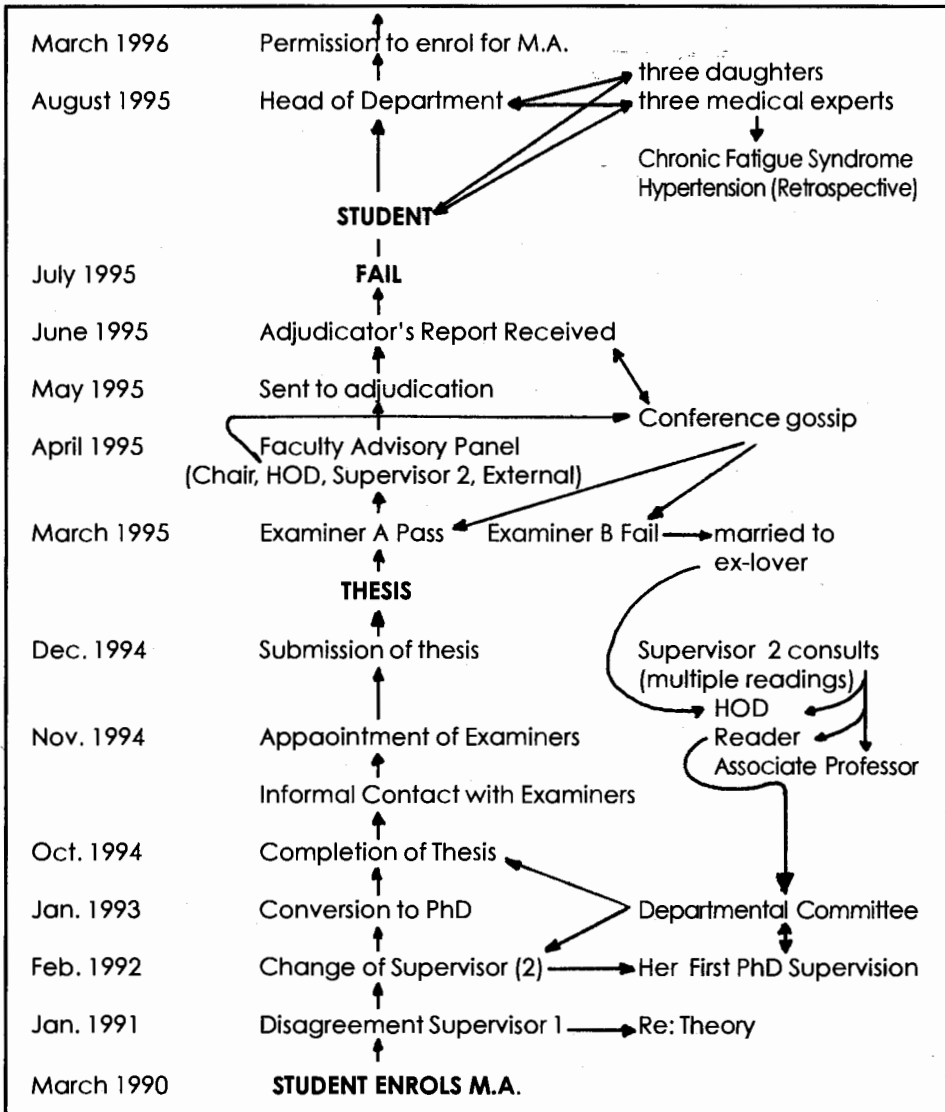
These are good questions, questions that are central to the dynamics of current postgraduate pedagogy in Australian universities, and questions that the essays written for the Gallop Seminar addressed, perhaps without resolutions, but at least in public and as a matter of institutional concern.

A story of institutional failure

Of course, our failure to theorise postgraduate pedagogy has material effects on the lives and bodies of the students we supervise and examine. We can illustrate this by returning to the conflicting examiner reports with which we began our paper and bringing to center stage the student whose thesis was assessed by

WHICH THESIS DID YOU READ?

Examiners A and B. As a consequence of the discrepant readings, a third examiner was selected to adjudicate the dispute and ultimately Examiner B's reading was confirmed and the student was failed. There are many ways, however, to tell the story of her failure. First, we tell it from the point of view of the institution, by outlining the set of institutional relations and procedures involved. These are represented in the diagram below as a linear process with a chronology and a set of institutional practices that mediate and construct an institutional history.



This diagram can be read by moving chronologically and vertically from bottom to top. You will note, however, there is a great deal of activity clustered on the right side of the diagram. These represent traces of the many interpersonal interactions and domestic difficulties, crises of confidence for supervisors, and attempts at counselling (supervisors, students, distressed examiners) that are never recorded in the institutional history.

Because this representation does nothing to illuminate the nature of supervision and failed examination as everyday lived experience, we wish to tell a different story which does not begin and end with examination (supposedly the end point of a long process) and which illustrates what poststructuralist themes of textuality have been about for a long time, including the embodied subject and the power of authority and its violence. While the academy may treat supervision and examination acts as disembodied processes, the micro-context of relationships are never separate from the macro politics and relations of power. Positionings as student, examiner, and supervisor are never separate from gender relations, power, knowledge, authority and the histories of the individuals playing out the game (Ballard 1995).

For issues of ethics and confidentiality, we tell this story again by using many different cases to construct a soap opera - a perfect metaphor with its generic conventions of drama, pain, betrayal, and love lost.

#### **PHD EXAMINATION AS SOAP OPERA**

Any resemblance to real persons or historical events in what follows is purely accidental. We have tried to keep the sexualities ambiguous. Any participant could be gendered in many ways.

A conference is held in a relatively small field in the Northern Territory. Examiner B from Panash University announces to the company at large over dinner that she has just failed the most appalling thesis she has ever read from Pazzazz University. What she doesn't know is that Examiner A and the person adjudicating that result, known heretofore as the Adjudicator, is sitting opposite her at the table.

Examiner B has a great deal of power in the field in which these people work; she influences jobs and reputations. How can we explain such a breach of confidentiality? What is at stake for Examiner B in making such a public statement? What might the effect be on Examiner A (who has just passed and commended the thesis as 'impressive' 'pleasurable' and 'interesting'). Will this gossip have any affect on the Adjudicator's reading of the Examiner's Reports and the dreadful thesis?

**Probably not, if the examination process is objective and confidential.**

**And Brutus is an honourable man.**

Five years earlier, the Supervisor of this dreadful thesis was supervised by Examiner B. Thirty years earlier the Supervisor's HOD and

## WHICH THESIS DID YOU READ?

Examiner B for a brief time shared a lover. What (we wonder) are we to make of the fact that all that time long time ago, when the HOD realised that this lover was not to be the love of her life and ended the relationship, the lover returned to Examiner B and they were subsequently married.

We wonder how such distant events may motivate the readings of a student's thesis and the statement made over dinner. Does it matter that Examiner B and the HOD worked together as graduate students thirty years earlier, shared a lover and are now competitors in their field at rival institutions? We wonder if there is anything at stake in Examiner B from Panash University claiming that Pazzazz University (where the HOD is located) has produced the worst thesis she has ever read. Does it matter that this happens in an era when institutions have become increasingly competitive and funding arrangements have set universities against one another in the marketplace?

**Probably not, if the examination process is objective and confidential.**

**And Brutus is an honourable man.**

Well, what has become of the student? The student is 53. She's been writing this thesis for 7 years. She has three daughters, all professional women. During the course of her supervision with the first time Supervisor, the student suffered recurrent bouts of depression and had difficulties with contemporary theoretical frameworks in her field. How does a first time supervisor deal with all of this? These are pedagogic and emotional issues. Do they have anything to do with the final examination process?

**Probably not, if the examination process is objective and confidential.**

**And Brutus is an honourable man.**

When the thesis is finally complete the young Supervisor wants confirmation that it is actually ready to go out for examination. It is read by her HOD, a Reader and an Associate Professor in her Department. All three confirm that they would see this as a passable Doctorate Thesis. There is consultation about examiners, examiners are contacted informally and then appointed.

Examiner A passes the thesis. Examiner B fails the thesis. Examiner A is now very distressed when he is informed by Pazzazz University that Examiner B failed the student. What does this say about his own judgment and glowing report? He writes twice to the University asking to see Examiner B's report but is denied access. Ultimately, the Adjudicator comes down in favour of Examiner's B judgment that the thesis should be failed.

Remember the dinner at the conference? Remember the love affair? Remember the rivalry? Remember the power relations in the field? Do any of these things matter now?

**Probably not, if the examination process is objective and confidential.**

**And Brutus is an honourable man.**

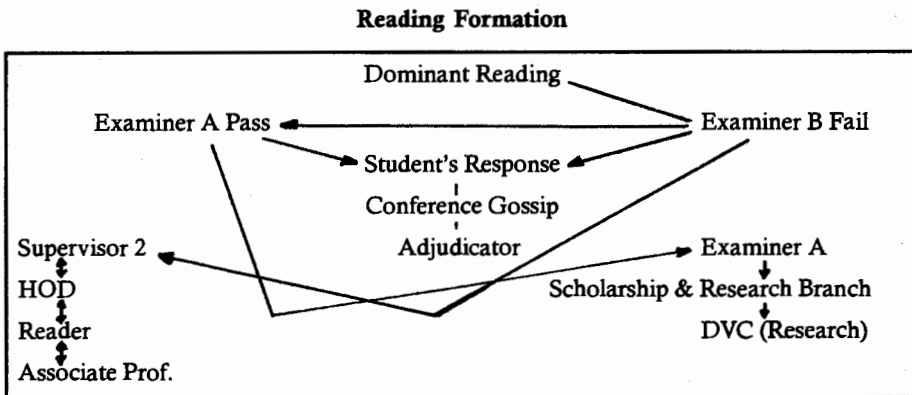
What has become of the student now? Remember her three daughters? In a tearful interview with the HOD, she confesses that she cannot tell her daughters that she has failed. She also produces three medical certificates from three medical different experts now suggesting she is suffering from Chronic fatigue syndrome and hypertension. She asks for retrospective consideration. Can she have it? Should any of this be taken into consideration? A series of University committees decides NOT.

One year later the Student reenrols for a Masters Research Thesis. A third Supervisor is appointed. And the story continues.

### READING FORMATIONS

Cultural studies and recent work on readership has taught us to see the reader as empowered, a nomad, a textual poacher (de Certeau 1984). In fact, the story we've just told seems to us to demonstrate that within the academy there are enormous constraints on readers. We are not the nomads we are made out to be. Dorothy Smith's (1990) work on organisational discourses has demonstrated in a sociological context the way in which discursive conflict of any kind produces problematic readings always related to hierarchical power relationships. What she has demonstrated is the power of dominant readings to inflect all those which have less power than it. A dominant reader quite simply counts more than other readers. That power is granted to a dominant reader, in the case of PhD examination, by our institutionalised belief in objectivity and confidentiality.

In the diagram below, we represent the reading formation (Bennett 1993) that we see as having governed the outcome for the student, whose story we have just told you. In this case, as we have constituted it, the 'Dominant Reading' is the reading of the thesis produced by Examiner B, who was the most powerful of the people involved in this complicated scenario.



## WHICH THESIS DID YOU READ?

What is important here is that there is a sequence of readings involved and that sequence has powerful effects. Examiner B's reading calls into question the reading of a more junior colleague in the same field, Examiner A. The Adjudicator, who was appointed to decide between the two examiners and is inevitably situated in the same field, is also more-junior than Examiner B and has been a party to the conference gossip where Examiner B gave a 'public reading' of her reading of the thesis. Both Examiner A and Examiner B's reports on the thesis inflect the response which the student is entitled to make to their reports for the Adjudicator.

In the story we are constructing, Supervisor 2 (the supervisor who took over when this candidate upgraded to PhD) is a former student of Examiner. Supervisor 2's reading, then, is also now called into question. (Remember she had to approve the thesis before it could go out for examination). However, Supervisor 2 did not read alone. She had concerns about the thesis because it was her first PhD supervision and she asked her Head of Department, a Reader and an Associate Professor in her department to read the thesis before it was sent out to examiners. All agreed that they would pass the thesis, but now their readings have also become suspect.

The Adjudicator who has to decide the case is already faced with a number of conflicting readings: Examiner B's report, Examiner A's report, the Student's read response to those reports and the Adjudicator's prior relationships to Supervisor 2 (a colleague) and the Head of Department (also a colleague). Despite this, she comes down in the favour of the reading of Examiner B and fails the thesis. We remind you that Examiner B is very powerful in the field in which the Adjudicator works.

Meanwhile, Examiner A, determined to vindicate her reading, writes to the Scholarship and Research branch at the University demanding to see the other Examiner's report. This request is passed on to a Deputy Vice Chancellor who refuses this request on the grounds of confidentiality.

What we are trying to demonstrate, then, is the role of reading formations in understanding the impossibility of an 'objective' or 'confidential' reading in the kind of scenario we are presenting - a scenario which is more common than any of us would like to believe.

## CRITERIA AND EXAMINATION

The difficulties we have discussed in this paper have a great deal to do with the current absence of any real postgraduate pedagogy (Lee & Green 1995). Contrary to some popular opinion, supervision is more than 'talking in the office' and examination is more than objectively reading against predetermined criteria. The criteria for a successful doctorate thesis, as currently set out in instructions to examiners' documentation from most Australian universities, give examiners a small number of alternatives. They may pass the thesis, ask for minor amendments, ask for major revisions or they may fail the thesis. The grounds on which they are to make these decisions are flimsy at best. They are asked, for

example, to decide whether the thesis is original /independent work - a peculiar concept at best in a poststructuralist context and one that harks back to a British masculinist transmission model of the creative individual as independent scholar.

Nowhere does anyone attempt to define what originality might mean now in the kinds of contexts we have discussed above. Noone seems to have noticed that it is no longer British boys who are writing doctoral theses, that there are many more doctoral students than there used to be, and that originality in this context is highly unlikely and independence improbable, given the close dyadic, one-on-one supervisor relationships we now work with. Independence is also unlikely if the degree is to be completed quickly and efficiently, in line with the current quality and economic arguments shaping university cultures.

Both concepts (independence and originality) are actually contradictory with and detrimental to the idea that the supervision and examination process is a teaching and learning process. We suggest that a 'coproductive relationship' of the kind suggested by Alison Lee (1996) offers a much better model for theorising what supervision might be about than anything currently available. The other criteria which is always inevitably mentioned to guide examiners is publishability. That too seems to us an extremely problematic criteria given publishers' attitudes towards the publication of PhD theses. They usually run a mile. If we really want to teach students to write in ways that are publishable, the typical 80,000 word thesis is not the way to begin.

We note some recent attempts by universities to do a rather better job with setting out criteria, although to date we have come across these only at Masters and Honours level, not at PhD level. The criteria, for example, which Murdoch University currently uses for its examination of its Masters in Literature and Communication examination seems to us to be particularly helpful:

...Examiners should take into account the specific methodology, theory or paradigm of research in which the student is working - and the student should be judged on those grounds. That is, examiners should not find fault with the approach which the student takes to the topic, but should examine the dissertation in terms of whether or not (and to what degree) it is a competent application of that particular approach.

**Criteria:**

1. *Subject Content*

- adequacy of the candidate's conceptual understanding of the approach to the topic and the topic itself;
- evidence of a thorough, critical and discriminatory review of previous material in the relevant field of inquiry.

2. *Competence in research*

## WHICH THESIS DID YOU READ?

- execution of the project and analysis of the results;
  - interpretation and discussion of findings.
3. *Presentation and quality of the dissertation*
- organisation of the text;
  - layout
  - clarity of style (including spelling, grammar and syntax);
  - correctness of referencing techniques

These criteria seem to us to be a move in the right direction, particularly in an interdisciplinary context, because of the way they focus on what the student has actually set out to do, rather than what the examiner might have liked the student to do. They are also quite specific about the ways in which things like subject content, competency in research and presentation are actually to be assessed and provide a model for more useful ways of giving direction to examiners.

At the moment such specificity, as is available institutionally, is not much help. In the case of all the institutions we examined, there was a vast amount of information for both students and examiners about how the binding, presentation, width of margins, commas should be organised, but little real guidance for the student or examiner on the content and form of the thesis. While we recognise the problems about specificity with regard to the PhD, which is usually a university degree and therefore not faculty specific, we nonetheless feel we have institutionally resorted to using a great deal of paper to talk about what can be measured, and avoided the more difficult issues. The focus is all on the technical production of the thesis as artefact, as commodity, not the business of its making, the fields it might engage with or the ways in which those engagements might be examined and assessed.

Even if we get the criteria right, however, examiners 'will still need to be examined' (Shannon 1995:14). That is, we first need to theorise the examination process itself and then give people some training in what it is precisely they are expected to do as an examiner of a PhD. It is one thing to argue, as Ballard (1995) does, that we are currently generously admitting a number of scholars to the fields in which we work through the process of examination. It is quite another to actually do this in a deliberate, knowledgeable and focused way that does not damage students in the ways we currently do. We have not mentioned what happened when we delivered a version of this paper at the Tertiary Literacy Conference in Melbourne in March 1996. Immediately after the paper, we were mobbed by people who either still were or had been postgraduate students eager to tell us of the horrors that had befallen them in that situation. In subsequent weeks, we received a number of lengthy and equally disturbing narratives in the

mail. This is by no means a rare phenomena. And that is why we have told our constructed story as a soap opera which is equally ubiquitous.

In conclusion, we have some questions to ask:

- Why not course work if we believe it is teaching and learning we are engaged in?
- Why not teach students how to write alternate things - papers and genres of publishable length?
- Why not choose the best person for the job of examination - inside or outside the institution where the thesis is written - rather than assume an 'outside reading' ensures an unbiased, fair, objective examination?
- Why not an oral defence of a doctoral thesis which would at least make examiners and supervisors accountable to the other whom they are 'examining'?
- Why not more dialogue, more negotiation among students, supervisors and examiners and less committees, less rules and prohibitions about confidentiality and objectivity? (remember Foucault's repressive hypothesis - repression is merely reproductive of all the things it attempts to deny)

If we can't avoid the personal, the complexities of human relationships (and who would want to), why not acknowledge them and use them as a resource to make the process of PhD supervision and examination less damaging, less threatening and more realistic and pleasurable for all concerned. Why not teach students to engage in co-productive relationships (Lee 1996) where they engage in thinking, theory and reflective doing, making their academic theories impact on practice in significant ways. That is what they will need to do, after all, in the communities they go to when they leave the academy and we are not convinced that our current system is conducive to producing these 'outcomes'.

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# The Complexities of Tertiary Literacy

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Given significant changes in the composition of their feeder societies, Universities have had to make extensive changes to both their entrance formats and their expectations of student functions within courses. Some of these changes have enjoyed high profile exposure, eg. multiculturalism, technology and gender equality, and have consequently had their associated coping strategies (ie. their 'literacies') formalised in such documents as the Mayer and Finn Reports. This paper seeks to contrast such ability expectations with the subtler but nonetheless significant abilities that are assumed to be natural corollaries of high profile changes but which fail to attract formal recognition. For instance, the generic ability to deal with change, as opposed to dealing with individual changes, is presupposed but is clearly not limitless, as witnessed by students being successful in undergraduate areas but failing in graduate contexts. The types of literacy expected in courses where conforming processes are rewarded is contrasted with that seen as necessary for areas involving a "problem solving" approach, and some of the contributory abilities needed for success are analysed and delineated. In tertiary institutions, the changes affect both staff and students and data will be presented to illustrate aspects of both areas.

Over the last decade or so, not only has our society undergone radical changes; we can immediately think of such aspects as computerisation, multiculturalism, gender equality, technological advances and our shrinking global village, just to name a few; but the position and the role of tertiary institutions within that society have also experienced extensive changes. In Australia, we have gone from a three tiered structure to two, participation rates have increased enormously, overseas student access has exploded and funding procedures have changed significantly, much greater emphasis now being placed on private sector contributions and to universities making their own commercial way in the world, rather than being almost entirely provided for by government.

These changes have had to be dealt with by the adoption of sets of "coping strategies", which should fit comfortably within current views of critical literacies, given that our view of literacy encompasses the ability to deal with changing environmental demands, including those related to language and communication. However, considerable difficulties have arisen in various aspects of the implementation of these coping strategies, due largely to misunderstandings of the role of the strategies and of some of the implications of otherwise well meant initiatives.

Significant sections of change for tertiary institutions have been attributed to the policies implemented by the former Federal Minister for Education, John Dawkins. In his introduction to the 1991 national policy document Australia's Language: the Australian Language and Literacy Policy, Mr Dawkins stated that:

Global economic forces are demanding changes in the structure of Australian Industry, in our ability to compete in world markets, and in our readiness to adapt to new jobs, new career structures and new technologies. These changes will require new skills in communication, understanding and cultural awareness, in the workplace as much as in the international marketplace. They will also place added pressure on our education and training systems. (Dawkins, 1991, p.iv)

Most of us who have been involved in these changes can attest to the minister's powers of understatement.

As a result of the policy responses to these global forces, Simon Marginson observed in 1993 that "Education is becoming a marketed economic commodity (or rather a number of different commodities), especially in post-school institutions" (Marginson, 1993, p.172). But he then went on to point out that the "OECD notes that 'there can be little doubt that the ways in which higher education institutions receive funds affect their incentive, and hence influence their internal organisational behaviour and the composition of the academic services they provide'" (OECD, 1990, in Marginson, 1993, P.179) He further labours the point by highlighting some of the almost incredible figures of income earned by tertiary institutes from overseas marketing:

\$100 million in 1988 and \$174 million in 1989. Revenue generated by English language courses reached \$58 million by 1989. In 1990-91, full-fee programs between them generated \$392 million in the sale of educational services and another \$270 million in the sale of other goods and services to full-fee students. By 1991, six higher education institutions were listed among Australia's top 500 exporters. In 1992, Monash University was earning \$40 million dollars a year from international students, representing 12.5% of its budget. (Marginson, 1993, P.187).

The enormity and speed of this stimulus for change then may offer some indication of the reasons for the difficulties of implementation.

Because the stimulus for change has been seen as being global in nature, the search for coping strategies has also been global, and Australia's current investigations into the Outcomes and Profiles template for schooling emanate partially from Great Britain's efforts to introduce a National Curriculum as a result of the U.K. Educational Reform Act of 1988. A similar process has occurred in New Zealand with the introduction of the Achievement Initiatives, particularly that in English Language, and Angela Scarino has recently commented on similar activities in America, both between co-operating states and, in particular, in California (Scarino, 1995). However, none of these innovatory procedures have run smoothly (some may consider that to be an understatement, as well). Major concerns have arisen

over day by day aspects such as workload, assessment procedures and the complexities of some of the categorisations involved. The emphasis on such observables as performance indicators has caused their role to be disproportionately elevated; Scarino suggests that "There is a danger that the outcomes will be accorded ontological status" (Scarino, 1995, p.10) and certainly it is very easy for such tangible and identifiable behaviours to come to represent entirely the intangibles of cognition, development and ethical principle.

However, Outcomes Based Education (OBE) appears to have considerable appeal for commercial interests in our community since it attempts to delineate specific abilities of a prospective employee rather than offering an averaged scaled number. In 1995, the Hunter Valley Research Foundation conducted a survey of Newcastle area businesses, inquiring about the suitability of university graduates to fit readily into the workforce. One of the major criticisms was a deficiency of literacy skills, which those surveyed indicated should be overcome by university lecturers being more punitive of "errors" in submitted assignments. This recommendation has had little effect on lecturers at our university who are under the firm belief, supported by research investigations, that such red-pen penalty procedures have little effect on students' literacy performances. Already we can see a tension here that is central to the process of change. Although tertiary institutes in general are trying hard to serve their communities (admittedly often with ulterior financial motives in mind) it can readily be seen that the server and the servee are starting from different viewpoints on how literacy can be achieved.

OBE also makes some claims to having educational value in that it has "the perceived potential to minimise the notion of failure (McGhan, 1994) and a focus on learning accomplished rather than on time spent to achieve learning success (Haas, 1992)" (Eltis, 1995, p. 20). Certainly, the Federal Government has indicated its faith in the process; in January 1993, the then Minister, Mr. Beazley announced the provision of \$20 million over the next three years to support the development, trialing and evaluation of the Mayer Committee key competencies in Australia's general and vocational education and training systems. A letter to Universities from DEET on 22 December, 1995, stated that "Work is proceeding to develop all the key competencies as explicit learning outcomes. ... It is reasonable to assume that key competencies will be implemented nationally in some form."

This result has horrified large numbers of academics who had thought that such an explicitly OBE approach had been shelved because of the British, New Zealand and American difficulties, and because of the extensive discussion that had taken place in relation to the Mayer recommendations during 1992. These discussions highlighted such objections to OBE as:

- the preference for a 'rational' approach to education as opposed to procedural and critical alternatives. (see Smith & Lovat, 1991 for a discussion of procedural approaches.) Ellerton and Clements (1994) have argued strongly that the performance indicators even of maths tests are not universally representative of supposed cognitive processes.
- the danger of reverting to an assessment based education, with the consequent

de-emphasising of educational processes.

- the risks of partitioning knowledge into a set number of categories; Are there enough categories to comprehensively cover the needs? Are they the right ones? Should skills be separated at all?

Certainly it seems difficult to imagine that the complex inter-relationships contained in the end product espoused by the Christie Report on Literacy, namely the “capacity to build, negotiate and communicate ideas and information both in speech and literacy” (Christie, 1991, p.25) are likely to be achieved through a sequenced set of mechanical outcomes, if, in fact, that is what OBE is to become.

The eight generic “employment related” key competencies identified by the Mayer committee may be briefly described as the abilities to:-

1. collect, analyse and organise information (research)
2. communicate ideas and information (oracy and literacy)
3. plan and organise activities (leadership)
4. work with others in teams (co-operation)
5. use mathematical ideas and techniques (numeracy)
6. solve problems (assess, predict, institute)
7. use technology (operational skills)
8. exercise cultural understanding (tolerance, social awareness).

Humanists may decry such omissions as those relating to artistic awareness, comparative value judgments, ethical or principled behaviour, empathy or emotional understanding, while methodological purists may criticise overlap between such categories as 3 and 4, 4 and 8, and 5 and 6. But are these the only, or indeed the real, objections?

Many community members have criticised the ‘process’ of change as constituting either change for the sake of change or else as political gimmickry involving the need for an individual minister to leave his/her mark on the portfolio. Whether such accusations are justifiable, or are exaggerations for the purpose of supporting a viewpoint, it is undoubted, as claimed in the opening paragraph of this paper, that radical change is occurring in our society, and that one of the major skills that society members need is the flexibility to cope with that change. Surprisingly, this ability itself is not mentioned among the qualities that the Mayer report sees as being essential for a literate, contributing entrant to our society.

This ability to change is, in itself, a complex procedure, but one of its bases seems to be the fact that humans cannot undergo complete change without retaining traces of former habits and attitudes that have previously figured in our existence. Thus, notwithstanding the logically contradictory nature of the process, we tend to change by still retaining features of the standpoint that we have moved away from. In fact, such conservatism is a basic, though sometimes subtle, feature of change. To illustrate, it seems evident that our tertiary institutions have been adapting

to many of the recent major changes in communal expectations that have faced them, admittedly with varying degrees of success. A recent Masters degree thesis at Newcastle University examined the attitudes and practices of university lecturers assessing NESB students on tasks requiring English literacy skills. The findings indicated that, although lecturers expressed strong opinions about literacy inadequacy in the submissions of NESB students, they were generally not prepared to fail those students because of their shortcomings. Thus, in practice, some elements of variation in standards became evident, wider tolerance being allowed for students who were not native English speakers. However, few lecturers were prepared to state this in discussing their opinions of overall literacy variations among a changing student population. Thus, in theory at least, lecturers seemed to believe that they were protecting 'standards' by being flexible with NESB students' work (Wilson, 1995). While they are not completely changing horses in midstream, they seem to be trying to guide the new horse while still retaining a firm grip on the old.

A further example occurred recently when a thesis was externally marked by two assessors, one of whom is a currently practicing head of an applied language centre, the other being an academic who retired about ten years ago but who still remains active in academic research. The former marker awarded the thesis a distinction while the latter opted for only a pass, one of the prime criticisms of the latter being that almost a third of the references were to government documents rather than to academic works. The significant influence exerted by government documentation in daily practice, particularly in relation to Literacy and NESB students, has clearly been recognised by the marker who is still practising, but the value of the priority formerly held by academic works have clearly been transgressed in the case of the retired marker. The process of change, then, needs to recognise this sense of loyalty or need to retain some of the old values.

The introduction of OBE however, contains change of a different nature. The possibility of Outcomes Based Education giving rise to outcomes driven procedures involves practices that are directly opposed to many of the liberal humanist philosophies underlying education in our tertiary sector. This has caused polarisation, rather than the type of gradual compromise being seen in the case of NESB literacy. Probably this polarisation is inevitable if we accept as an ever-present factor the need for some loyalty to the old ways illustrated above. It is unlikely that academics will negate the deeply ingrained habits of a lifetime and change, midstream, to a horse going in the opposite direction, as OBE appears to be doing; and if the change is instituted in a top-down autocratic way and the beleaguered academic attempts to maintain his allegiance to the old views while straddling the new horse going the opposite way, the best possible of a number of rather horrifying results seems to be for the whole process to go in ever-decreasing circles, an activity not entirely unknown at universities but one which I don't think that we would care to follow to its logical conclusion here.

But what may well be a salient underlying issue here is the potential disempowerment of the academic in favour of the rational, impartial, seemingly objective set of defined outcomes. The suspicion that such outcomes may become absolute and represent in an inadequate way the sets of professional skills currently

embodied in the academic's judgment of his/her subject matter under the different conditions of a changing world is a strong but subtle factor in this proposed change that may be influential in preventing its occurrence. The type of judgmental relaxation of rules illustrated in the Wilson thesis mentioned above would not be possible under a strict OBE approach. This problem has been foreseen by the Eltis Committee who comment that:

if Key Competencies are to be developed in school settings, they must be integral to existing syllabus outcomes, and emerge from such outcomes. The Panel does not support a position that would force any syllabus to fit an externally-imposed outcome or competency. ... Any outcomes of learning must be defined in terms of the syllabus and arise naturally from it. This should be a fundamental principle ... The Review Panel appreciates the importance of developing linkages between the outcomes of schooling and pathways into vocational education and training. ... The Panel has some disquiet, however, about ... the criteria that are being used to judge whether the Key Competencies are being achieved, and how they are being arrived at - in particular, whether their meaning has been fully explored with teachers. (Eltis 1995, p. 75)

In summary, then, it seems that the essence of the problem is, on top of all of the other changes in multiculturalism and computerisation that tertiary institutions have had to come to terms with (and this has meant learning new 'literacies' for lecturers to be able to cope with the changes), there comes another change, partially pushed by our new masters in the world of commerce, who look to such aspects as benchmarking, best practices and performance indicators as their method of assuring quality. If this change is to become effective in our tertiary institutes, its purveyors must realise some of the basics of change, e.g. too much change is too much, and change cannot be total because of the ever-present conservative aspect illustrated in this paper. It is to be hoped that our experience of the process of change in universities will at least have taught us that much. Perhaps, in order to avoid some of the types of total confrontation that have previously occurred between the opposed value systems of academia and commerce, it is up to the changees to attempt to control the process of change. We, who will have to deal face-to-face with the proposed new products of schools, i.e. those students who have learned coping strategies in OBE, (and realistically, those strategies may well be outcome driven) may well have to consider whether our own "frames" of liberal humanism and developmental educational processes are fully appropriate in a ruthless, commerce-driven world, and whether there is any possibility for compromise in incorporating suitable outcomes into our process-driven curricula.

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# Mediating Cognition and Culture: A Pilot Study of the Literacy and Academic Communication Skills of First Year Commerce Students

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The measurement of students' developing literacy and communications skills is part of a larger process to enhance student learning and communication skills at university. Diagnostic literacy tests were pilot tested on 602 first year Commerce students at the beginning of a six-week Effective Communications lecture and tutorial program aimed at 'apprenticing' student writers into the "tribes and territories" of the disciplines. A post-test was applied to 405 students at the end of the module.

Kutz (1986:393) details the power of 'interlanguage' as a means of dissecting and locating student writing behaviours as part of the developmental writing process. This conceptual framework when applied to the diagnostic testing procedure, enables the 'teacher' to "see what there is, as opposed to what there isn't." Overall, students improved their writing skills in the areas of grammatical and text organisation. Further, English native-speaking Australian students improved their skills in this domain more than international students or Australian students from non-English speaking backgrounds. This paper presents the findings of the pilot study. Implications of the study for testing academic literacy skills as part of the curriculum, and development of a discipline based approach to teaching generic communication skills are discussed.

## **LITERACY AND LEARNING - APPROACHING THE INTERSECTION**

Academics, employers and professional bodies stress that there are a number of generic communication skills that students need in order to competently negotiate academic literacy within a particular discipline at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. To compound this there is growing recognition that an increased number of first year students are "either educationally or socio-economically disadvantaged." (Higher Education Council 1992:45), and as such enter university under-prepared and under-skilled in terms of requisite communication and literacy skills (Higher Education Council 1992:45). This

notion of literacy embraces the underlying principle that literacy is a functional technology, a product of discursive practice which can be expressed as a range of literate behaviours. Those inside the discourse are privy to the systemic conventions and features which carry the material markings of the "literate" - those outside the discourse must master this technology in order to enter the 'tribes and territories' of successful discursive writing. (McCloskey: 1994) The literate individual is a construct therefore, of the compromise, conditions and patterns which operate within our institutions. She or he is a product not only of the interaction of institutional compromise, conditions and patterns, but of a capacity to adapt to and critically review changing practice in a changing world. This 'dance' it seems, is performed in relative darkness - little has been done to problematize points of intersection between the literacy specialist and the non-specialist in the process of translating academic literacy skills.

Candlin observes that despite the diversity of approaches used by universities to teach communication skills, the problem of how to diagnose and develop tertiary students' literacy skills remains largely unsolved (quoted in O'Connor 1995: 4). Candlin further argues that the problem has intensified as the proportion of students from non-English speaking backgrounds in the student population has increased (quoted in O'Connor:1995: 4). Since the "Fair Chance For All" credo of the early 1990's, access to education has become the motherhood word as researchers have continued to address issues concerning the thin wedge of access that policy is able to define. Few investigators have moved beyond institutional issues of access to learning, preferring rather to seek out and define performance indicators which serve to dispense access to learning and literacy as a procedural outcome. In essence this means compensating 'needy' students for their unstudent qualities in an oppositional framework which places learning and literacy on one axis and students on another. This in turn translates into an examination of various taxonomies which plot the "good" things about our own culture of academic literacy that do not exist in the everyday literacy of our students.

Academic literacy is not culture neutral. This managerial approach, with its emphasis on action and outcomes fails to adequately problematise the everyday relations in which literacy and learning are embedded. It is the overall patterning of institutions to treat learning and literacy issues as further "crises in educational services delivery" (Smith 1991:7) and to construct a policy imperative which simply charges the institution not to impede the access of minority groups. We therefore see emerging a proliferation of Learning Assistance 'ventures', predicated on a philosophy of self-help and upon a crude analysis of where the educational marketplace is heading. Clearly, the intersection between the social and cultural construction of the pedagogic context and academic literacy skills runs deeper than this. More is needed what is required is coined by Jones (1989:29) as getting inside learner interpretations of literacy and learning as cultural constructions, and to aid and abet student understandings of the socio-political nature and purpose of such constructions. In other words, we need to find a means to 'critically engage' and 'interrogate' our own institutional practices of literacy and learning. (McLaren 1995:18)

Like the meaning of life, this is a complex issue for any practitioner in the literacy field to confront. What is emerging in regard to literacy in tertiary education is a broad anthropological approach (Ballard &Clanchy: 1988:8) which demands that a literacy and learning culture (as well as skills) be made explicit as part of the learning process. There is polarisation, however, around the question of whether learning skills can be taught independently of the disciplines. At one extreme are those who suggest that only the discipline, and the way the discipline is taught, can (re)construct a learning culture (McCloskey:1994) At the other extreme lie the generalists who contend that through the processes of logic, argumentation or problem solving, a common or generic learning culture can be taught independent of disciplinary bases (Perry 1970, Biggs & Collis 1982).

This paper embraces that body of literature which advocates that literacy skills should be taught in the context of the writing that students do as part of their learning in particular subjects. Writing has a focus, therefore, the 'need' to write gives rise to a form that cannot be satisfactorily taught independent of content (Martin & Ramsden 1986; Nightingale; 1988). Form and style are a product of the purpose of the writing task, the direction of the question, disciplinary notions of the appropriateness of evidence and the relevance of methods for gathering this evidence. These are not properties that disciplines hold in common (Ballard 1984; Elbow 1991). It is necessary, therefore, to focus on educational institutions as 'Balkanised' sites of knowledge construction, in which any focus on writing ought to give equal weighting to questions of epistemology. In this regard, Taylor (1990, 1994) dissects the concept of generic skills into two related, but quite separate entities. One area involves the "mastery of pre-defined technologies", such as learning to use computer soft-ware packages, while the other refers to "capabilities" which are "aspects of understanding best practiced and developed in a disciplinary context" (Taylor 1994:27).

If generic skills, and discipline specific capabilities are to be exposed as the culture of the learning institution, then a means of examining these within the lived relations of the classroom is essential. This paper suggests that it is possible to facilitate students' enculturation into the tribes and territories (McCloskey 1994) of the disciplines by making the learning culture of the learning institution as explicit as possible. This paper further suggests that it is possible to quantify and measure literacy skills acquisition at the student level, and to use this as a basic dialogue to create the conditions for students to contest and mediate the academic culture of the disciplines. In critically interrogating the cultural markers of our own academic literacy, we place institutional practices under a microscope and come closer to providing genuine access to them for students learning to write into a discourse.

### **A FRAMEWORK FOR TESTING ACADEMIC LANGUAGE SKILLS**

The present study involves the development and testing of two diagnostic literacy tests within the context of a discipline specific (Commerce) Communications module. The diagnostic tests are part of the initial stage of a broader process of

documenting students' developing literacy and communication skills, and form part of a larger process to enhance student learning in the university context. Prior to the development of the diagnostic tests, the academic staff of the faculty completed a core skills questionnaire outlining their expectations of first year student writers. These 'standards-competencies-capabilities' acted as a benchmark by which student writing and reading behaviours were measured. Our ongoing agenda seeks to legitimise literacy as a point of intersection between the institution and its constituent parts, and involves identifying and defining academic literacy skills; devising ways to integrate these into the curriculum; incorporating assessment of these skills into overall course assessment; monitoring the development of these skills in students and devising intervention and support for students to better mediate academic culture. Systemic linguistics provides the theoretical framework for the design of the test instrument, and, as an analytical tool, best accounts for the "principles of discourse variation" (Elbow 1991:152).

The diagnostic literacy tests were predicated on the belief that the structure and composition of successful disciplinary writing is highly predictable, as long as the purpose and contextual setting of the tasks are clear. Some text and graphical/visual data were supplied as background information to a set topic. These background materials were drawn from conventional daily newspapers and assume a general reading competency.

Students were required to undertake a critical evaluation (reading and writing) of the background information. Reading competency was measured across two criteria (Reading for Understanding - R1; Intensive Reading - R2) using seven multiple choice items and three short-answer responses. Writing competency was gauged from students' written responses (of one page in length) to a set prompt asking for validation or analysis of the background information. Written responses were measured using three writing criteria:

- |      |                                 |   |
|------|---------------------------------|---|
| i)   | <b>Organisational Knowledge</b> | <i>Grammatical and text organisation (W1)</i>                               |
| ii)  | <b>Pragmatic Knowledge</b>      | <i>Use of language to construct meaning<br/>(W2)</i>                        |
| iii) | <b>Discourse Knowledge</b>      | <i>How language reflects and is related<br/>to generic conventions (W3)</i> |

(Bachman 1991).

The second diagnostic test comprised different background materials from those used in the first test. Although the subject matter changed, the second test instrument used the same format and underlying constructs as the first test. The focus of the pilot study was to devise a system of measuring student writing and reading behaviours within an overt discursive framework.

The aims of the project were threefold:

- (i) to develop diagnostic tests for use with undergraduate first-year students;
- (ii) to document students' levels of literacy competency on commencement

of academic study; and again on completion of the six-week Effective Communication module; and

- (iii) to analyse the relationship between literacy competency as measured by the test, and a range of other variables. ---

The notion of literacy relied upon in this project corresponds to the Applied Linguistics view of language ability as consisting of two essential components, namely language knowledge and cognitive processes (Bachman 1991). If we reconcile this with the work of Freebody and Luke (1990), it becomes possible to envisage literacy as a process in which a series of critical events - that is the development of the student as 'code breaker', 'text participant and text user' and finally as a 'text analyst' - enables a strategic mediation of academic discourse as an inherited literacy. Thus the results of the diagnostic tests are to be used as part of a deeper teaching and learning agenda, enabling teaching and teaching support staff to make inferences and predictions about test-taker capacity for using academic language in a context outside the test itself. This is in contrast to the generalised language tests (ASLPR; IELTS; TOEFL) which seek to place the test-taker on the basis of their previous experience of English (and sometimes academic) language. Thus the major consideration emerging from the use of language tests is the extent to which the tasks included in the test device elicit instances of discourse specific language use from which we can make such inferences or predictions.

### **HYPOTHESES - SOME GUIDING QUESTIONS**

A quasi-experimental test design (pre-test/ post-test) was chosen as a framework in which to explore notions of literacy across the cluster of student groupings identified by faculty equity and administrative policies (i.e., Mature-aged students, Local Students, Non-English Speaking Background Students (NESB) and International Students). The labels attributed to these are a product of a university administration which aims to impose an imaginary coherence on collectives of very different individuals. In order to test the apriori assumptions the university makes of its students and their literacy practices, it was necessary to construct some parameters in which to locate the study. These took the form of a set of hypotheses. The following hypotheses guided the present research:

#### **HYPOTHESIS 1**

Local students will demonstrate a higher rate of skills acquisition (i.e., a test one/test two difference) compared with either international or NESB students. More specifically, local students will improve their Organisational skills (W1) and Discourse skills (W3) compared with the other two groups. This reflects a belief that significant skill development in Pragmatic skills (W2) requires deeper learning over a longer period than the length of the teaching and testing program (i.e. six weeks).

#### HYPOTHESIS 2

The diagnostic literacy tests will discriminate between the literacy outcomes of international students, local students who are native speakers, and students from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB).

#### HYPOTHESIS 3

No differences are expected between the reading outcomes of each student group on criteria R1 (Reading for understanding), and R2 (Intensive reading). It is assumed that these skills are functional skills which serve to inform the writing process.

#### HYPOTHESIS 4

The literacy outcomes of non-native speaking students, as measured by the second diagnostic test, will reflect some degree of fossilisation or will have regressed. In other words, international and NESB students' test 2 scores will either be at similar levels as their test 1 scores, or will be lower than their test 1 scores. This suggests that factors such as second language learning and cultural adjustment will impact on student performance.

### METHOD

#### SUBJECTS

The total population of first year Commerce students at Griffith University (N = 602), completed the first diagnostic test in the first week of semester and 402 completed the second test in week seven (see Table 1). The population comprises three groups of subjects. The first group were Australian students from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds. Predominantly, this group was comprised Pacific Island students from Fiji and Western Samoa, and Asian students from China, Vietnam, Hong-Kong, Phillipines, Malaysia, Japan, Taiwan and Indonesia.

The second group comprised 56 international students of diverse ethnic origin. Of the two non-native speaker groups, international students were all recent arrivals of less than two years, while the Non-English Speaking Background students had arrived three or more years before commencing study at Griffith.

The third group consisted of Australian students. Of the local student population, more than half were mature-aged students, defined as having attained 21 years of age or older, or of having relied on mature-aged entry provisions.

As Table 1 shows, there was a large proportion of students who did not complete the second diagnostic test. This was due primarily to the fact that their first assigned essay for the year fell due on the same day on which the second diagnostic test was administered causing a large drop in the number of students who attended the lecture in which the diagnostic literacy test was administered. Thus, only 405 students completed the second diagnostic test instrument (see Table 1).

**TABLE 1: SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS**

Test	Group N/ Mean Age		Sex			
			Male	Female	Male	Female
1	NESB	25	10	15	19.7	21.5
2		18	6	12	19.2	21
1	Internat	56	29	27	23.1	22.5
2		34	16	18	23	22.4
1	Australian	521	259	262	23.1	23.8
2		353	170	183	23	23.1

**PROCEDURE**

The diagnostic literacy test and accompanying questionnaires were administered to all first year students enrolled in the Foundations of Commerce and Administration on two occasions. The first test was administered during the first lecture of the Effective Communication module in Week 1 of semester. The second test was administered in Week 7. On average, the test and questionnaire were completed in sixty minutes during a scheduled lecture time slot.

**ASSESSMENT OF THE TEST**

The diagnostic literacy tests were assessed across the five criteria previously mentioned (i.e., R1, R2, W1, W2, W3). Each criterion was elaborated by banded descriptors, ranked according to levels of performance on a six-band scale (i.e., from "0" to "5"). Lower ratings across a range of criteria indicated a poor competency rating and, hence, a need for intervention. A mark of "5" was achieved when excellent competency was demonstrated while a "0" score indicated an absence of target reading and writing behaviours.

Both tests were evaluated and scored by three experienced practitioners (two Learning-centre staff and one seconded marker) trained in the use of the marking schedule. A randomly selected 30 tests were marked separately by each marker whereupon results were conferenced and moderated to create benchmark standards. Thereafter, every tenth paper was triple-marked to support inter-rater reliability.

On completion of the tests, students were given feedback in the form of a graphical representation of their performance over the five skill dimensions. The information was used to construct profiles on teaching and learning outcomes within the Foundation program. Information was constructed for each skill category and plotted on a simple set of axis for summative purposes for each student, tutorial class and target equity group.

## RESULTS

### DIAGNOSTIC LITERACY TESTS.

Table 2 presents the mean scores for all students on the two diagnostic tests. Overall, students scored higher in the area of organisational skills on the second diagnostic tool ( $M= 2.48$ ) than they did on the first test ( $M= 2.29$ ) ( $t_2= 3.21$ ,  $df = 407$ ,  $p<.001$ ). This indicates that to some extent students have been able to mediate the cultural processes of academic writing, at least to the extent of improving and addressing aspects of text cohesion and structure. The next stage of the analysis was to examine whether particular groups of students improved their skills during the six week period. As Table 2 shows, Australian students improved their organisational skills from the first test ( $M= 2.29$ ) to the second test ( $M = 2.50$ ) ( $t_2= 3.23$ ,  $df = 354$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The approach to teaching embedded in the Communications Module it seems would enable local students to more readily convert everyday literacy resources into the form of cultural production the university both rewards and recognises.

TABLE 2: MEAN SCORES FOR DIAGNOSTIC TESTS

Skill	Test	NESB	International	Australian	Overall
R1	1	3.07	2.67	3.44	3.37
	2	2.94	2.79	3.51	3.41
R2	1	3.53	2.68	3.48	3.41
	2	2.84	3.04	3.41	3.34
W1	1	2.33	2.35	2.29	2.29
	2	2.11	2.53	2.50	2.48*
W2	1	2.22	2.42	2.32	2.32
	2	2.16	2.44	2.35	2.35
W3	1	2.11	2.15	2.13	2.12
	2	1.94	2.05	2.14	2.12

\* This mean is significantly different from the W1 mean shown above it in this column.

Test results did not indicate a change in the level of literacy skills of students from non-English speaking backgrounds nor international students over the seven week communications module. This suggests one of two things - either the Communications module failed to address these students' frameworks or the diagnostic tests failed to detect changes in student writing and reading behaviours. On the former point, Hyde (1994) strongly advocates a teaching approach which focuses on the whole person, and which avoids a narrow top-down didactic approach to E.S.P programs. On the latter point, the six-point reading and writing

subscales contained in the diagnostic tests may have failed to meaningfully discriminate between levels of reading and writing behaviours. Both of these issues will be taken up in the discussion section of this paper, pointing to recommendations for further testing and for addressing design faults with this, the pilot project.

At this point, it is important to note that student self-ratings at the close of the communications module reflected no change in inter-group differences in terms of confidence in completing the writing tasks. This further suggests that student frameworks have not really shifted since the commencement of testing. Any evidence of a behavioural shift - in terms of measurable change in reading and writing behaviours - has been confined to text organisation in local students alone (what Freebody and Luke (1990) may term text-user capabilities). This raises the suggestion that we as educators need to better address and understand the structured, collective cultural interpretations and frameworks of our students in order to effectively transmit a new literacy to them. The cultural production of academic literacy must be understood as the collective use of cultural resources to "positively respond to inherited structural and material conditions of existence" (Willis 1983:112). Only by getting inside student constructions of literacy, can we create the necessary intersections and conditions for successful adaptation and change. Whilst the role of language is not solely that of a change agent in this (a changing) world, it is often the first 'marker' in which the evidence of deeper (non-public) change is presented. Only by getting inside student constructions of literacy, can we endorse the 'writing and speaking back' that is central to forming both opinion and identity as an apprentice writer.

#### CLASSIFICATION OF GROUPS

Firstly, multiple discriminant analysis was used to determine whether the diagnostic literacy tests could be used to correctly classify students into three groups (i) local Australian students, (ii) non-English speaking background students, (iii) international students.

In the first diagnostic test, the discriminant function was significant ('Wilks Lambda' = .89,  $p < .001$ ), and correctly classified 86.07 percent of subjects. Similarly, in the second diagnostic test, the discriminant function was significant ('Wilks Lambda' = .91,  $p < .001$ ), and correctly classified 87.05 percent of subjects. Both diagnostic tests therefore, were good predictors of students' group membership.

#### CONFIDENCE ABOUT ACADEMIC SKILLS

A one-way MANOVA based on the criteria identified by Burns (1994:22) compared the ratings made by students regarding their level of confidence about completing the literacy tests correctly. These criteria included perceived competencies such as skim reading, deeper reading, taking notes, summarising material, writing essays, citing references, using argument, and using grammatical conventions. The MANOVA produced a significant multivariate effect ( $F = 2.44$ ;  $df = 14, 658$ ;  $p < .01$ ). International students ( $M = 3.02$ ), were less confident than

Australian students ( $M = 3.64$ ), and NESB students ( $M = 3.73$ ) that they had completed the first diagnostic test correctly.

There was no change between the groups regarding their level of confidence in successfully completing the reading and writing tasks of the second diagnostic test. In Week One, when the first diagnostic test was completed, international students ( $M = 4.48$ ) were less confident than Australians ( $M = 4.78$ ), or NESB ( $M = 4.89$ ) that they would be able to do the tasks correctly by the end of semester.

When the second diagnostic test was completed in Week Seven, international students ( $M = 3.50$ ) were still less confident than Australians ( $M = 3.91$ ), or NESB ( $M = 4.05$ ) that they would be able to complete the writing and reading tasks correctly by the end of the semester. As the results above show, student self-ratings after the second diagnostic test reflect a more critical and discriminatory analysis of their individual capacity to accommodate the process of writing into a discourse. The Communications module was constructed on the principle that disciplinary languages and writing styles are cognitive, and that cultural constraints - (as it turned out only in the case of the local student population) - can ease rather than intensify student anxieties about writing into a discourse. The diagnostic tests suggest that little has changed by way of reading and writing behaviours in non-native student writers. The value in measuring this phenomena lies in its' capacity to chart the distance between the cognitive absolutism of disciplinary writing and the everyday literacy of our second-language students. The international student population were treated to an intensive bi-weekly workshop program over the six-weeks of the Communications module and were able to demonstrate skills (capabilities) development in terms of Reading for Understanding (R1:Mean for test 1=2.68:Mean for test 2=2.79), Reading for Meaning (R2:M1=2.68 :M2=3.04); Grammar and Text Organisation (W1:M1=2.35:M2=2.53) and in Using Language to Construct Meaning (W2:M1=2.42:M2=2.44). The NESB student sample received no such supplemental teaching support and demonstrated a clear fall-off in performance levels in all capabilities measured by the diagnostic tests. (Refer to table 2) This has clear implications for the nature and positioning of literacy support programs in our universities, and for reconstructing the relationship between pedagogy and academic literacy skills.

#### PREDICTIVE ABILITY OF DIAGNOSTIC TESTS

Regression analysis was used to determine whether students' scores on the second diagnostic test could be used to predict their end-of-semester exam results in two other core modules of the first semester Foundations of Commerce and Administration program (i.e., Law and Politics). Both courses are taught as part of an integrated approach to the area of Commerce and Administration, and offer an insight into the legal and public policy influences that impact upon traditional Commerce areas of study. The Politics module comprises a 10 week study program, whereas the Law module comprises a six-week program. The exam for each module required students to write short essay style responses, to questions and background materials. Given feedback from the Core Skills

Questionnaire completed by faculty staff at the outset of the project, organisational (W1), pragmatic (W2), and discourse (W3) writing competencies are necessary for a competent performance in these exams.

The second diagnostic test was a good predictor of all student results in both Law (beta= .191,  $p < .005$ ) and Politics (beta= .246,  $p < .001$ ). A further step was to determine whether some subscales of the literacy test (i.e., W1, W2, W3) were better than others as predictors of Law and Politics exam results. Two of the writing subscales, (W2 Pragmatic skills: beta = .182;  $p < .05$ ), and (W3 Discourse knowledge: beta = .186;  $p < .05$ ) were good predictors of Law exam results. In addition, one of the writing subscales, (W3 Discourse knowledge) (beta = 2.23,  $p < .05$ ) was a good predictor of the Politics exam results. Clearly, the results indicate that the diagnostic tests are useful as predictors of student performance in assessment pieces in other courses concurrently undertaken by first year students.

## DISCUSSION

### LITERACY - FROM THE TOP-DOWN OR THE BOTTOM-UP?

The present study provides some evidence of first year Commerce students' academic literacy and communication skills development. Results suggest that first year students improved their grammar and text organisational skills during the six week program, and that their perceptions of the culture of academic writing have become more culturally relative and discerning. In particular, the outcomes in local student performances tend to suggest that the goal of gradual apprenticeship into discursive writing has contributed to a shift in the organisation, presentation and cotextual cohesion of student writing in line with faculty expectations. Further, the diagnostic tests were accurate predictors of the Law and Politics exam results for all student groups. It seems that the core skills and competencies that feature in the Effective Communication module are also well represented in faculty exam assessment items, thus validating the authenticity of the diagnostic tests as a behavioural measure of the writing and reading practices in commerce disciplines.

As predicted, local Australian students demonstrated a higher rate of acquisition of Organisational skills (W1) compared with international or NESB students. This provides some evidence that the Effective Communication module is a viable teaching and learning approach for local students - especially in conveying information about sentence, paragraph and text structure and cohesion, and in acquiring discipline specific information. However, contrary to predictions, local students did not improve their Discourse skills (W3) compared with other student groups. Discourse and Pragmatic skills are clearly subject to a more complex interplay between the structural and material conditions of the institution and the frameworks of its' students. One must question the limitations of a writing or communications program to mediate the deeper processes of critical literacy in which the legitimacy of the disciplines and their cultural reproduction can be negotiated. As our students 'write into' our culture of academic literacy, it

becomes essential overtime to further empower these same students (from a variety of cultural backgrounds) to develop their own uses of academic language. In the timespan between tests (1&2) this did not appear to happen, despite some modification of surface writing behaviours. (text structure and organisation)

In terms of the test rubric itself, the spread of test results raises some questions about the sensitivity of the six-point measuring scale employed in the pilot project, and its ability to detect subtle differences in some reading and writing behaviours. In areas related to self competency ratings, local students developed a more realistic assessment of their "academic" abilities as the Effective Communication module progressed, reflecting a deeper awareness of the nature of academic tasks and the demands of writing into and mediating a discourse. This is reflected in test one and test two differences in self-efficacy ratings.

The Effective Communication module was less successful in teaching argument development [W2] to the local group. This clearly emerges as a long-term aim, one which is probably best dealt with in the "tribes and territories" of the disciplines as part of an ongoing inquiry framework. The Communications module aims to apprentice students into a critical framework, where instead of repressing student everyday language complexes, it could use these as a point of contestation, shifting students from a writer-based to a reader-based cognition in order to develop deeper thinking and understanding. To what degree these learning behaviours can be modelled in a six-week module is difficult to ascertain, suffice to say that the more visible writing behaviours (paragraph, sentence and text construction) did show some improvement (refer to table 2). To this end, in delivering the Communications Module, the pilot project may have shifted too far towards a "top-down" approach to teaching academic language skills. In this regard, instead of extending culture-marked students into the realm of academic writing, the Communications Module may have been reductionist in its' approach, and thus contributed to a resurfacing of old 'writing problems' and an adherence (in some students) to the familiar 'dance' of past patterns and habits.

The results of NESB students on each of the writing and reading subscales were lower on the second test than on the first test. This negative trend could suggest that their learning patterns may be increasingly influenced by psycho-social adjustment factors, or that the culture of the university - and its particular set of disciplines - demand a whole new approach to learning. One must question the capacity of mainstream processes to support the learning needs of this student group. In comparison to the test 1 results for local students, NESB students were not readily identifiable as a separate or different sub-group, given the reading and writing outcomes measured by the diagnostic tests. This intergroup difference emerges (with test 2) and indicates a reverse pattern of skills acquisition (a decrease) in core skills (capabilities) for NESB students, in the face of a general improvement for other student groups. In this light, the NESB group are identified as sharing a collective identity and cultural experience. What is important here is not only the fact of different cultural production by race-, language- and pedagogically-located students in the classroom, but also its'

significance in terms of understanding the processes through which the classroom contributes to social reproduction. Further analysis of the anxiety levels of this student group is underway. The results of the pilot study suggest that far greater interventionist support is needed for NESB and international students and that this support be of a particular kind. Rather than acting as the providers of adjunct educational input, teaching staff need to critically engage student frameworks to 'interrogate' notions of literacy, the construction of knowledge, the design of the curriculum, the practice of pedagogy and the omnipresent labor market which subsumes much of our focus, funding and energy. A move towards a recognition of the the whole person/student, involves a consideration of at least this - a bottom up approach.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

A number of limitations became evident in the pilot stage of the project, and can be improved in the next phase of the study. The two diagnostic literacy tests developed for the project need to be refined and further tests of reliability and validity of these instruments need to be conducted. In addition, it may be desirable to redesign the second diagnostic test so that it re-uses a significant portion of the background materials that were presented in the first test (a strict pre-test/post-test design). This would enhance test validity making possible the scope to elicit more detailed evidence about the impact of the module on student skill levels. Consideration must be given, however, to the influence of a practice effect on student results on the post-test instrument..

Further, it may be unrealistic to seek statistically significant changes in students' literacy and communication skills in what is a relatively short period of time. Some of the skills may require deeper learning over a longer period than the length of the teaching and testing program (i.e., six weeks).

Preliminary analysis of the results of the pilot study suggest that students may have found the items used in the second test to be a more difficult test of the core skills than those items used in the first test. For this reason, this test may have interfered with accurate measurement of students' literacy competency. The marking scale used to measure students' results across the reading and writing criteria also may have prevented stronger arguments emerging from the test data. As with many interval measures, it was found that many student outcomes were grouped around the middle of the six-point scale. A wider scale (e.g., an 8-point scale) would allow for more of a spread of scores and, therefore, a more discriminant analysis of student reading and writing behaviours. A complication that arose from testing the entire population of first year students in the Faculty of Commerce and Administration was the disproportionate number of Australian students, compared with the sample of students from non-English speaking backgrounds and international students. For this pilot study, this also meant that some of the students in the first sample failed to complete the second test given that another assessment item (from another course of study) fell on the same day.

#### FUTURE RESEARCH

The next phase of the project involves replicating the study with 100 students who form part of the mid-year intake into the Foundations of Commerce and Administration course. For this follow-up study, feedback from the pilot study will be used to modify the research methodology and to address issues of the reliability and validity. The Effective Communication Module will be refined based on staff and student feedback and the results of the diagnostic literacy tests. Students will be tested on entry to the course (baseline data) as well as at the end of the Effective Communications Module. As an adjunct to this, the sensitivity of the 6 point scale used to measure student outcomes on the diagnostic tests has been reviewed, expanded and trialed as an eight point scale. The goal is to increase the sensitivity of the test items to the range of student writing and reading behaviours, and to reflect more accurate measurement of this response range. This has meant dissecting and discriminating the middle range of the six-point scale, and converting this to a more sensitive eight-point scale.

#### CONCLUSION

This paper offers a case-study of the development of student literacy and communications skills as part of a larger process to enhance first year student learning in the Foundations of Commerce Program. Overall, students improved their writing skills in the areas of grammatical and text organisation. Further, there was a difference in the rate at which local Australian students improved their skills in this domain as compared with international students and students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

The discipline specific approach to teaching academic literacy and communication skills adopted in this project provides a context for evaluating the practice and culture of academic writing in this - a Commerce Faculty. This approach also makes space for the testing of core reading and writing capabilities to detect and reflect changes in student literacy thresholds. The diagnostic literacy tests provide a preliminary basis for measuring literacy competency and indicate some validity as predictors of competent language use in discipline specific tasks (i.e., exams). Clearly, this enables those close to the teaching and learning intersection to make inferences and predictions about test-taker reading and writing behaviours, and their capacity to perform literacy tasks in a context outside the diagnostic test itself. In doing so, this can only enhance our understanding of literacy as a classroom practice. Such an understanding of classroom practice as the complex, structured production of all participants creates the possibility for derivation of a more 'socially useful' model (Anyon 1994) for translating academic literacy to the non-specialist. This model will involve a critical language awareness, and seeks to avoid the traditional 'top-down' approach common to 'wallpaper' models of teaching academic literacy. For this reason the testing process does much to problematise the "dance" between

the literacy specialist and the non-specialist student. The tests have enabled the construction of a Communications module, identification of the core literacy competencies of the Commerce disciplines and have shed some light on the steps certain student groups take in negotiating the darkness in which first year study occurs.

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# How Did We Get a Literacy Problem in Research Articles?

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Researchers are not illiterate by most definitions of the word, yet many are functionally illiterate in that they are unable to write about their research in terms that readers find easy to comprehend. The main cause of this "illiteracy" lies in a persistent misdiagnosis of the problem. Whereas most people and the overwhelming bulk of the published advice about how to write focus on problems within sentences, the real cause lies in the assumptions that authors make when they write an article. In particular, the assumption that the suspense format is an appropriate model is the root cause of many communication problems in research papers.

## **SO WHAT IS LITERACY ?**

To the person in the street, literacy would usually be taken to mean an ability to read and write. Taking this a little further, the ability to read and write would probably be defined more by its absence than its presence. Thus, somebody who could not read the label on a tin of food well enough to understand that the contents were pickled ox livers proudly packaged in the glorious People's Republic of Lower Bulldustistan would be considered illiterate.

By this food-tin definition, everybody who publishes a research article must be abundantly literate because they can obviously both read and write whole pages of sentences. However, if they are really so literate, why does everyone complain that so many research publications are so poorly written and hard to understand?

I have my own definition of literacy and it goes along the lines of being able to make oneself clearly understood in writing. By this definition, many researchers are barely literate, at best. In my own case, I took a doctorate and, on reflection, I think I came out less literate than I went in.

Back in the Dark Ages when I started my career, I did some research and, being ambitious enough to want promotion at some stage in my career, I figured that I had better publish it. So I wrote a manuscript and sent it off to a journal and waited. Eventually, I heard from the journal and, after making some revisions, it was published.

The question of literacy did not enter my head. After all, I had been through

high school and university, and I could make a good sentence, punctuate reasonably well, and spell really well. However, I clearly remember that I had trouble in writing the introduction to that first paper because I had no idea as to what should go into an introduction. Eventually, I got one, but it seemed to be a collection of words that I had to have to separate the summary from the results, rather than something that had its own reason for existing. That alone should have been a signal to me that my literacy left something to be desired, but one of the hallmarks of true ignorance is being too ignorant to recognise ignorance, so I just blundered on. A few years later, I realised that I could not expect my readers to understand what I wanted to say unless I was clear about it myself. I think that that was the point at which I started to overcome my own illiteracy. It was the point at which I discovered the suspense format, and how it corrupts so much of what passes for scholarly writing.

### WHAT HAPPENS IF WE PURSUE THE WRONG PROBLEMS ?

Part of the reason that so many otherwise literate people become functionally illiterate when they prepare work for publication is that we follow the wrong models. There is an old joke about a drunk looking for a lost coin under a street lamp. When asked exactly where he lost it, he points about fifty yards down the road. When asked why he is looking under the street lamp when he lost it somewhere else, he replies that the light is so much better under the street lamp. When it comes to defining the real problems in writing, we often behave a lot like that drunk.

We get trained to read for content, but not to read for process. If we find an article easy to read, do we ever stop to analyse why it is easy to read? Practically never! Moreover, things are not much different with articles that are hard to read. We may be more inclined to analyse the difficulty, but we rarely dig down to the root causes of the problem. Often, I hear people attribute a clumsy style to poor grammar, overly lengthy sentences, inadequate punctuation, reliance on jargon and other sentence faults, but examination of the text shows that the nominal causes are only a small part of the problem. Few authors cannot make passable sentences. Instead, their real difficulties lie in creating a logical sequence of sentences and in building appropriate links between sentences and paragraphs.

Hence, we need to look beyond the individual sentences to tackle the problem. As long as we look only at the sentences themselves and not at the relationships between sentences, we make the same mistake as the drunk. Unfortunately, the error is easy to make. There are many rules about making good sentences. There are rules about agreement of verbs, use of prepositions, punctuation, noun strings, and so on. They are useful, but they are also seductive like the street light. Conversely, the rules for relationships between sentences range from the vague to the non-existent and are hard to fathom like the dark part of the street.

### **AIMING AT THE WRONG TARGET**

Let's extend the metaphor a little further. What would happen if the drunk thought he had dropped a coin, but had really dropped a key? Do you think that his chances of success would improve? Authors do a similar thing because they often misunderstand the purpose of writing and that creates its own communication problems.

Let me illustrate this with two examples. A few years ago, I was at a conference on postgraduate supervision and the subject of doctoral theses arose. Part way through the debate, someone interjected with the question: "What is a thesis for anyhow?" and somebody shot back with: "To get the degree, stupid!". Worryingly, nobody gave any sign that the interjector was only half-right. A thesis is a tool for communicating and one that communicates well will get the degree, but getting the degree is only the by-product of the communicating. Similarly, some years earlier at a workshop on how to prepare articles for publication, I saw one of the participants have a major insight when she realised that her main goal in writing had been "to be published" and that this translated to her as producing something that would take up space on a library shelf. Until that moment, she had never realised that her real task was to write something that other people would find useful to read and that getting it on the library shelf was just a stepping stone, not the end of the journey.

These two examples are just two of many. In each case, the common element has been that the author has been writing to meet the author's needs rather than the reader's needs. Ideally, the two sets of needs should be the same, but it takes only a small diverge to create communication problems. As I explain in more detail soon, writing is marketing, and the art of marketing is to meet a need. Papers that meet an author's ego needs first often leave the reader with insufficient reason to buy.

### **MOST BOOKS WOULD HAVE ENCOURAGED THE DRUNK**

In some respects, most of the books about how to write better have aggravated the problem.

Some have been written by people who, themselves, do not know how to write. That is a worry in itself, but even among the books written by people who are demonstrably good writers, most share the same weakness: they focus on the sentence. They typically give advice that can be summed up as:

Write clearly;

Use short sentences;

Avoid jargon;

Be concise;

Punctuate clearly;

Avoid inconsistencies, and so on.

The advice above is a necessary part of being a good writer, but it is not sufficient by itself.

Unfortunately, because so many books focus so heavily on individual words, phrases, and sentences, they unwittingly create an expectation in their readers that mastery of the sentence will bring mastery of the manuscript. This creates enormous blind spots that stand in the way of becoming literate. To compound the problem, to the extent that such books offer advice that looks beyond the sentence, they all make the same mistake of specifying the destination, but not the route. There is a huge gap between telling an author what to do and showing how to do it. Few books even come close to achieving the latter (Blicq (1987) and Murray and Hay-Roe (1986) are two worthwhile exceptions).

Ironically, much of the effort that is directed at sentences is wasted. The things that trip authors of research articles are rarely things to do with their command of the language. People who can write clear research articles usually know their weaknesses and have found ways around them. It does not seem to matter whether they understand the difference between "that" and "which" or whether they believe "none" to be singular or plural, the real issues in writing for publication lie at a higher level.

#### **AND THE JOURNAL'S NOTES TO CONTRIBUTORS ARE USUALLY EVEN MORE USELESS**

With titles like "Notes to Contributors" and "Guide to Authors", an aspiring author could be forgiven for imagining that these pages which are published regularly by all serious journals would tell the author how to put together an article.

Wrong! The people who write such pages seem to assume that the author already knows how to write an article and just needs to know about the quirks peculiar to their particular journal.

Typically, there will be one or two sentences on the subject matter appropriate to the journal and the rest (sometimes more than thirty pages!) will be about fonts, margins, line widths, journal abbreviations, and all the other things that get copy editors excited but which are totally useless to an author wondering which words to put on a page.

#### **WHERE TO LEARN, IF NOT FROM BOOKS ?**

In practice, few researchers seem to study books on writing before publishing, or, if they do, it is only after they have written an article or two.

So how do people learn how to prepare their first article? Surprise! Surprise! They copy what they read! Given the difficulty of finding satisfactory written advice, the next most rational strategy is to take the holistic approach and try to copy a successful example. And what could be more successful than a paper that has been published? Unfortunately, this strategy is flawed. Not only are

novice authors unable to recognise well-written papers when they see them (Brown 1992), but no two articles are the same, so how is an aspiring author to choose effectively between different approaches in different articles? This is where a good mentor can make an enormous difference for the better, but few of us are so fortunate, so what do we do? This seems to be where the herd instinct takes over. Faced with uncertainty, authors retreat to copying patterns that they see repeated.

To understand the significance of the previous point, you have to accept that there is probably a bell-shaped distribution between the number of research articles written and their quality. The job of the journal editor then becomes one of identifying and turning away the low-quality end and of publishing the rest. What remains is numerically dominated by the mediocre middle, so it is the mediocre middle that indiscriminating novices copy. Moreover, because the mediocre is capable of being published, the fact that it gets published just reinforces the “wisdom” of copying the mediocre. Thus, the cycle becomes self-perpetuating.

The next step is look more closely at the elements of what is being perpetuated.

#### THE PERILS OF IMRAD (A.K.A. THE DREADED SUSPENSE FORMAT)

The scientific method is an indispensable tool in research, but it is a mixed blessing when it comes to reporting the outcomes of the research. Put crudely, the scientific method says: frame your hypothesis, then gather the evidence, then draw a conclusion. I have no argument with that, because it is a logical way to proceed. The problems arise when people try to use the same process to write a paper, because they create a suspense format.

Let me explain what I mean by suspense format. There is a common structure that is embedded in most journal articles, called IMRaD (an acronym for Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion). Some of you will recognise it straight away because you work in a discipline where those headings, or something close to them, are used in the literature.

There is a sequence of information that goes into most scholarly articles, irrespective of discipline. Nearly always, there is an opening section that serves as an introduction. Its purpose is to create a context for a reader and, ideally, this is done by providing a synopsis of what is already known and outlining where the author proposes to add to what is known. Following that will be some information about how the author gathered the evidence to be presented (sometimes this is implicit in the way the evidence is presented as in, say, a review article). After that, the evidence is presented. It may be data from carefully designed experiments, observations from reading published works, the author's own insights, or a mixture of all three. Then follows the analysis of the evidence, either as a separate section or combined with the presentation of the evidence. The last step is then to draw some sort of conclusion.

Once you understand this way of unfolding the story, you can probably also

guess why it is called the suspense format: the critical element is that the question comes first and the answer comes last. (Murray and Hay-Roe (1986) call it the biblical format because it starts at genesis and ends in revelations.) It has a strong logic to it and is such a common approach that most of us use it without giving it a second thought.

However, it is also the formula for the detective novel (set the scene of the crime, lay out a trail of clues and red herrings, then bring the whole to a surprising conclusion) and therein lies the problem. The suspense format is tolerable for short documents, but becomes progressively less satisfactory as the length increases. This is because the scope for the reader to get lost or confused increases exponentially with length, so it becomes increasingly less appropriate to expect readers to wait until the end to discover the answer.

None of us read everything that hits our desks. There is simply not the time, even if there was the inclination. Moreover, our readers are no different. They read to be informed, not mystified, so the first step in being literate in writing research articles is to realise that the task is to inform readers clearly, unambiguously and without delay and, to do this, you need to take a marketing approach.

When you offer an article for publication, there is an implicit claim attached to the article. That claim is that you know more about the topic than anyone else in the world and that you know enough to be able to provide an important addition to knowledge. In effect, there is a claim to expert power, but it has a dark side. It is easy for an expert to fall into the trap of thinking: "there are the facts, understand them if you are clever enough." That sort of thinking is more common than you might imagine, although it is often unconscious. Moreover, that sort of thinking blocks successful marketing.

## WRITING IS MARKETING

When you write for publication, you enter a competitive market, not just for space in the journal, but for your readers' time, and that is why marketing is so important. The only person who will read an article just because you happened to write it is your mother (and perhaps not even then). For everybody else, reading your paper is an optional task. You are competing not just with other papers, but with writing a grant proposal, taking the kids to sports practice, watching television, revising last year's course notes, and so on. You have to present the reader with a reason to read, not just rely (as many do) on the naive belief that good information will automatically find its market. Above all, you have to understand that the fundamental rule of marketing is that people do not buy goods and services, they buy benefits. (Ries and Trout (1986) provide an excellent, easy-to-read digest of this topic.)

People will not read your article just because you happen to have assembled a lot of data. In a sense, your data is irrelevant to your readers. Readers do not need to know about the data itself, they need to know what you think the data

means, and more importantly, how they can use your insights to understand their own work better. In short, a reader has to be able to see some sort of likely benefit in your article before being willing to invest time in reading it. Moreover, that benefit has to hit readers between the eyes as soon as they see your document. Practically nobody will cruise through a document that presents no obvious benefit on the off-chance of finding something useful tucked away inside it.

So the task then becomes one of deciding what the benefit should be and this is usually easier said than done. I find it helpful to think of the benefit in the following terms. Imagine that you have just placed your manuscript in front of your reader, but, as soon as the reader sets eyes on it, it bursts into flames. Also imagine that the copy you have just put in front of your reader is the only copy that they are ever going to see. So far, things seem grim, but now imagine that a kindly leprechaun intervenes to offer you the chance to place inside your reader's head the one thing that you would most like your reader to have remembered had that reader been able to read your whole article. Your task is to decide what that one thought should be and it becomes the benefit that you want a reader to get from your paper. Writing your article then becomes a matter of putting the benefit up in neon lights for your readers.

So far, it probably all seems simple and obvious, but, like most advice, it is far easier to give than to apply, so I shall now move on to explaining how to make the benefit clear to readers.

### THE SAY-IT-THREE-TIMES STRATEGY

There is a saying that has analogues in many disciplines. It goes like this: "When explaining something to a person, first you tell them what you are going to tell them, then you tell them, then you tell them what you told them (and if you think they might have missed anything, you start all over again)." In short, if you want to get a message across, bargain on making your point three times, or, to put it the other way around, one way to make sure that people miss important information is to insist on telling each thing only once. (Did you notice that you just read the same information three times in a row?)

Telling readers each thing only once seems to be a corollary of embracing the suspense format: each piece of information is offered in its turn but its significance is not revealed until the end.

### FROM IMRAD TO TAIMRAD

When I outlined the IMRaD structure above, I conveniently overlooked the two sections that precede the introduction, namely the title and the abstract (or summary, if you prefer). However, these two sections, along with the introduction, provide the opportunity to tame IMRaD by telling your reader about the main benefit in three different places. Unfortunately, it is an opportunity that too few authors take.

After talking with the leprechaun and deciding the most important thing that a

reader would want to remember from your article, you can neutralise the inherent problems with the suspense format of IMRaD by planting that most important thing in the title, the abstract, and the introduction.

First, let's look at the title. How many articles have you read that started with words like "The effects of ...", "A study in ..", "An approach to ...", "An analysis of ...", "Observations on ...", or any one of dozens of other "dead' openings? These are dead openings because they say nothing. The very fact that an article has been written is proof that there are some effects or analyses or observations or whatever, so there is no need for such words to occupy the most strategic part of an article, namely, the first words a reader sees. Moreover, having started with such words, such titles are nearly always designed to tease. They titillate a reader with a veiled promise that something useful will be delivered without actually delivering it.

The way to approach a title is to say to yourself: "If my readers read only my title, how can I ensure that they take away the most important information?" Writing a good title is an art, so here is an example to learn from. Remember how, back in the middle 1970s, a ship brought down the bridge across the Derwent River in Tasmania and how it enormously disrupted the lives of the people in Hobart? A paper about this disaster was presented at a conference on logistics. Its title? "When the ship hits the span!" The ingenious double-imagery in that title gets the message across superbly. It is the sort of title that, even twenty years later, many people will remember.

The abstract is the second leg of the tell-them-three-times strategy, but abstracts are often poorly written. There are two common flaws in abstracts and they often occur together. They are (a) restricting the content to just methods and results and (b) writing in a way that holds out a promise of what will be delivered without really delivering it. As with the title, both flaws follow as corollaries of the suspense format.

To be properly informative, an abstract should answer the following five questions (Brown 1994, Brown et al 1993, 1994):

- (a) what was done?
- (b) why was it done?
- (c) what were the main results?
- (d) what do the results add to theory? and
- (e) what are the results good for in practice?

Interestingly, over half of the abstracts in the published literature seem to answer only the first and third questions (Salager-Meyer, 1991). In effect, many authors provide information only on the methods and results and, in keeping with the suspense format, hold back information on the significance of the work until later in their paper.

The second common flaw in abstracts is best seen by comparing the following

## HOW DID WE GET A LITERACY PROBLEM IN RESEARCH ARTICLES?

two abstracts (a good version and a bad version) taken from an excellent paper by Landes (1951), called "A scrutiny of the abstract".

(Bad abstract) What should be covered by an abstract is considered. The importance of the abstract is described. Dictionary definitions of "abstract" are quoted. At the conclusion a revised abstract is presented.

(Better abstract) The abstract is of utmost importance, for it is read by 10 to 500 times more people than read the entire article. It should not be a mere recital of the subjects covered, replete with such expressions as "is discussed" and "is described". It should be a condensation and concentration of the essential qualities of the paper.

Notice how the first version is little more than a table of contents that has been turned into a series of sentences by adding non-committal verbs to the end of each entry in the table of contents? Notice also how the second version condenses the paper? The difference between the two is most obvious if you consider the reader who reads only the title and the abstract (as many do). The reader who reads the second version of the abstract will still depart with some concrete advice about how to make a better abstract. In contrast, the reader who reads only the first version is left only with a rough idea of the topics covered in the text of the article and no real information about how to write a better abstract. A key element in making authors more literate is to help them to recognise sentences that follow the table-of-contents approach and to substitute meatier ones.

The third leg of the tell-three-times approach lies in the introduction. It is also the element that many people find hardest to adopt and the reason is always that they have strongly internalised the suspense format and cannot bring themselves to reveal the answer before the end of their article.

One of the functions of the introductory part of an article is to raise a question because, without a question, how does an author show what is being added to knowledge? Having raised a question, the next logical thing to do is to provide the answer. Not only is it logical, but it also short-circuits the suspense format. Moreover, the difference between raising the question without the answer and raising it with the answer is often only a matter of a few words. For example, after reviewing the literature, an introduction might end with a statement such as: "This paper reports a study designed to examine the effects of bombastium on billiard balls." That statement would leave a reader in suspense about the outcome of the work, but it could just as easily have been framed as: "This paper shows that bombastium can grow hair on billiard balls during odd-numbered leap years". The second version clearly has the answer (improbable as it might be) embedded in it and does the reader the greater service.

### INDIVIDUAL SENTENCES DO MATTER

Despite my taking issue with books that imply that mastery of the sentence is everything, building good sentences are central to writing a readable manuscript.

There are at least four things that literate authors do that others could learn from.

The most important one is to write sentences that start with words that provide a context for readers and then to follow with words that add new information. Many authors simply provide the new information and forget to lead with words that show readers how to relate the new information to the preceding parts of the manuscript. I think that part of the reason for this lies with the suspense format: if one sets out to write a whodunit, it is easy to leave out the information that would create the links because it might reduce the suspense!

The links may be simple direction signals, such as “on the other hand”, “besides”, “in short”, and so on (Murray and Hay-Roe (1986) provide a good discussion of these signals) or they may be more complex (see Williams (1988) or Gopen and Swan (1990) for some good examples).

The second is the practice of corrupting verbs through nominalisation.

Here is a simple example:

“Two market segments were found to have experienced growth of more than 10%.”

There is nothing hugely wrong with that sentence, except that the real action is not in the verb. The verb is just a bunch of words that say that something happened. For the reader to know just what it was that happened, the reader has to look elsewhere in the sentence and will eventually find the action locked up in “growth”. It would have been better to have written:

“Two market segments grew by more than 10%.”

With the nominalisation, it may take the reader only a few milliseconds longer to understand the sentence, but small difficulties like these are cumulative and enough of them eventually make the text impenetrable and the author illiterate. (For a more extensive discussion of corrupted verbs, see Murray and Hay-Roe (1986).)

The third mark of the illiterate author is what I call comparing apples with oranges. It usually arises from a misdirected attempt at brevity. Here is an example:

“These results differ from McSnootley and Lotsabucks (1981).”

It should come as no surprise to anyone that results are different from people, but, of course, that is not what the author meant. The author meant to say:

“These results differ from *those of* McSnootley and Lotsabucks (1981).”

People sometimes defend this shorthand with the argument that their readers know what they meant to say, but that misses the point. I am not at all sure that everybody will always make the correct interpretation (especially with more

complicated examples than the one above), but, even if they do, they have to read the passage twice: once to decide that the literal meaning is ridiculous; and a second time to find the next most likely meaning.

The fourth element arises in making comparisons. It is a rare piece of research that does not make comparisons, yet authors often structure the comparisons to obscure the comparison rather than to make it clear. The simplest way to signal a comparison is to use a repeating pattern of words. When the reader starts the second or third leg of the comparison, the fact that similar words appear in a similar order sends a signal to the reader that a comparison is being made and allows the reader to start making the comparison before the reader otherwise has enough information to do so. In practice, I find that plenty of authors randomise the order of presentation of their information or else do things such as making the first leg of the comparison in a single sentence but then splitting the second leg into two or more sentences and so make it hard for the reader to tell that a comparison is being made at all.

Again, it is hard not to suspect the hand of the suspense format where comparisons are poorly signalled. Some authors may think (unconsciously) that it is better not to make the comparison too clear or else the surprise will be spoiled! In reality, even an exceedingly well-written research article makes significant intellectual demands on its readers, so trying not to spoil the surprise may spoil it totally because a reader may never understand it!

### **THE FIRST PERSON IS FORBIDDEN IN RESEARCH ARTICLES !**

One of the most common misconceptions among researchers is that journals will not let them use "I", "me", "we" and other pronouns in the first person.

If you wish, you can prove the fallacy of this for yourself by repeating a short experiment done by John Kirkman. Kirkman (1980) selected 81 journals at random in his university's library and found 74 had published articles written in the first person. Moreover, they were all leading journals and included the *American Journal of Physics*, the *British Medical Journal*, *Econometrica*, *IEEE Transactions*, the *Journal of Applied Ecology*, the *Journal of Fluid Mechanics*, the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, *Nature*, *Polymer*, *Progress in Materials Science*, and *Psychopharmacology*. The whole exercise took him only two hours and, had he spent longer searching each volume, some of the remaining seven may have yielded an article in the first person.

The issue of using the first person is important at several levels. On one level, first-person pronouns are an invaluable tool for separating the facts (third person) from the author's interpretation of them (first person). On another level, first person pronouns help create the enthusiasm that makes a paper readable (Maddox 1983).

On a different level altogether, the first-person issue is important because it demonstrates how people are capable of failing to read what is put in front of them. Given that most journals publish articles written in the first person, it is

inconceivable that so many people could have avoided reading any. The only reasonable explanation seems to be that they did not see what they read.

## **AUTHORSHIP**

The world's most published author of scientific papers is reported to be Yury Struchkov. Over the last 10 years, he has turned out 948 papers and got an average of 3.0 citations/paper. He runs a big crystallography lab in Moscow and, if you want to use his equipment, he requires you to make him an author.

So what has this got to do with literacy? Misconceptions about authorship add a lot to literacy problems because they often give rise to "gift" authorships. In a nutshell, authorship belongs to those who stand to defend the published work. This gives rise to five basic principles (condensed from Huth, 1986, and Day 1983):

Principle 1. Each author should have participated sufficiently in the published work to take public responsibility for the content.

Principle 2. Participation must include three steps:

- (1) conception or design of the work represented by the article, or analysis and interpretation of the data, or both;
- (2) drafting the article or revising it for critically important content; and
- (3) final approval of the version to be published.

Principle 3. Participation solely in the collection of data (or other evidence) does not justify authorship.

Principle 4. Each part of the content of an article critical to its main conclusions and each step in the work that led to its publication (steps 1, 2, & 3 in Principle 2) must be attributable to at least one author.

Principle 5. People who have contributed intellectually to the article but whose contributions do not justify authorship may be named and their contribution described – e.g. 'advice', 'critical review of study proposal', 'data collection', 'participation in clinical trial.' They must have given their permission to be named. Technical help must be acknowledged in a separate paragraph.

The practice of providing "gift" authorships is unethical and runs directly contrary to the principles above, but is remarkably common. It even arose during the discussion that accompanied the original presentation of this paper at the Literacy Conference. The person in question had asked for statistics from another research institute only to be told that a condition of being given the statistics was that the institute's nominee would be made an author of any publication that arose. There was no discussion of what the nominee could contribute to the manuscript and it was clear that the granting of the authorship was rent to be extracted for the use of the statistics.

This notion that authorship is an automatic property right over data attacks literacy by ignoring the fact that the value of a document rests on the quality of

the insights it presents, not on the fact that some numbers were collected or by whom they were collected.

### SO, IS THERE A SOLUTION ?

Yes and no. On the one hand, the solution is remarkably simple: just walk away from the suspense format. This requires authors to decide on the main message that they want their readers to take away, then to craft their title, abstract, and introduction so that the main message is clear to their readers. This approach will not fix every defect in an article, but it will take an author further down the track than any other strategy. Also, I find that when authors do this, it creates a clarity that allows a lot of the other problems to resolve themselves.

On the other hand, fear complicates things and fear is the main reason that authors fail to make the main message strategy work. In many ways, researchers are like bankers. Back in the 1930s, John Maynard Keynes was asked why, with so many danger signals obvious to everyone, did the banks persist with their course of action even though they must have realised that it was extremely likely that most of them would fail if they persisted with that course of action. Keynes replied that the banks felt it was safer to stick to the "sound" course and so fail together than to change to a different course that would provide a greater chance of survival but also bring a chance of failing alone. Researchers are often not much different: the fear of being unconventional keeps so many researchers wedded to the suspense format. It is ironic that iconoclasm is a key part of a researcher's role, but that so many feel that the icons can be broken only with conventional tools.

Nevertheless, abandoning the suspense format can work brilliantly well. I run workshops for authors in which I show them how to avoid its straight-jacket and I have had many success stories, not least of which are several novice authors who have had papers published by international journals that were so clearly presented that they were published without any revision whatsoever.

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# Comparing the Citation Choices of Experienced Academic Writers and First Year Students

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The practice of citation (or referencing) is characteristic of academic writing. However, students are often confused by the many possible functions of citation, and the way these can be linguistically realised. This paper examines Political Science texts of experienced academic writers and first year students, in the light of a framework for considering citation choices. Compared to the experienced writers, the students exercise a narrower range of citation choices, or often fail to apply these choices in a way that controls their reader's focus on points of academic 'controversy'.

## INTRODUCTION

In academic writing, citation is the explicit citing of another's text within one's own. It is also referred to as 'referencing' or 'reporting'. As Swales (1986:47) puts it, citation is the writer's problem of handling the dual requirement of stating both what has been found and who has found it. As Study Advisers, every day we read student texts across the range of disciplines taught at the Australian National University and are very aware that many students find citation difficult. They see it primarily as protection from the charge of plagiarism. Academic staff, on the other hand, see it as something fundamental to scholarly pursuit. They insist on it, and frequently comment negatively on students' attempts to use it. However, such comments are usually vague because academics themselves are not conscious of the way variations in citation language can realise fine distinctions in meaning.

This paper proposes a model for understanding the significance of variations in citation language. The model was developed from analysis of the citation practices of experienced academic writers, initially in Biology (Buckingham and Neville 1995), and then in ten published papers in Political Science. For this specific aspect of academic writing our goal was to better understand what it is that student writers do, and do not do, that marks their texts as immature. To this end, we used the model to analyse the citations of twenty essays by first year Political Science students. Our ultimate aim is to use the model with our students.

## CITATION IN ACADEMIC WRITING

Citation is frequently raised in general discussions of academic discourse and culture (eg. Becher 1989, Swales 1990, Bhatia 1993), but increasingly citation is a specific focus of research. For example, Swales (1986) drew together studies of citation in the separate literatures of Applied Linguistics and the sociology of science (such as Gilbert 1977 and Cronin 1981). He presented a 'featural scheme' and traced citations of a particular paper in the relevant literature. Campbell (1990) used a controlled study to categorise students' use of a chosen background text in a composition task. Although the task was somewhat contrived, Campbell concluded that "none of the students...seem to have a mastery of the appropriate acknowledgement of another author" (1990:223). Bloch and Lan Chi (1995) compared the time period and manner of the citations in Chinese and American academic research papers. Finally, Baynham et al (1995) reported on the beginnings of a project investigating citation in students' writing and compared the way two students position themselves in dialogue with others' works.

Of greater relevance for directing our research, however, were particular papers which focussed on specific features of citation language. Thomas and Hawes analysed citation in medical journal articles and mapped out very detailed networks of options for both the type of 'reporting [citing] verb' (1994a) and 'thematic' patterns in reports (1994b). Their aim was to establish patterns between particular options and the rhetorical function of the reports. Similarly, Shaw (1992) examined correlations of grammatical voice (active/passive), tense and sentence function in reporting verbs. He found correlations to be strongly influenced by paragraph structure and topic development, and that therefore "there may be mediating mechanisms between a rhetorical function and the form that appears to represent it" (1992:317).

These papers were valuable in identifying and describing in detail particular characteristics of citation language. Our interest was in the role of citation in creating intertextual understanding. We wanted a means for describing how variations in citation forms reflect the relationship of the writer's text to other texts. This is possibly what Shaw meant by "mediating mechanisms".

## COLLOQUY AND CONTROVERSY

Academic writers place a value on citation which reflects a number of assumptions. These have been written about by Becher (1989) and can be simplified into the following:

- knowledge arises from a dynamic system of research, analysis and communication
- intellectual property is valuable
- academic endeavour must be relevant to disciplinary interests
- indication of sources allows verification of research and thinking
- indication of sources makes further research and thinking possible.

The first assumption is that the academic world consists fundamentally of people researching, analysing, and communicating with each other. It is a complex multi-member colloquy in which any individual researcher's 'studying', 'finding', 'arguing' etc. occurs always in the context of other researchers 'studying' etc. The act of citation necessarily points to such processes. The moment a writer cites, this colloquy exists. Citation language forms reflect the complexity of this colloquy, which consists of the writer, past authors/researchers, and the immediate reader and future academic readers. Inherent to this colloquy is the notion of controversy, which represents the points of potential or actual difference between members from which new knowledge arises. These are the points where knowledge is presented as negotiable or actively challenged. Other members of the colloquy may well be 'studying', 'finding', 'arguing', 'knowing' etc. something different, even contradictory to the cited author, or may have done so in the past, or may do so in the future. If this were not so, it would not be necessary for the writer to cite. The notions of colloquy and controversy are crucial to an understanding of the implied meaning of any citation. The notion of colloquy is preferable to 'dialogue' (used by Baynham et al 1995) because it better captures the sense of a network of writers, readers and texts to which any individual text must relate.

By citing, writers are therefore positioning their own texts in relation to the colloquy, and in so doing can control their reader's sense of 'engagement' with both the colloquy and the writer's own text. By engagement we mean simply a critical academic attitude of doubt or challenge. Writers can use citation language forms to signal the points in the text where they themselves are engaging, what the writer sees as controversial, and in so doing where they wish their readers to do so. It is in this way that variations in citation language are related to differences in intertextual understanding. We sought to develop a model to represent these relationships. In Thompson and Ye's (1991:380) words, the model would seem to be one way of "linking evaluation in report structures with the overall realization of evaluation in academic papers".

### DEVELOPING THE MODEL

The model incorporates three valuable distinctions presented in the literature. First, Thompson and Ye (1991) distinguish between reporting verbs which represent 'author acts', that is those for which the cited author is responsible, and 'writer acts' for which the citing writer is responsible. An author act is simply something the cited author is said to have done. For example the author 'studied', 'found', 'argued', 'believed' etc. A verb phrase represents a writer act if the writer is using the citation itself to make a point for which the writer is responsible. We found one sign of a writer act to be the nominalisation of an author verb, ie. the author's verb is turned into a noun. This is evident in Thompson and Ye's (1991:378) examples: "X's model accounts for..."; and "X's claim corresponds to...". In these examples we can see that 'X models' (verb) has become 'X's model' (noun), and 'X claims' (verb) has become 'X's claim' (noun). The citing writer is therefore responsible for saying what the model 'accounts for', and for

what the claim 'corresponds to'.

The second distinction, adapted from Thompson and Ye (1991), is between 'denotational' and 'evaluational' verbs. The difference here is that evaluational verb phrases include some sense of the writer's interpretation of the author's act. This interpretation varies from verbs such as 'argues' or 'believes', which show the citing writer's understanding, to verbs such as 'demonstrates', 'proves', 'admits' or 'acknowledges' which include a sense of acceptance or non-acceptance. Denotational verbs, such as 'say', 'report', 'study', have no such writer interpretation. The choice of the verb phrase itself makes visible the attitude of the citing writer.

The third distinction, from Swales (1990:148), is between Integral and Non-integral citations. Usually, a citation is Integral if the name of the cited author/researcher appears in the citation sentence as a sentence element. It is Non-integral if the author/researcher's name is given in parentheses or is referred to elsewhere eg. by a superscript number. We also include as Integral citations the use of 'dummy' or generalised author/researchers, in phrases such as "Many commentators", "Some critics", "Political analysts" etc. While these lack the impact of a specific name, they make up for this by being plural and are usually supported later by a name in parentheses. The critical point is that an Integral citation gives prominence to a cited author and member of the colloquy.

Other features of citation language which are frequently discussed in the literature, such as grammatical tense, voice, and thematic (clause initial) position, were found to be too variable in Political Science for inclusion in the model. For example, thematic position increases the prominence of cited authors or reporting verb phrases, but for our purposes it is too strongly influenced by the macro-organisation of the text and the ongoing development of content.

## THE MODEL OF CITATION OPTIONS

The model was derived from our analyses of citations in ten papers written by experienced academic writers in Political Science. It presents five main options, with two of these further divided according to the nature of the citation verb phrase (denotational or evaluational). For each option there is a predominant textual form which represents a certain level of controversy and engagement with the academic colloquy. The model is not an attempt to account for every citation form possible and be able to say definitively what any individual citation 'means'. Instead, we agree with Thompson and Ye (1991) that the effect of citations is often cumulative and citations are best understood as working over stretches of text.

Together, the options form a continuum representing increasing levels of engagement. The model does not imply that some options are more advanced or academically sophisticated than others. Depending upon the aims of the writer, choices may be more or less appropriate. The mark of authentic academic text is variation in citation language forms which is consistent with the intertextual understanding intended by the writer. Experienced writers are able to choose

among the Options to control engagement with the colloquy and the focus on controversy, and balance these with the demands of developing topics and lines of argument. They present a balance between the extremes of accepted and uncontroversial knowledge, where engagement from the reader is not intended, and affected knowledge and initiated controversy, where engagement from the reader is expected. Having said this, it appears that some level of actual engagement and controversy is necessary for legitimacy: every argumentative academic text must at least present knowledge as challengeable.

The model is presented in the appendix at the end of the paper, and the options included in this model are explained below.

## EXPLAINING THE OPTIONS

### OPTION 1

Option 1 is both Non-integral and uses no reporting verb phrase. In terms of the citation, there is no recognition of a colloquy and no sense of controversy. Knowledge is accepted and taken as given. The writer's own text is intended to be secure from the reader's engagement. It is not the case that this Option is primitive, and it was commonly used by experienced writers in Political Science. Instead, it conveys that the writer does not view something as controversial, does not wish to engage with the colloquy, and does not wish the reader to do so. Controversy will be elsewhere.

South Australia seems to have a reputation for being a pioneer in many fields of public policy, possibly a result of the coincidence of manageable scale with a longstanding (through perhaps declining) culture of public sector reformism (Stretton 1975, p. 201) [OPTION 1]. It would be interesting to examine further the inter-State diffusion of policy and managerial innovations (Moon 1987) [OPTION 1]. Diffusion has probably quickened in recent years through the adoption of more sophisticated policy and management structures by State governments and through the proliferation of intergovernmental Ministerial Councils and meetings of senior officials in a process of 'executive federalism' (Chapman 1988, Sharman 1991) [OPTION 1]. The recent series of Special Premiers' Conferences can be understood as not only trying to reform 'vertical' Commonwealth-State relations but also as bringing more coherence to the increasing scale of 'horizontal' State-State relations.

### OPTION 2

Option 2 is Non-integral but has a reporting verb phrase representing an author act. By signalling processes of research, analysis and communication, these verb phrases imply the members of the colloquy responsible for the processes. In this way a colloquy is recognised but not actually engaged with. The writer is acknowledging potential controversy as knowledge is now vulnerable. There is now the chance of reader engagement. The option is sub-divided A and B

according to whether the reporting verb is denotational or evaluational. An evaluational verb phrase enhances the sense of controversy and engagement with the colloquy by including the writer's interpretation, but it still does not focus on the author. Again, the writer is aware of controversy, but chooses not to open it to the reader.

This revival of the classic obsession with a work orientation is an international phenomenon. It has been observed that the economic adjustment occurring in most OECD countries involved a concerted effort in the late 1980s and early 1990s 'to ensure that social security systems do not unduly weaken the incentives to work, to save and to change jobs'. [OPTION 2A] In Australia the pursuit of this goal can be seen in respect of many provisions, particularly unemployment benefits, sole parent pensions, disability allowances and the provision of the Family Allowance Supplement to the working poor.

### OPTION 3

This option is Integral, but has no reporting verb phrase. The use of the author's name is powerful enough to introduce a sense of engagement with the colloquy and actual controversy. Knowledge is now presented as negotiated and so engagement from the reader is likely. The writer does shift the focus to the cited author, but then distances the reader from the engagement by omitting the reporting verb phrase which would carry the writer's interpretation.

'Regimes' have been defined both tightly and loosely, but one of the most quoted definitions is that of S. Krasner. According to him, a regime exists when there are 'implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations'. [OPTION 3] In the sense that almost every aspect of international life—economic, legal, military, or political—is conducted in a stable environment in which there are predictable and restraining patterns of behaviour, international society is criss-crossed by regimes, both explicit and implicit.

### OPTION 4

This Option is both Integral and has a reporting verb phrase which represents an author act. Like Option 3, knowledge is presented as negotiated and there is actual controversy and engagement with the colloquy. By referring to both a member of the colloquy and an academic process (the verb phrase), this Option signals greater engagement than Option 3. The citation form makes visible both the author and the citing writer. The Option is used where the controversy is explicit, recognised in the discipline, and where engagement from the reader is expected. Like Option 2, this Option is sub-divided A and B according to whether the reporting verb is denotational or evaluational. This Option was very common in the Political Science texts of experienced writers.

Others have taken a very different view, arguing that there is a basic

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clash of values between the 'technical rationality' of corporate cultures and the career-permanent traditions of public service with its ethical concerns (Considine 1988; Sawyer 1989; McInnes 1990) [OPTION 4B]. Wilenski has suggested that there is conflict between the cost-cutting approach of managerialism and the human resource approach of motivating people and encouraging creative responses to problems (Wilenski 1986b) [OPTION 4A]. McInnes has claimed that after David Block's efficiency scrutinies there was a 'shift from the original reform preoccupation with skills, resource allocation and employment equity to an emphasis on cost related efficiencies based around deregulation and privatisation and the overall strategic identification of opportunities and options for savings to the public purse' (McInnes 1990:113) [OPTION 4B]. Considine has argued that those managers 'concerned with such things as future policy development, staff training or the improvement of quality of work, appear to lack the capacity for attracting sufficient status in this environment because their "outcomes" are viewed as intangible' (Considine 1988:12) [OPTION 4B].

### OPTION 5

This Option is Integral, but the significant difference here is that the reporting verb phrase represents a writer act. By actually using the citation to take responsibility for saying something new, the citing writer is initiating controversy and now affecting the colloquy as a full participant. Knowledge is now affected by the writer and not the cited authors. The writer is therefore using the citation form to engage the reader and future authors/researchers.

Castles suggests that Australia would have been appropriately termed a 'wage earners' welfare state'. [OPTION 4a].....As Castles' analysis of the links between employment regulation and welfare demonstrates, the concept of 'welfare state', in its broadest form, is not confined simply to those elements traditionally denoted by the term welfare, that is, pensions and benefits and services to the poor [OPTION 5]. In its broadest sense a welfare state should be concerned with the well-being of all citizens and the degree of equality, or redistribution, that is achieved through all of the state's actions or lack of actions. At its broadest, then, the concept should be just as concerned with the effects on the well-being of citizens of, for example, monetary and tariff policies, support for the arts and sciences and the framework and enforcement of criminal and civil law as with the effects of unemployment benefits and public housing.

To summarise so far, the model we have presented is not a developmental progression, but a range of Options from which experienced writers choose to create intended intertextual understandings. Through variations in citation language forms, they are able to control engagement with the academic colloquy and focus on points of controversy.

## CITATION IN STUDENT WRITING

Twenty student papers were chosen, all written as regular assessable items during a first year Political Science unit at the ANU. In length, the papers ranged from 1500 to 2000 words. Only papers graded Pass or better were included. Scores for the papers ranged from 55% to 80%, with most between 60 and 75%. The number of citations per paper ranged from 9 to 43. The total number of citations across the twenty papers was 467, with an average of around 23 citations per paper.

Compared to the experienced writers, the students exercised a narrower range of citation options, or often failed to focus their reader on points of academic controversy and control their reader's engagement with the colloquy. Many chosen options created misleading expectations about the way the writer's text related to the colloquy.

The clearest difference in students' writing was the tendency of nearly half of them to rely mainly on Option 1. Four students used only this Option (one of them 43 times). In terms of citation forms, these students' texts do not engage with the colloquy at all. Citation choices give little or no recognition of academic knowledge as constructed through processes of researching, analysis and communication. Knowledge is a set of facts to be discovered and accepted. Nothing is presented as controversial and the texts always resist engagement from the reader. Sources are presented as authoritative, and citations perform a narrow legalistic function as a means for showing ownership of ideas and words. Recalling the assumptions described earlier, such citation choices reflect the students' understanding of the value of intellectual property and the need to indicate sources to allow verification of research and thinking. The following consecutive citations show such use of Option 1:

Democracy is a concept, an abstraction, a term with no single precise and agreed meaning (Arblaster 1987:1). [OPTION 1]

However, modern day democracies basically encompass balance of representative government that is responsible to its people and is governed by the rule of law to lend it legitimacy (Jaensch 1989, and Kakuthas et al 1990). [OPTION 1]

It [Australian democracy] is also a system that lets individuals and associations pursue their varied interests and resolve their conflicts in a peaceful and orderly manner (Kakuthas et al 1990:133, 90). [OPTION 1]

The application of the rule of law by the judiciary ensures that the government is not arbitrary in its laws and opinions (Jaensch 1989). [OPTION 1]

Australia has led the way in granting the franchise to its citizens, and by the 1960s had extended that right to the Aborigines as well (Smith and

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Watson 1989). [OPTION 1]

In a system of government which has its citizens involved with a single and important political decision,...., it is essential for the politician to realise what the voters want and how the government is perceived in their mind (Aitkin et al 1989). [OPTION 1]

Conversely, a few students presented very little knowledge as accepted and uncontroversial. These students did choose from the range of citation forms, but Option 1 was rarely used and so everything was presented as controversial and under negotiation. These texts appeared always to be encouraging engagement from the reader. In terms of citation forms, the writer's text is presented as unstable and lacking an accepted knowledge base from which new points are made. These students have a 'feel' for what their texts should sound like, but are using the forms without the intertextual understandings and the underlying assumptions of experienced Political Science writers. The following are consecutive citations from one paper:

Lucy (1985:104) states "Studies of voting behaviour suggest that political apathy...correlates with low socio-economic status and low educational attainments." [OPTION 4A]

Skurnik and George (cited in Smith 1983:248) stated that the person who goes to the polls in the voluntary system is most likely to be a white, middle-aged, well educated man with a middle to high income. [OPTION 4A]

Bob McMullan (cited in Adams 1992:2) said that under a voluntary system, the young, the homeless, Aborigines, the unemployed and the poor would be far less likely to vote. [OPTION 4A]

He states "To be by the people for the people, government must be judged by all the people". [OPTION 4A]

As voting is compulsory the government will be more responsive to the communal opinion (Crisp 1978:130). [OPTION 1]

Crisp (1978:132) states "...whatever its shortcomings, [compulsory voting] does keep the politicians uncertain of power and therefore responsive to the current of opinion." [OPTION 4A]

At times, the particular confusion arose in the use of reporting verb phrases. Student writers, facing a huge range of possibilities (Thompson and Ye (1991) counted over four hundred), may overuse particular verb phrases, use them inconsistently, or otherwise fail to appreciate the expectations their use would raise in the mind in an academic reader. Some verb phrases, particularly those referring to 'discourse' (Thomas and Hawes 1994a) or 'textual' acts (Thompson and Ye 1991), such as 'state', 'suggest', 'report', 'claim', 'argue', 'maintain',

may be used interchangeably. Experienced writers, with a better understanding of the way academic knowledge develops, appreciate (even if unconsciously) the subtle evaluative distinctions between particular verbs, and so use to effect.

Occasionally student writers seemed to achieve a balance. The following consecutive paragraphs show how one student writer chooses among the options to move from establishing background to introducing controversy. Note the shift in the use of the author Bogdanor, and the change in verb phrase, before the writer's contrasting point and an alternative author appear:

Electoral systems can magnify or minimise societal conditioning and prejudices and in turn affect party competition (Bogdanor 1984:111). [OPTION 1]....Women are under-represented in relation to their numbers in the general population in all countries, however this is more acutely so in countries such as Britain and the USA which use single member constituency systems, as opposed to countries where a party list system is in place. Under a party list system women's representation increases up to sixfold (Bogdanor 1984:114). [OPTION 1] The possibility that this is due to lower general levels of prejudice in these communities may be discounted by comparing female participation in non-traditional areas such as medicine, engineering etc. Their numbers are similar, if not lower. So it would appear the increased female and minority representation is due largely to the electoral system.

Bogdanor (1984:115) suggests the most likely explanation for the correlation between party list systems and increased female and minority representation. [OPTION 4A] He [Bogdanor] argues that in constituencies where gaining a seat depends on a single candidate win, selection committees will be predisposed to selecting what they perceive as a low risk candidate. [OPTION 4B]. HOWEVER, where a party list system is in place, attempts are made to present a balanced ticket, necessitating the inclusion of women and minorities. In the USA for example.....In such systems the election prospects for women and minority groups is improved (Rule and Zimmerman 1992:4). [OPTION 1]

## CONCLUSION

The model we have presented links variations in citation language to intertextual understanding through a range of citation options. We have found that compared to the texts of experienced writers, students' texts seem intertextually confused. There is commonly a mismatch of citation form and intertextual understanding. Student writers have difficulty in using citation forms to appropriately signal their relation to the colloquy and to focus their readers' attention on points of controversy, these being the negotiated areas of knowledge with which the writers are concerned. In so doing, student writers confuse their own readers' ability to know when engagement is resisted or welcomed.

Citation is a fundamental but complex aspect of academic writing, and one which students need to control if they are to write credible academic text.

Warnings from academic staff against the evils of plagiarism may encourage only a narrow view of citation as a means to show ownership of ideas and words. Citation allows much more than this. Student writers will be in a position to use citation more convincingly if they are given greater understanding of both the assumptions underlying the value that academics place on citation, and the intertextual significance of variations in citation language forms.

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**APPENDIX: MODEL OF CITATION OPTIONS**

<b>INTERTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING</b>	<b>OPTION</b>	<b>EXAMPLES</b>	
No recognition of colloquy 	1 NON-Integral NO Reporting Verb phrase	Labor was a strong party (Smith 1993)	No controversy Knowledge accepted No reader engagement
Recognising colloquy 	2 (A) NON-Integral AUTHOR Reporting Verb phrase (Denotational)	It has been <i>said</i> that Labor was...(Smith 1993)	Potential controversy Knowledge vulnerable Possible reader engagement
Engaging colloquy 	2 (B) NON-Integral AUTHOR Reporting Verb phrase (Evaluational)	It has been <i>argued</i> that Labor was...(Smith 1993) Research has <i>shown</i> that Labor was...(Smith 1993)	Actual controversy Knowledge negotiated Likely reader engagement
Affecting colloquy	3 INTEGRAL NO Reporting Verb phrase	According to Smith (1993), Labor was... In Smith's (1993) theory, Labor was...	Initiating controversy Knowledge affected Actual reader engagement
	4 (A) INTEGRAL AUTHOR Reporting Verb phrase (Denotational)	Smith (1993) <i>says</i> that Labor was... Smith (1993) <i>studied</i> Labor's strength...	
	4 (B) INTEGRAL AUTHOR Reporting Verb phrase (Evaluational)	Smith (1993) <i>argues</i> that Labor was... Smith (1993) has <i>shown</i> that Labor was... The strength of Labor was <i>demonstrated</i> by Smith (1993)	
	5 INTEGRAL WRITER Reporting Verb phrase	Smith's (1993) view that Labor.. <i>explains</i> the electoral success of the party	

# Expectations of Academic Writing at Australian Universities: Work in Progress

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Student success at university depends largely upon how quickly they can adjust to the expectations of their lecturers. This is especially so in relation to their writing skills, by which they will, for the most part, be assessed. Students must learn how to write with a style and a content which is perceived to be acceptable and to be within the constraints of the academic discourse community.

This paper will present findings from a survey of academics at a number of universities throughout Australia. The survey examined the views of academics with regard to their expectations of student writing and the importance of the major features of writing. The purpose of the research was to inform teachers who prepare students for Australian universities or who assist university students with study skills, in particular, it aimed to inform teachers of overseas students, who are often unaware of their lecturers' expectations.

## **BACKGROUND**

This study arose out of a discussion a number of years ago between three English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teachers at an ELICOS Centre and an overseas student who had just commenced her studies at university. In a sense, the EAP teachers were pumping this ex-ELICOS student for information. We wanted to know what her lecturers' expectations were, the types of tasks she was being set and how she was faring in terms of the lecturers' assessment. As teachers who had come through the humanities area, we had only a sketchy idea of the demands of other discipline areas.

This discussion prompted the idea of surveying faculty in order to examine the differences in expectations they have with regard to academic writing. At the time I was an EAP teacher at the University of Canberra and the survey consisted of items which arose from my reading in the literature and from my own experience as a teacher of overseas students who were rapidly approaching the reality of having to cope with tertiary literacy in an English-speaking environment.

Following the survey, I gave a paper on the results at the ACTA-WATESOL

conference in Perth in 1994. A number of like-minded individuals approached me with a request to carry out the same survey at their own universities. In the end, we formed a network of researchers carrying out the same research into what Australian academics expect of their students' writing. The results that follow represent a "work in progress" view of this network's research, as the results from two universities in the network are not yet completed.

### ACADEMIC WRITING

There now appear to be two approaches to the acquisition of tertiary literacy appearing in the literature, one of which proposes that tertiary students must gradually acquire the literacy skills and behaviours appropriate to successful completion of their studies. Johns (1990) calls this approach the "social constructionist" approach, where the writer begins as an outsider and must learn the rules in order to become an insider. The other, more recent, approach seems to be that students should "not be forced to acquire academic literacy and become part of the academic discourse community" (Johns, 1990, p. 29). The latter approach does not seem realistic in the face of the power which academics wield to pass or fail their students. "Ultimately, of course, it is the students who must (and mostly do) have to make the major adjustments to meet the educational demands of the programme" (Ballard 1995, p. 211). Students who fail to read the signs of appropriate language and literacy behaviours which surround them, quite often do not complete their courses.

Lietz and Martens at Latrobe University examined whether students' learning and writing difficulties impacted on their end of year results. While they found that these difficulties do not have a direct influence on final results, they "have a sizeable negative impact on students' self-rating of academic performance which, in turn, has an impact on students' actual performance" (p. 14). In other words, students' lack of confidence in their literacy skills may lead indirectly to poorer performance.

Students usually learn literacy skills from the feedback they are given by academics on their assignments and essays; however, more and more students are being explicitly taught these literacy skills in pre-tertiary language courses, bridging courses (see Felix and Lawson 1994 for an evaluation of a bridging course) or study skills centres. In order to provide adequate training in tertiary literacy, teachers of these courses must be informed as to the specific requirements of the wider academic community (see May and Bartlett, 1995). The present study seeks to fill a gap in information about the writing requirements of Australian academics. Johns (1993) believes that this area of research, ie readers' expectations, has been "the least explored in the literature" (p. 75) and that it is especially important for second language students to acquire knowledge of their readers' expectations.

Two surveys in the UK and US examined the writing expectations of academics in other English-speaking countries. A survey by Weir (1988) examined the views of both students and academics in British universities in order to discover

the importance of various aspects of student writing. Weir's main conclusion was that "subject tutors are more concerned with content than with mechanical accuracy features" (1988, p. 25). Similarly, Eblen (1983) surveyed all faculty at the University of Northern Iowa and found that "overall quality of ideas" (p. 344) was the most important criterion, followed by "organization", "development", "grammatical form" and "coherence". There seems to be a clear message from these previous studies that the quality of the content in a student text is more important to faculty than the sentence level features (see also Harris and Silva 1993).

To return to Australian universities, it should be noted that there appears to be growing concern, both in the media and in the literature, about the literacy levels of university students both prior to entry and on completion of their studies. According to Bourke and Holbrook (1992), research suggests that there has been no decline in standards while others (Buckley 1993, Moens and de Lacey 1993, Connolly 1994) decry what they see as a fall in tertiary literacy standards. With that in mind, it is important to ascertain what those standards of literacy are.

## METHODS

The questionnaire used in this survey was trialed in a pilot study at the University of Canberra before being distributed to all academic staff. Researchers at six other universities have joined the survey since that time but so far, results for only three other universities (University of Wollongong, Macquarie University and Flinders University) have been completed. The size of the sample is currently as follows:

Macquarie University	211 respondents		29%
University of Wollongong	283	"	48%
University of Canberra	260	"	22%
Flinders University	260	"	41%
TOTAL	867	"	35%

Three types of analyses on the results have been carried out to date but there will hopefully be further comparisons to be made at a later date from the information gathered.

## RESULTS

So far, the following results have been collated and analyses carried out. Firstly, a comparison between the total responses for each of the four universities has been made; secondly responses for two Arts and two Science Faculties have been compared and thirdly, three Education Faculties have been examined for differences in response rates.

A Likert-type scale was used to obtain faculty opinions on nine major features of academic writing: Content, Argument, Style, Organisation, Use of Literature, Grammar, Communicative Ability, Vocabulary, and Punctuation. Faculty could choose L (Little or No Agreement), M (Moderate Agreement), S (Strong Agreement) or NA (Not Applicable) to statements about the nine features. Responses are shown as percentages and the analysis which follows generally focuses on how much strong agreement there was to statements in the questionnaire.

### TOTAL RESPONSES

In the comparison between total responses for each university to the survey, all aspects of Content were found to be extremely important. Especially, faculty in all four universities strongly agreed with the importance of the following:

- 1) an understanding of the main concepts of the subject area under consideration,
- 2) the relevance of the content to the topic, and
- 3) how well the essay fulfils the requirements of the topic.

However, it must be said that faculty at Flinders University did not agree as strongly to the last of these (73% strong agreement) as did faculty at the other universities (all over 90%). There seems to be no apparent reason for this divergence of opinion.

The most important aspect of the argument according to faculty is the clarity with which the writer reveals his/her line of argument (all totals over 90%). Also of high importance is the writer's ability to show the connections between ideas (all totals over 80%). However, faculty do not appear to strongly object to writers going off onto tangents instead of pursuing one clear logical line of argument. It could be that faculty enjoy such originality and creativity in their students' writing, especially when it leads to a deeper analysis and understanding of the issues.

Attitudes to style show the greatest disparity in the survey. There appears to be very little agreement from faculty at any university as to whether such aspects of writing as formality, objectivity, impersonality, sentence length, repetition and sophistication are important or not. The only aspect on which there is agreement is that an appropriate style should be chosen for the topic or task (strong agreement over 60%). This confirmed the first study carried out at the University of Canberra (Bush 1994), in which faculty showed a surprising divergence in their attitudes to the traditional view of an "academic" style. It seems therefore that students need to tread warily when writing essays for a lecturer whose stylistic expectations they do not know.

In general, faculty show reasonably strong agreement that accurate grammar is important and likewise, that they are distracted by writing which includes poor grammatical construction. On the other hand, it appears that faculty do not expect students to use complex grammatical structures but are quite happy to accept more basic sentence patterns.

In terms of students' communicative ability, there seems to be a reasonable expectation from faculty that student writing should be easy to understand, but there is less emphasis placed on students to interest faculty with their ideas.

In terms of the organisation of student writing, faculty place the greatest importance on consistent referencing, with introductions and conclusions second in importance, and correct paragraphing third. On the other hand, faculty do not seem to be so concerned about whether students divide their writing into chapters or sections.

The most important aspect of vocabulary appeared to be accurate usage. Second in importance was the appropriate use of vocabulary; of far less importance was the necessity to use the specialised vocabulary of their subject area. It appears that faculty are concerned with clear communication, not with writing to impress or the overuse of jargon.

In using the literature, faculty place very strong emphasis on avoiding plagiarism (over 80% strong agreement). Other important aspects in this area are: the ability to grasp the main points of other writers, to analyse and synthesise and to quote accurately. However, there was far less emphasis on wide reading than was anticipated. Perhaps faculty are more concerned with reading selectively than reading material which is out of date, not highly acclaimed or of little relevance (see Bush 1994 and 1996).

Punctuation was not as important as other aspects of writing according to faculty responses.

Faculty were asked to rank order the nine major features of writing and there was very strong agreement among universities. The majority of faculty at all four universities placed Content (1), Argument (2), Communicative Ability (3) and Organisation (4). These are content features and were consistently ranked by faculty above form features (Grammar 6 or 7, Style 6 or 7, Vocabulary 8, and Punctuation 9). Use of Literature was fifth among all universities and forms the midpoint between content and form features and contains features of both content and form. It is a content feature in the way that writers use other writers' ideas within their writing and it is a form feature because there are "mechanical" rules as to how to include these ideas within the text. There was only slight variation as to which feature was placed (6) or (7) in the order of importance but otherwise all universities ranked the features in the same way.

### ARTS/SCIENCE COMPARISON

The second analysis was an examination of whether there were different responses from Humanities and Science Faculties. This was more difficult to achieve as there was such a range of different Humanities and Science Faculties among the four universities; for example, some universities have general Humanities Faculties while others have specific Faculties eg Faculty of Arts. I therefore attempted to reduce the differences. Therefore, two universities with a specific Science and Humanities Faculty in each were chosen for comparison.

The Faculties of Communication and Applied Science at the University of Canberra and the Faculties of Arts and Science at the University of Wollongong were selected.

On aspects of Content, Argument, Grammar and Punctuation there were few discernible and consistent differences between Arts and Science faculty views. There were a few small differences nevertheless in other areas. Science faculty do seem to place more stress on objectivity in writing, which is to be expected considering the nature of scientific inquiry. They also place more emphasis on the need for academic writing to be easy to understand (clarity of expression). Thirdly, science faculty place less emphasis on appropriate vocabulary and more emphasis on accurate vocabulary than the humanities faculty. Possibly, the scientific background may lead to a philosophy which emphasises correctness, on being as accurate as is possible within the limitations. Lastly, science faculty are somewhat less concerned (under 70% strong agreement) about students *analysing what they read* than humanities lecturers (over 85% strong agreement). Perhaps they feel that scientific texts are less open to interpretation, but it is difficult to say whether this is the real reason.

### EDUCATION FACULTIES

The third area of analysis was a comparison between three very similar Faculties in three of the universities. These were the Faculties of Education at University of Canberra (UC - 23 respondents), University of Wollongong (UW - 26 respondents) and Macquarie University (MU - 15 respondents). All have small staff numbers, but it was anticipated because of the nature of their discipline that they would exhibit strong tendencies to require high standards in both content and form features. This was certainly true in the area of Content where there were several instances of these lecturers giving 100% strong agreement to statements, especially to the statements which have previously been alluded to as important aspects of Content for faculty in the total responses.

However, in the area of Argument, differences began to appear between the three groups. On whether an argument should follow from the beginning to the end without tangents, UC lecturers showed 83% strong support while the other two universities exhibited less than 70% strong support. There seem to be no apparent reason for this divergence. UC Education lecturers were slightly more averse to repetition in writing than the other groups but on the other hand, were somewhat less concerned about grammatical accuracy and the correct use of punctuation.

UW lecturers gave much stronger support to the need for writing to show some sophistication (65% strong support) than the other two (less than 40% strong support); they also laid greater stress on correct paragraphing and dividing a text into chapters or sections. UW Education lecturers seemed to place more importance on students using the specialised vocabulary in their field and using it appropriately.

MU lecturers in Education seemed to be more distracted by poor grammar in student writing than the other two groups; in addition, they had a higher expectation that student writers would try to interest them in their ideas. They placed less stress on accurate quotation and less emphasis on the necessity for students to fully grasp the ideas of others.

In other words, considering that these faculty all teach in the same subject discipline, there is still quite a range of attitudes within and between universities. Even though we may say that there is more agreement than disagreement among these Education faculty members, there is still a fairly wide range of responses, limits to tolerance and standards of acceptability.

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

There is probably more agreement than disagreement exhibited among the responses to the academic writing survey. Faculty in all four universities consistently placed more emphasis on content features than form features. They also placed great stress on matters to do with intellectual property and plagiarism in the Use of Literature section and appeared to believe that reading and analysing the ideas of others is essential to academic work. Faculty also consistently ranked Content as the most important feature, with Argument, Communicative Ability and Organisation in descending order afterwards.

Aspects of academic writing which attracted the strongest agreement were as follows:

Writing should show an understanding of the main concepts of the subject area.

The content should be relevant to the topic.

The assignment should fulfil the requirements as set out in the assignment topic.

The line of argument should be clear to the reader.

An emphasis on these four aspects of writing in pre-tertiary, bridging and study skills course would no doubt be of great benefit to students. The message for EAP teachers in particular is that they should focus on the broader picture in students' writing, on content, ideas and arguing a case rather than on errors in form. Errors or micro-level skills are important, it would seem, but are less important than the macro-level skills of communicating ideas in a logical way.

The most surprising result was the divergence of views on academic style, with the only agreement being that the style should be appropriate to the task. Considering the divergence of responses, lecturers need to clearly state their requirements for academic style for the tasks which they set. Alternatively, students need to ask for these standards to be given explicitly before they submit their work. The message clearly is that faculty do not appear to agree now, if

they ever did, on what constitutes an academic style.

The differences discovered between the humanities and science area responses were minimal but science students should keep in mind that the scientific philosophy of accuracy and objectivity is expected to influence the way they write and think.

The comparison between the three Education Faculties was of interest in that there were a number of instances of differing response rates, which did not seem to follow a particular pattern. The message here is that students need to be aware that there are differences in expectations between universities and between individual academics and that they should learn to judge reader expectations as accurately as possible.

Audience or reader expectations are a crucial part of learning to become an insider in the academic discourse community and these expectations must be made as explicit as possible by academics. Those who teach academic literacy skills would also do well to ascertain the expectations of academics in their own universities.

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# Teaching Difficulties Associated with Variability in Student Working Memory Capacity

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Working memory, conceived of as an arena of computation, has been implicated in accounting for variability in performance in a number of verbally weighted tertiary study areas. For example, variability in working memory capacity accounts for a significant proportion of the variability in comprehension, problem solving, and statistical and other reasoning tasks. This paper summarises some of the research findings in regard to the above, and discusses the implications for lecturers' management of the teaching of aspects of subjects where diversity in working memory capacity across students may provide difficulties in the communication of key concepts.

Working memory is a system that temporarily holds and manipulates information while we carry out cognitive tasks (Baddeley, 1992). It can be regarded as "an arena of computation" (Just & Carpenter, 1992). For example, for you to remember my office number (069 332248) in the period between reading the number and dialling the number requires a short term memory performance. However, for you to tell me my phone number with the digits in reverse order requires working memory, because this task demands that you hold the number in memory while you compute the order from right to left. Note that people who have very good short term memories do not necessarily have high capacity working memories, and vice versa. Variability in working memory capacity has been shown to account for a significant amount of the differences between people on tasks such as reading comprehension, verbal reasoning, problem solving, and statistical thinking.

I first review links between working memory capacity and performance on a range of cognitive tasks, concluding this section with a discussion of cognitive load. I then consider some of the implications of individual differences in working memory capacity for teaching, with attention being paid to aspects of tertiary literacy.

In this paper, tertiary literacy is conceived of as the ability to follow and communicate complex ideas and arguments, and includes the competency to deal with abstractions. As such, tertiary literacy in terms of its relevance to particular tertiary topics is arguably a continuum, touching every area of tertiary study, with some areas (e.g., philosophy) pertaining more to tertiary literacy

than others (e.g., algebra). At one end of the continuum we have topics with a very heavy verbal component, while at the other end of the continuum the phrase tertiary literacy is almost a metaphor. Tertiary literacy as a goal is a life long task.

## RESEARCH RELATING WORKING MEMORY TO COGNITIVE PERFORMANCES

### WORKING MEMORY AND READING COMPREHENSION

Just and Carpenter, and their colleagues (e.g., Carpenter, Miyake, & Just, 1994, 1995; Daneman & Carpenter, 1980; Just & Carpenter, 1987, 1992; King & Just, 1991; Miyake, Carpenter, & Just, 1994; Miyake, Just, & Carpenter, 1994), have given working memory a key role in accounting for individual differences in reading related tasks, especially comprehension. Their research has relied in part on the use of a working memory span measure derived with the aid of a dual task methodology. This methodology requires subjects to perform two tasks concurrently, and yields a measure of an individual subject's working memory "span".

One span test, the reading span test designed by Daneman and Carpenter (1980), requires subjects to read a set of sentences while retaining the final word of each sentence for later recall. Only the sentence being read is visible to the reader. An individual's working memory capacity is defined as the size of the largest group of sentences for which a subject can correctly recall the final word of each sentence following the reading of the sentences. Thus, if the sentence block contained the following two sentences, "The versatile musician played a lively tune on his trumpet", and "The politician visited the town in order to open the new hospital", then first the subject has to read each sentence, and then, with the sentences out of sight, has to recall "trumpet" and "hospital".

Working memory span, as measured by the largest number of sentences which can be read and followed by the correct recall of the final word of each sentence, typically varies across university students from 2 to 5.5 (Just & Carpenter, 1992). The reading span measure, and a similar, listening span measure, correlate moderately (between .5 and .6) with results on the Verbal Aptitude Test, and highly (between .7 and .9) with answering comprehension questions (e.g., Daneman & Carpenter, 1980; Just & Carpenter, 1992). However, it is noteworthy that passive short term memory performance (e.g., recalling a list of unrelated words) does not correlate significantly with reading comprehension (e.g., Perfetti & Goldman, 1976).

It seems, however, that the dual task used to measure a working memory span need not be a predominantly reading task in order to predict reading comprehension level. Turner and Engle (1989) examined measures of ability to retain to-be-recalled words when the distracter task was verification of a numerical calculation rather than a reading task. For example, if the stimuli for one trial consisted of the following mental arithmetic problems and attached words, "[5

x 3] - 8 = 7 wireless", and "[4 x 5] + 2 = 18 horse", then the successful participant would respond True on presentation of the first string, then False on presentation of the second string, and finally, recall "wireless" and "horse". Measures of working memory span obtained from this numerical operation task correlated almost as highly with reading comprehension measures as did reading span measures.

The position of Turner and Engle (1989) then, differing somewhat from that of Just and Carpenter (e.g., 1992), is that the span tasks used to assess working memory capacity measure a more general working memory factor than simply working memory for tasks related to the content domain of the working memory test. An important implication is that if the reading and other span tasks measure a general working memory capacity, then we may be able to use the results from almost any span test to predict performance on a range of cognitive tasks.

#### WORKING MEMORY CAPACITY AND REASONING/PROBLEM SOLVING PERFORMANCE

Recent studies have linked working memory capacity constraints with differential performance across subjects in problem solving and reasoning tasks. Carpenter, Just, and Shell (1990) have shown that level of performance on the Raven's Progressive Matrices test (Raven, 1965), a complex problem solving test, is associated with an ability to store intermediate goals. Kyllonen and Christal (1990) carried out four large factor analytic studies, involving a total of more than 2,000 military recruits, and found significant correlations between performance both on reasoning ability tests taken from the psychometric literature, and on working memory capacity tasks. Other reasoning researchers (e.g., Johnson-Laird, 1983; Rips, 1988; and Sternberg, 1988) have also invoked working memory constraints to account in part for subjects' difficulties on a range of reasoning tasks.

Casey (1993) made a detailed study of subjects' difficulties with a particular reasoning problem form, termed a double modifier problem. Here is an example of a double modifier problem.

I show you a blurry photograph. I inform you that I have no brothers and sisters, and pointing to the photograph state, "That man's father is my father's son". Is the person in the photograph my grandfather, my father, myself, my son, or my grandson?

(The solution is at the end of the paper.)

Such problems can be formed from any list of items that can be arranged linearly on some dimension. For example, "I am thinking of a number. The number before the number I'm thinking of is the number before 5. What number am I thinking of?" (The correct answer is 5.)

Casey hypothesised that both the failure of many subjects to correctly solve the problem form (some 60-70% usually failed), and especially the inability of some 30% of subjects to solve the problem form after training, may be accounted for

in part by constraints on working memory capacity. Casey (1994, 1995) reported finding significant correlations between working memory span and performance on such problems. He also found that subjects with a relatively low working memory capacity experienced more difficulty in learning how to solve such convoluted verbal problems than did subjects with a higher working memory capacity.

Casey (1994) also reported a significant correlation between working memory span and performance on another verbal problem, termed the transfer problem.

Container A has white marbles, and container B has black marbles. I have a small scoop which when filled always holds the same number of marbles. A full scoop of the white marbles is transferred to the black marble container (B), and mixed in. Next, a full scoop of the mixture in B is transferred back to the white marble container (A).

Are there now more white marbles in B than black marbles in A, the same, or the reverse? (The solution is at the end of the paper.)

Accuracy level on this problem across 1,600 subjects was 30%. Working memory spans were available for 100 participants, with the correlation between accuracy and WM span being highly significant ( $r = .28$ , highly significant for 100 participants).

#### STATISTICS

Variability across people in reasoning and decision making in the statistical area can also be related to differences between people in working memory capacity. Farry and Casey (1994), working with a group of 21 high school students, found a significant correlation between performance on a probability task and working memory capacity. Casey (1995) also found a significant correlation between working memory capacity and performance on a statistical decision making task in a group of 20 University students taking a research methods in psychology subject.

The findings for statistics are consistent with the literature reporting children's difficulties with arithmetic word problems. Arithmetic word problems are much more difficult than equivalent problems in a numeric format. Cummins, Kintsch, Reusser, and Weimer (1988) reported one type of arithmetic problem which was solved correctly by all first grade children, but for which only 29% were correct when it was presented in a word format. Carpenter, Corbitt, Kepner, Lindquist, and Reys (1980) found that children in the United States perform between 10% and 30% worse on arithmetic word problems relative to equivalent numeric problems. Cummins et al. noted that as students advance to relatively sophisticated topics, they continue to find word problems more difficult than those presented in a symbolic format.

In summary, results from correlational studies in the areas of reading comprehension, reasoning, and problem solving have shown significant links between working memory span and performance. The consistency with which

working memory capacity has been linked with performance across a range of cognitive tasks suggests that working memory capacity needs to be considered as a variable which may account for differential performance across students in a range of university subjects.

#### COGNITIVE LOAD AND THE WORK OF SWELLER

Sweller and his colleagues (Chandler & Sweller, 1991, 1992; Sweller, 1993; Sweller & Chandler, 1994; Sweller, Chandler, Tierney, & Cooper, 1990) have paid particular attention to the consequences for the learner of a high cognitive load being associated with the organisation and presentation of information.

Sweller and Chandler (1994) have targeted what they term "elemental interactivity" as a particular factor in determining cognitive load. They claim that "the cognitive load associated with material to be learned is strongly related to the extent to which the elements of that material interact with each other" (p. 188). For example, learning the vocabulary of a foreign language involves zero interactivity because the foreign language term for one word can be learned in isolation from the foreign language term for another word. The learning difficulty associated with acquiring the vocabulary of another language relates to the large number of words that need to be learned.

However, when learning the syntax of another language, the elements of information to be learned must be learned in relation to one another. Sweller and Chandler give the example of learning how to use in English the verb *to be*. Learning how to use the verb *to be* arguably requires the simultaneous learning of a complex of syntactic and semantic relations.

Sweller's cognitive load theory is detailed in several places (e.g., Sweller, 1993; Sweller & Chandler, 1994). It suffices here to note that he advocates reliance on our relatively powerful long term memory to circumvent the difficulties associated with limitations on working memory. Sweller argues for schema acquisition and automation as major learning mechanisms. For Sweller, "a schema is a construct that allows people to classify information according to the manner in which it will be used" (Sweller, 1993, p. 2). For example, the schema for the letter *b* allows us to read this letter in a near infinite variety of presentation styles. We have schema for all kinds of everyday activities, such as eating at a restaurant. We need schema to learn and to carry out skilled performances. Skilled performance also requires that many of the relevant activities be automatic. Thus, driving a car competently requires that the changing of gears be an automatic process.

The use of schemas and automatic processing reduce the load on working memory. A schema allows us to chunk elements of information into a single element, while automation provides a detour around working memory.

Sweller has presented evidence for some nonintuitive ideas in regard to teaching, such as not having computing equipment present when teaching certain aspects of computing because of the relatively heavy cognitive load in trying to deal with several items simultaneously.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

The research shows that differences in performance on a range of cognitive tasks can be related in part to differences in working memory capacity. A key feature of many of the studies reported above is that they involve verbal material that must be held in memory while some relationships are manipulated. Note that not all tertiary studies place heavy demands on working memory capacity. Some areas are predominantly dependent on long term memory, such as multiple choice examinations in first year psychology. (Here I have consistently found no relationship between performance and working memory capacity.)

At the tertiary level there would seem to be many specific topics and broad areas where the teacher may need to be sensitive to the manner in which working memory capacity variation across individuals, or in some cases the very high cognitive load of the material, may provide difficulties in communication.

Working memory is likely to be stressed by any material which requires both a relatively high computational load and a concurrent memory load. Relevant academic tasks which might stress working memory would seem to include:

Taking notes in lectures;

Following statistical computations;

Grasping research methodology;

Any form of complex reasoning, including verbal problems;

Split attention tasks, such as working between notes and a computer.

Further, such tasks seem to fall under the umbrella of tertiary literacy.

If tertiary literacy is conceived of as the ability to follow and communicate complex ideas and arguments, and includes the competency to deal with abstractions, then difficulties in students' attaining one or another aspect of tertiary literacy may in part be associated with limits on working memory capacity.

What are teachers to do? Sweller (1993) proposes that teachers organise their instruction so that students do not have to use lengthy chains of reasoning, an exercise that will inevitably place strain on working memory. This is not to say that we accept that students will forever be incapable of lengthy chains of reasoning. Rather, the material needs to be organised so that it extends slightly already existing schemas. Teachers may well reply that this has been known for a long time. However, Sweller has shown that some teaching practices which seem intuitively correct at times, such as having a computer present when teaching computer applications, may have to be reexamined.

Teachers might also gain by having some knowledge of the working memory capacity of their students, and knowing which tasks are likely to be more difficult for students with a relatively low working memory capacity. Some form of test would be required, such as a reading or listening span test, or a backwards digit

span test. (The listening span test is the equivalent of the reading span test described earlier in this paper, with the distracter task being to write True or False to each of a block of statements, and after responding True or False to all statements in the block to write down the final word in each of the statements. Such a test can be administered to a group.) Students might profitably be grouped according to working memory for some tasks. This would not simply be grouping students on general ability because some of the top students in some subjects have relatively low working memory capacities.

A general approach to aiding the development of tertiary literacy is to attempt to introduce students early on in their tertiary studies to a range of skills necessary for performing at a high level in tertiary study, and arguably for education in today's world. Such an introduction is being carried out here at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, as part of the Bachelor of Arts program. All students now have to take two generic skills subjects, topics including a wide range of computer usage, and being able to reason critically. Of course the teaching of these subjects necessarily requires that the points made above on working memory limitations and cognitive load be noted and monitored. If aspects of these skills (e.g., computing, critical analysis) can become part of a student's repertoire of relatively automated skills, then the teaching and learning of many University level subjects may be made easier because the possession of these relatively automated skills will lessen the load on working memory. Thus, one aim of the generic skills subjects is to put students on the path to acquiring a range of skills relevant to tertiary literacy and tertiary education at an early stage of their University studies, thus possibly making easier the teaching and learning of many subjects which traditionally are very cognitively demanding.

## CONCLUSION

The successful management of complex cognitive tasks relies to some extent on working memory. Areas of tertiary literacy arguably fall into the domain of complex cognitive tasks, and obstacles to the attaining of literacy in such areas may be related to working memory overload. Teachers may need to be sensitive to individual differences in working memory capacity, the cognitive load inherent in a task, and the cognitive demands of a particular teaching style in planning and executing teaching strategies.

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#### Solutions to problems in paper

Note that attempts to explain how to solve these problems can at times lead to heated argument.

1. The Brothers and Sisters Problem.

Here is one of several approaches. First, rewrite "that man's father is my father's son" as "that man's father is me". Next, rewrite the latter statement as "I am that man's father". Solve from here. If I am the father of "that man", then "that man" is my son.

2. The Marble Problem

The answer is that there is the same number of white marbles in the black container as black marbles in the white container. Consider the scoop on the way back from the black container to the white container. It contains a mixture of black and white marbles. Supposing there are  $x$  black marbles and  $y$  white marbles in the scoop. The  $x$  black marbles now going into the white container replace in the scoop the  $x$  white marbles that were left behind in the black container.

# Peaks and Pitfalls of a Tertiary Communication Policy

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Since 1993 the University of Western Sydney, Macarthur has had a policy which states that all students commencing an undergraduate degree course must satisfy non credit competency requirements in computer literacy and communication skills. This discussion of the 'peaks' and 'pitfalls' of a tertiary communication competency policy represents the views of lecturers within the Learning Development Centre, just one of the stakeholders involved in the policy's implementation. At UWS Macarthur the Learning Development Centre is located within the Student Services Division.

## **BACKGROUND**

In 1991 the Chief Executive Officer, Professor David Barr established a Steering Committee and a Working Party within Macarthur to investigate how best to implement a mandatory competency policy. The impetus for the development of this policy was the concerns expressed by regional employers about the communication and computing skills of graduates. Although not involved in initial meetings, the Head of Students Services was later invited to join the Steering Committee and a member of the Learning Development Centre, the working party. At the time the Student Services Division became involved a variety of options were already being considered including a "Challenge Test" separate from courses and administered by the Student Services Division. This option was later to be firmly rejected.

Committee membership allowed the Student Services Division to affirm its commitment to several key principles including that communication competencies and their assessment be tied to relevant course content, that students should be notified as early as possible in their courses if they were thought to be at risk of not meeting competencies and that those students have access to free and readily available language and learning support. We also argued that since the acquisition of tertiary communication competencies was a developmental process, not a remedial one, credit courses should be considered as a support option.

The Minimum Communication Competency Policy, adopted by Academic

Committee in 1991, stated that Faculties were to be responsible where possible for teaching and assessment and that the Student Services Division (through the LDC) was to provide safety net tuition. With the additional funding received the LDC was able to develop a workshop and self access program in which referred students attend, usually in vacation, a Faculty specific twenty hour workshop followed by ten to twelve hours of self access work monitored through individual appointments with lecturers in the Learning Development Centre. In 1995 around 150 students attended the workshop program. While most of these students were referred by Faculty lecturers, a small number of students self referred and voluntarily sought Faculty endorsement.

The provision of the communication competency safety net is just one of the support programs run by the LDC. In addition to this program the Learning Development Centre teaches credit communication based courses, responds to requests to run writing workshops in Faculty course time, organises and teaches several preparation programs and offers general workshops and individual appointments.

## PEAKS

The introduction of the Communication Competency Policy has brought several positive outcomes, not least of which is the increased role of the LDC. Firstly, increased funding allowed the LDC to run more developmental programs ie the safety net program and courses for credit which we also see falling within our responsibilities under competencies. We are pleased the University is making a commitment that goes at least a little way beyond the 'band aid' approach that can result from poor funding. As Bizzell (1992, p 125) says "We ought not to pretend to give people access to this power by admitting them to college, and then prevent them from really attaining it by not admitting them into the academic discourse community".

Secondly, student success at university is increased and career prospects are enhanced. The development of academic communication is, of course, a process that continues all the time a student is at university and beyond. Therefore the role of the Learning Development Centre in providing a safety net program is only one of a variety of paths that should be open to students who are experiencing difficulty. Nevertheless, we feel that the thirty hour workshop and monitored self access program offered by the LDC does provide successful tuition at what is often a critical time for students at risk of failing or discontinuing.

Students are referred to Competency workshops for a variety of reasons and have different needs. While some are referred for lower-level needs such as problems in sentence-level grammar or conventions of citation, many are referred because of difficulties with higher-order competencies such as the ability to analyse sources, to reason and argue, and to write in a genre appropriate to the task. Because the range of needs is so great, the workshop and follow-up program could not be expected to make a very great impact on all students' performance. This is particularly true of referrals for problems in English expression or

grammar.

There is overwhelming evidence from studies of second language acquisition (eg Cummins 1984) that the 'interlanguage', or transitional language forms, of students learning in a second language are persistent and that it may take some years before their language approximates that of native speakers. This is particularly true of the development of academic registers of language, where students need to learn a grammar which, in comparison with spoken English, is more heavily nominalised, more abstract, more technical, and distinctively shaped by particular discourse communities (see for example Halliday and Martin, 1983).

With sufficient time, many students will learn the skills of academic communication which are being transmitted in each subject studied at the university. However, some of the processes, knowledge, skills and expectations of the disciplines frequently remain implicit because of the constraints of time or, possibly, because lecturers have not considered how the modes of communication of their subjects can best be explained. LDC programs (competency as well as other teaching subjects and workshops) attempt to make this knowledge more explicit.

The samples of student writing given in the short case studies below show that explicit instruction in the role of language in academic communication can lead to improvement in areas of need. It is worth noting that when asked for feedback, the students make the point that the workshops are most helpful in revealing previously unknown expectations, such as about essay structure, and the use of evidence, and in showing students how to meet those expectations.

Nikki is a student in first year of the Bachelor of Teaching (Early Childhood) Degree. Although born in Australia, she had lived in Greece between the ages of two and sixteen, speaking little English until she returned to Australia to be placed in Year 9. From here she continued through to Year 12 and university with little ESL support. In Greece she had performed very well in the Year 10 exams being placed in the top 5% of candidates. When Nikki was referred to the Learning Development Centre's program, she had already received a number of unsatisfactory grades and was in danger of failing the course. Samples from these assignments demonstrate that Nikki was a capable student who had not grasped the requirements of the genres in which she was writing. For example, in a report asking students to comment on accessibility for strollers or prams and to consider the implications, Nikki wrote

How many times has one encountered the above obstacle whether the incident may have been an integral part of life either by coincidence or maybe because the person pushing the pram was none other than oneself.

How many times ?

A question of infinite meaning and responses, however as one undertook task b the focus questions and the centre of this discussion seemed to be profound. Why? What causes "this" delay. Who is at fault?

Perhaps the person pushing the pram. Could it be possible? Can it be possible "....."

Students not accustomed to tertiary expectations will often try to shape their writing according to the discourse conventions with which they are familiar. (Bartholomae cited in Bizzell, 1992, p165) In a follow up individual appointment Nikki explained that she was a fan of television dramas and had often been praised in English (literature) classes for her 'dramatic' writing style. In fact, as with many referred students, Nikki reported that she would not have sought help from the LDC had she not been referred because, after failing to identify any specific weaknesses in her writing herself, she had decided that she simply lacked the ability to pursue university study. While the marker of these assignments had made it clear that the writing was inappropriate with comments like "you are supposed to be analysing ...", it was not until models were deconstructed in the workshop that Nikki was able to distinguish between her writing style and the conventions required by the lecturer.

Yasmin is from a Turkish background and grew up in rural NSW. Her father died when she was 15 and she left school to help her mother run the property. When she was 19 she undertook 2 years of TAFE studies and then married. Her husband is also Turkish and they now have two children. Yasmin is in her late twenties and has just completed the first year of a Bachelor of Social Science degree. Her extra-curricula reading tends to be in the area of popular texts of self-help psychology, alternative therapies and self-improvement. In first semester 1995, Yasmin gained good marks in her written assignments (eg 17/20, 13.5/16). They were fairly short essays which required interpretations of mainstream sociological theories. One essay, however, received a 'C' grade and drew the following comment from the lecturer: (The essay was on the application of social policy)

There is ample amount of good material here and some impressive research but you haven't produced a strong well-structured clearly articulated argument. You should have been able to do so given the calibre of the material you have...some of the bits & pieces are not really relevant to the issue to hand even though interesting and important in themselves. You need to develop a much tighter and more explicit structure for your paper.

A comment on an essay that received 17/20 also included praise for the ideas contained in it but commented on lack of clarity of expression. The opening sentence of this essay reads:

The study of sociology is an eye opener, although being very complex it is forever changing and this is how it differs from science.

Later in the essay, the student writes:

In the western society marriage is thought to be a very natural occurrence which is supposed to increase people's happiness and

encourage harmonious interaction with man and women. This is generally not the case. People who had got married had the belief that marriages are made in heaven and they will live happily ever after as in the story of Cinderella who found her prince. Marriage does not promise happiness, love, sexual satisfaction and an escape from loneliness. The high cases of divorce in Western society show a realistic illusion of marriage.

The lecturer's comment on this paragraph, apart from a few suggestions for alternate vocabulary choices and the addition of a "therefore" was "There is a lot written about myth". Although the essay received a good mark, the student began to realise that the style of her written expression would have to become more academic and she would have to improve her essay structure if she were to meet the more stringent marking criteria of second semester.

In the second semester, Yasmin self-referred for competency assistance. She brought along the introduction to an essay discussing the effect of multiculturalism on Aboriginal people which read:

The ideals that Australians and Governments signal what culture Australia embodies has not been equally expressed by the original inhabitants of this island. The ideology that is reflected in white society is one of a never ending search of materialistic possessions in order to make oneself happy. The term multiculturalism needs to be discerned from the good to the bad. There is a need to look into the past to document the original sources ... assimilation and integration, wherefrom multiculturalism grew. The main areas in this argument will examine the identities, equality, losses, effects, power, falseness, mistakes vices and misrepresentations of Aboriginal society. Large scale migration has included many benefits to immigrants but tipped the scales for the inhabitants, leaving them to walk on the darkside of life alone. Although this century has begun to open the locked cupboard of colonial history and face the truth about Australian roots. It is the Government that needs to accept and acknowledge what Aborigines stand for if they wish to call themselves Christians and rid themselves of ego.

After commencing the monitored self-access part of the competency program, Yasmin started to identify her own tendency to combine colloquialisms, cliches and rhetoric. She started to unpack the confused compression of ideas within sentences and reworked the essay, so the final version of the introductory paragraph read:

Multiculturalism is a term that governments use to respond to the cultural diversity of contemporary Australia in the interest of the individual and society as a whole. This essay will concentrate on Aboriginal groups within a multicultural context. Aborigines experience of large scale migration started in 1788, it changed the Aboriginal's pattern of harmonious living. Prior to 1974, policies were adopted in an effort to assimilate immigrants and indigenous people

into the Australian way of life but they failed. Today Multicultural policies are aimed at giving every Australian an opportunity to participate fully in Australian society. To all people, Multiculturalism is represented positively through the media and by Australian governments, but where its effects are negative, it needs to be examined. The positive effects suggests ideals of equality for all Australians, however, equality is not experienced by many of the original habitants of the island. In comparison to the overall population Aborigines are more disadvantaged from alienation unemployment, health and education. This essay will address the position power and equalities of the Aboriginal people in Australian society. The mainstreaming of multiculturalism, especially in young generations should lead to a greater degree of acceptance and contribute to equal conditions as time goes on. (This will allow aborigines to become a part of the collective group - the Australian society.)

In comparison with the first attempt, the writer has used this introduction to attempt to define its terms less dramatically and to make statements which represent a thesis position. Structurally, there is still much improvement to be made, but its register is becoming more academically appropriate.

The essay received 20/35. The lecturer's comments criticised the main assumption in the argument and some issues of content, but praised the essay as 'stimulating'. Yasmin attended the competency workshop program during the summer vacation and we will be monitoring her work in first semester 1996.

Tony is studying for a degree in Visual Arts and came to university straight from school after completing the HSC. Tony was born and educated in Australia, although his family are Croatian and the older members of the family do not speak English at home. The essays from which the following examples were extracted were each marked by the same lecturer. The student was referred to the competency program after submitting the essay from which the first example is taken:

A examination of Paris society and art until the early twentieth century and beginning with the works of Manet as they represent the first adjoining of art reflective of the society their produced in, that of a modern life emerging? Mark Roskills statement is validated on the question of what is art history?

Why was there a avant garde (art of our time, revolutionary and radical) approach to composition and the subject matter in art? Manets 'Luncheon on the Grass' was exhibited in Paris Salon des Refuses. It was refused in the Paris Salon of 1863. As it ignored the basic rules of composition, that line, form and colour were to be finished in order to create three dimensional space. Its refusal although was mainly due to these, description of 'Luncheon on the Grass' as 'indecent' and of Manet's 'Clymbia' also in the year of 1863 too lifelike for the time.

This sample was analysed by John Grierson, a lecturer in the LDC, and published in the Communication Competency Report (Grierson and Catterall, 1995).

The second example is from an essay submitted after Tony had completed a competency workshop and was still attending the self-access component of the program. In comparison it shows a greater awareness of the purpose and structure of the introduction stage of the essay genre. The second text has a clearer thesis, it previews the argument of the essay more successfully, and, in avoiding questions, uses a more appropriate academic style. Note also in the second paragraph of the first text that the relationship between the 'topic' sentence - "Why was there a *avant garde* ... approach to composition and subject matter in art" and the remainder of the paragraph is rather unclear. The typically deductive style of essays in our culture requires the following kind of claim and elaboration: "The *avant garde* movement can be seen as a reaction to the constraints imposed by the Paris salon. These constraints are exemplified in the Salon's refusal in 1863 to exhibit Manet's 'Luncheon on the Grass'" etc. The second text shows more sophistication in paragraph and argument development.

Australia and America adopted their respective landscapes, firstly as a symbolisation of national identity and secondly, as a symbolisation of God. These two would merge to form the identity of nation as God's own country. This reading of the landscape can be seen in the nineteenth century paintings of the respective countries. In Australia, the Heidelberg School which originated in the 1880s and lasted roughly to the 1980s would serve to represent the landscape in these terms. In America, the movement of luminism which originated in the 1850s would seek to do the same. The task of this essay is to show how the Australian film 'Crocodyl Dundee' and the American film 'Dances with Wolves' reinforced the reading of the landscape first seen in the nineteenth century paintings.

The landscape is read firstly as a symbol of national identity. The distinctive characteristics of both American and Australian landscape allowed it to become a symbol of their nation. The landscape to both countries represented a source of difference, which allowed them to construct a national identity based upon this. The illustration of how both Australia and America saw and used their distinctive landscape to represent national identity can be seen in the paintings produced by the Australian Heidelberg School and the American Luminism movement.

This example not only displays a more appropriate structure, it also demonstrates a greater awareness of how to order claims and signal the order to the reader. The word 'firstly' ('The landscape is read firstly as a symbol of national identity'), while apparently minor, is an important element of the logical structure of the argument.

The second essay shows a much keener awareness than the first of logical and persuasive paragraph development. The initial claim in paragraph 2 about reading landscape as symbolic of national identity is clearly developed through the simple device of lexical repetition, and through expansion by reference to the two schools. The second text also clearly signals that two or more claims will be developed.

Improvements shown in these three case studies can be attributed to explicit guidance by the competency tutor following analysis of student needs. As can be seen in the examples above, competency workshop and individual programs developed by the LDC must necessarily respond to the discourse requirements of different disciplines. One of the 'peaks' of our involvement in the Communication Policy has been the increased contact with different Faculties. Liaison with lecturers and students in order to collect samples of student assignment questions and text and to discuss assessment expectations has given us the opportunity to develop more Faculty-specific materials.

Furthermore, students who may otherwise not have sought the assistance of staff in the LDC have reacted positively to the help they have received in the programs. An evaluation report completed in 1995 revealed an overwhelmingly positive student response.

### **PITFALLS**

Perhaps one of the most persistent problems associated with the communication competency requirements has been the uneven commitment of Faculties and their lecturing staff. This situation, exacerbated by the growing number of part time and casual staff, has resulted in great variance in the attention given in courses to the development of communication skills and in the frequency and number of referrals to the safety net program. In fact, inconsistency in approach and management of tasks related to competency requirements, including dissemination of information to staff and students, record keeping and notification of results, could potentially lead to the inequitable situation where a student may become aware that competency standards may not be being met too late for effective action.

While the competency requirements may have raised the profile of academic literacy and resulted in many lecturers seeking to increase their understanding and knowledge in this area, this effect has not been universal and some misunderstandings persist. Perhaps because some Faculties have located their competency assessment within a particular subject and also because of the 'separate' nature of the safety net program, some lecturers have tended to view the development of academic communication as a skill that can be learned in a finite period of time. Thus instead of viewing the development of academic writing as a process for which every lecturer should have responsibility, some see it only as the province of a particular subject or of writing specialists.

In the initial stages of policy implementation staff at the Learning Development Centre had a number of other concerns which, while regarded as potential pitfalls, have not eventuated. The decision not to fund the safety net program by levying Faculties per referred student relieved fears that economies may lead to some students being disadvantaged in the admission process or during their courses. In addition, much discussion initially centred around the fact that in undertaking to provide the safety net program, the LDC was, for this program, moving away from the completely voluntary and anonymous service that characterised many

other services offered. However student referral by Faculty staff does not appear to have compromised the overall autonomous nature of LDC services and neither, as feared, do students seem to resent being referred. Evaluations have shown that the majority of students are very appreciative of the safety net service (Grierson and Catterall, 1995).

Although a university communication policy clearly needs sustained commitment at all levels to be effective, we believe the Communication Competency policy at UWS Macarthur does address some of the issues related to concerns about tertiary literacy and has been at least partially successful in providing some solutions.

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# The Teaching of Communication Skills in a Health Science Faculty

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This paper reports on a survey of current practices in the teaching of written and oral communication skills conducted in the Faculty of Health Sciences, Cumberland Campus, University of Sydney. Means of identifying students with problems (predominantly NESB school-leavers and mature age students) and possible causes are canvassed. More adequate screening of students before they enrol as well as early diagnosis after they begin study is advocated. Current policy in teaching of the skills and obstacles to the implementation of the policy are then discussed. This includes the processes whereby students with needs are helped and improvement in all students monitored. Several innovative approaches taken by various schools are explained: these include diagnostic essays, staff mentoring and peer assessment and tutoring.

Finally, recommendations are made for future development. It is concluded that since staff are not always trained in this area, they need expert support, such as is given already by the Language and Learning Unit, not only in helping the students at risk but also in training staff within the schools.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Academic Board of the University of Sydney has been concerned for a number of years with the development and assessment of communication skills as part of the learning outcomes of its students and in 1993 a working party of the University Language Board was set up to investigate the matter. The recommendations of the working party were subsequently adopted as policy by the University and the working party continued to work on the implementation of policy. In 1995, each faculty was asked to report on the teaching of written and oral communication skills in their area of responsibility.

The following is a report on a survey conducted by the Language and Learning Unit (LLU) for the Faculty of Health Sciences on the Cumberland campus. The Faculty consists of seven Schools: Communication Disorders (CD), Community Health (CH) which includes Rehabilitation Counselling (RC) and Aboriginal Health and Community Development, Health Information Management (HIM), Medical Radiation Technology (MRT), Occupational Therapy (OT), Orthoptics (O) and Physiotherapy (PT), and two Departments, Biomedical Sciences (Bio Sc) and Behavioural Sciences (Beh Sc) which service the Schools. Part of the Faculty of Nursing is situated on the campus but was not surveyed on this

occasion since that has been done by its own faculty.

The survey was limited for a number of reasons. Only coordinators of first year undergraduate studies were interviewed and the interviews were done at a very busy time of the year when examinations were in full swing. Some lecturers were too busy to be interviewed and gave written responses which it was not possible to follow up before the deadline. Some respondents who were interviewed were not happy with the research design; they felt that a written survey containing specific and more focussed questions followed by the interview/discussion would have been more useful and they found it difficult to respond fully in the unstructured interview/questionnaire (refer Appendix). Such a format was certainly the ideal but unfortunately time was too short to implement it.

This report, after a short discussion of what constitutes tertiary communication, will concentrate on three broad issues covered by the survey: barriers to effective practice, ways to overcome these barriers and a description of innovative schemes already in place within the Faculty. The report concludes with some recommendations for improvement in the teaching of communication skills.

## INTRODUCTION

The transactional model of communication, rather than the merely interactive, best describes what happens in the Faculty of Health Sciences, especially in the clinical setting. Communication would seem to be more than a two-way exchange: we send and receive messages simultaneously and there are no isolated, discrete acts of communication. Rather, it is a relationship which is multifaceted. Teaching and learning are not to be seen as separate parts of the communication event in which the lecturer teaches, the student learns more or less effectively. The teaching and learning aspects of communication should each be considered as two-way; the student teaches and the teacher learns at the same time as the more traditional process is taking place. Again, feedback between lecturer and student ideally is an ongoing relationship in which behaviour is modified on both sides to improve the message. The relationship consists of far more than the rather narrow call for students to improve *their* communication skills.

Michael Jackson, in his response to the report of The 1994 Experience Questionnaire from the Graduate Careers Council of Australia (5/3/96), suggests that lecturers might consider how to communicate better with their students and how teaching might be improved. If students have to learn for themselves and not merely reproduce what the teacher has said, then stimulation and empowerment are needed (p. 17). Along similar lines, Garner suggests that communication is not a matter of *conveying* messages but of *constructing* them. Continuous, mutual interpretation determines the success of the communication. In the communication process the 'student' is as much a participant as the 'teacher': a new message is created from which both learn (1995, p. 21).

The Language Board, in their draft statement of principles, used DEET's definition of literacy. Both remedial and developmental needs of students are embraced in the definition of literacy as '... the ability to read and use written

information and to write appropriately, in a range of contexts. It is used to develop knowledge and understanding, to achieve personal growth and to function effectively in our society... Literacy involves the integration of speaking, listening and critical thinking with reading and writing.' (*Australia's language: The Australian language and literacy policy*, 1991, p. 9.) This definition incorporates the notion of oracy but the distinction between literacy and oracy is a valid one since some students have difficulty with one or the other and not necessarily with both. It seems that literacy is to be defined as the ability to communicate.

In response to the Higher Education Council Report entitled *Achieving Quality* in October 1992, many universities produced a description of desirable generic attributes of graduates. Those identified by the University of Sydney include, under the category of 'Knowledge Skills', the ability to 'identify, access, organise and communicate knowledge in both written and oral English'. This is the only reference to communication skills in the document. Clancy and Ballard in a recent article (1995, p. 159) have questioned the validity of the listing of such 'skills, attributes and values', because it 'inevitably encourages a fragmented curriculum and mechanistic approaches to teaching and learning.' Skills courses that are decontextualised from content are of little value in a university. Jackson (5/3/96) makes the same point. He comments that students must learn for themselves and therefore, special study materials, essay writing guides and remedial counselling are merely 'mechanistic responses to intellectual and social difficulties of intention, motivation, communication and beliefs' (p. 17).

The truth of these observations is confirmed in the findings of the Cumberland campus survey.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. OBSTACLES TO PRACTICE AND WAYS TO OVERCOME THEM

#### *a) Lack of standardised measurements of abilities*

Most students with perceived problems were identified as Non-English speaking background (NESB), but not exclusively. The English-speaking background students (ESBs) with difficulties would seem to be mature age students who have come back to study after many years and their area of concern is usually writing, whereas NESBs have problems in oral communication as well. Younger ESBs - and, among these, males especially - have problems with oral communication because of shyness. But the main problem is in writing and the cause would seem to be that, like many NESBs, they have done mainly scientific subjects at school. Whereas school-based science relies heavily on multiple choice and short answer assessment, at the university even more science-based disciplines like MRT and PT require an increasing amount of writing. Therefore, although Tertiary Entrance Rankings (TERs) are in the mid 80's for MRT and the mid 90's for PT, many students are not 'up to standard'.

Communication Disorders specifically report that international students have problems because the course demands 'native speaker insights'. Similar problems

have not surfaced among migrants, probably because they do not see Speech Pathology as a career option at this stage, whereas international students plan to practice in their own countries in their own languages.

One solution is, to quote one respondent, 'to modify the TER to include compulsory English up to the standard which International Students have to have' (IELTS score of 6.5 at Sydney University). It remains to be seen if the inclusion of one unit of English in NSW HSC in 1995 will help. The expansive unstructured creative writing required in HSC English does not necessarily translate well to the rigorous writing required in Science subjects. Students with high IELTS/TOEFL scores going into PT, for example, have expressed anxiety about their ability to write 500 words of succinct prose on a highly technical subject. International students are given English language tests but their scores do not always indicate ability to cope with academic writing, especially of a scientific kind. For that reason, specific diagnostic tests linked to the discipline in which the student is to study would be more reliable.

*b) Narrow criteria for some courses*

Many lecturers believe that communication demands on students should be more explicitly stated in pre-enrolment literature. Course manuals are not given out until enrolment and there are only general comments about some subjects. When subjects are compulsory (and most are in First Year) obviously the advice needs to be in promotional material sent to secondary schools, etc. According to some respondents, the subject matter in some courses (such as Sociology) is difficult and outside the experience of many students; therefore they find it difficult to express themselves and since they do not have a choice, there is little that can be done before enrolment to prepare them.

*c) Lack of early diagnosis of problems*

Some Schools have formal procedures for identification of 'at-risk students'. MRT gives a diagnostic essay in Week 1 along with a lecture on writing skills. In other Schools there is a less formal process whereby weaker students are identified in tutorials in the first weeks. But many students are not identified until clinical practice in the mid-semester break or picked up in written exams at the end of semester 1 and then remediation begins in semester 2. This is obviously late but it is better than some situations when students do not know they are in trouble until they receive Show Cause letters in January of the next year.

A recent study of first-year university students found that, although inappropriate expectations were largely to blame for the problems which students experienced, there was clear evidence of the need for improved teaching which could be achieved by respecting two pedagogical principles: early and clear communication of expected outcomes and timely diagnostic feedback (Maslen, 1995, p. 10).

*d) Lack of timely feedback or any at all*

Most Schools make early return of assignments a priority. Informal or formal annual reviews are common (eg. DT had a three-day session at the end of 1995).

But for one-semester subjects, the long-term view is difficult. Lecturers complain that there are too few hours to follow up weaker students. In some Bio subjects, there is no feedback at all since assessment consists entirely of a MCQ exam which is not returned.

A mix of assessments - including progressive lab tests - is preferable. As Paul Ramsden says (1990, pp. 67-8), the methods used to assess students are one of the most critical of all influences on their learning. If 'learning' is not aimed at understanding the subject but adapting behaviour to the requirements of lecturers, students are encouraged to adopt a surface approach which is hardly satisfactory from the university's point of view and is certainly not conducive to lifelong learning. Assessment also involves a dynamic form of communication. Proper assessment should reflect the quality of teaching as well as learning; lecturers learn from their students' experiences and modify the content and approaches of their teaching, as well as seeking to modify the practices of their students.

*e) Lack of teachers skilled in teaching communication*

In some Schools, such as Communication Disorders, all lecturers are experts in communication but some Departments have no one qualified and some have only two or three. In the scientific, as opposed to the vocational, subjects, this is understandable. Teachers of specific communication subjects (such as the 42 hour Communication subject in HIM) attend staff development seminars whenever possible and those who teach client-based skills try to keep up to date with current theory and practice.

This survey will hopefully raise awareness of the importance of communication skills and a description of innovative approaches already in use in the Faculty may induce lecturers who feel their inadequacies in this area to contact their more experienced colleagues. A workshop was suggested but that proved very difficult to arrange at a time suitable to all. More lecturers may avail themselves of university-wide seminars and workshops, however. Other suggestions included a generic resource kit, with instructor's and participants' manual. This is probably of limited usefulness, as already indicated, if it is divorced, as it inevitably would be, from discipline-specific content.

## 2. INNOVATIVE SCHEMES ALREADY IN PLACE

Along with usual assessments (essays, oral presentations) there are less traditional forms of evaluation: writings of memos and reports, group work, role plays, impromptu speeches, minute papers, vivas, videos, peer teaching. I would like to highlight several schemes already in place in the Faculty:

a) A diagnostic essay for First Year MRT students (160 in 1996) is planned and marked in conjunction with LLU. The topic (no choice) and marking criteria are given out in week 1 and lectures on writing skills are given in two two-hour sessions in weeks 1 and 2 by tutors from LLU. No grade is given but extensive feedback is passed on and students identified as 'at-risk' are encouraged to visit LLU on an ongoing basis. Two further (assessed) essays are given, one in each semester for which a similar format is required.

b) A mentoring system. Each lecturer is allocated 5-6 students who have to see their mentor at least once in the first 5 weeks, and thereafter voluntarily. A fairly small proportion, perhaps 2-3 out of those 5-6, will continue the relationship. The most commonly discussed issues last year, after administrative concerns such as changing courses, were problems in writing essays and clinical communication. The scheme is being continued this year because it is valuable for lecturers in early identification of problems especially in oral communication.

c) Topics in PT I and II. These two subjects, conducted in the first two years of the undergraduate course, aim to address academic and current/future workplace needs of PT students, who need to be able to act autonomously as learners and professionals and yet also be increasingly accountable to their employers, colleagues and patients (Bridger, 1994). TOP 1 (in Semester 1) has two topic areas, namely the Australian Health Care System and Teaching and Learning Skills. The subjects address both content (that is, clinical/academic contexts) and process (that is, how one learns). The focus of this module is 'setting the scene' and aims to give students an introduction to, for example, concepts of 'being a professional', group theory and practice and giving and receiving constructive feedback. The study skills component is given less emphasis in the teaching and learning module to make the tutorial content appear less remedial and more like a cooperative learning group. Content areas are integrated into communication skills and academic literacy and oracy, so the subject appears relevant to students' needs.

In the first semester of second year, staff from the School of Behavioural Science give lectures on Social Interaction, Communication and Personality. The module aims to have students understand interaction dynamics, concentrating on aspects of, for example, social influence, leadership styles, persuasion techniques, interpersonal skills and grief management. In the second semester of second year, the combined themes of communication and ethics are used to develop 'awareness of self and others', helping students, for example, in identifying and understanding the implications of potential mismatches in needs/expectations between PT and Patient, identifying communication barriers, developing observation skills and understanding 'awareness' models as well as clinical models in a professional context.

d) Peer assessment and tutoring in Occupational Therapy. The written assignment (which this year is a review of a book or video about an individual's experience of disability and the relationship to concepts underlying OT practice) is marked by the students themselves, then by their peers, finally by the tutors. A Policy and Procedures Manual, written by the OT School, which includes a 16 page writing guide (perhaps too long?) is provided free to all first year students. Students are asked to complete their assignment early and to hand it to a member of their tutorial group. This person has three days to read the essay, correct any referencing errors and check if all the information needed is included. The students then have a week to make any necessary changes on the basis of the feedback provided by their fellows. The educational principle behind this is the fact that it is a valuable mechanism for improving both technical ability and

critical appraisal skills, reduces stress on students who fear singly-evaluated courses and makes feedback more immediate. Behind it, too, is the wish to demonstrate to students that they do not have to work exclusively on their own.

There was peer tutoring in OT of first year students by third year students in 1995, and also this year of second years by other second years. The latter is highly structured and with lower expectations. The tutors are self-selected: Honours students get credit towards their fieldwork while Pass students do it for the experience. Tutors and tutored both go to the lectures and are given structured outlines of readings and questions. The sessions are not remedial; their aim is to stimulate discussion and bring field work experience to students who speak the same language. Third Years learn to communicate the knowledge without the use of jargon and they build relationships across the years. An evaluation carried out at the end of last year by the Centre for Teaching and Learning found that those involved wanted the program to continue and develop.

f) In several Schools there are efforts to develop critical thinking among students using the tutorial format. HIM has instituted a very successful 'Journal Club' in semester 2 of first year. Students are 'expected to lead one small group discussion on a professional issue, participate in small group discussions, apply principles of small group work to enhance the functioning of the group, listen actively at all times and document a critical analysis on one professional issue'. The insights gained will be used in constructing similar programs for other undergraduate years and even postgraduate courses.

MRT will introduce the critiquing of journal articles in 1996 as will Sociology (discussion of selected readings of articles will replace oral presentations). The tutorial format will not only encourage critical thinking but also provoke debate and ensure that the shyest students talk.

g) Many Schools have introduced reflective journals in which students maintain a dialogue with their teachers on their ways of learning and barriers to success. Some lecturers ask for a letter of 1,000-2,000 words as well as a 2-5 minutes presentation from the students telling their 'story about their reading'. The value of this is not only that students identify their own learning styles and problem areas but also lecturers can enter into dialogue with students and identify potential barriers to learning.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Communication skills teaching would be improved if all staff followed the example of the majority of their colleagues and implemented the following:

1. Attending staff development seminars for those lecturers who need information and support (these are of limited usefulness because of time constraints but they certainly need to be on Cumberland campus).
2. Seeking support from LLU: for staff, in team-teaching; for students, in group and individual tutorials.

3. Using diagnostic tests and/or mentoring, whether formally or informally, to identify as early as possible students who may have problems. (An example of an easily administered test is the 'minute paper' used in the PT School. At the end of the class, students write down on a sheet of paper brief answers to two questions: 'What is the big point you learned in class today? What is the main, unanswered question you leave class with today?' Students drop their papers in a box near the door for the teacher to read after class).

4. Allowing various forms of assessments to take account of the different ways in which students learn and which also reflect the objectives of the subject, and certainly ones in which immediate feedback can be given. Perhaps reflective journals could be included in more course requirements.

## CONCLUSION

It would appear that most schools in the Faculty of Health Sciences are observing the golden rules of early diagnosis of students with difficulties and prompt feedback on student assessment. There is also evidence that academic staff are very sensitive to feedback *from* students in modifying courses and improving their overall teaching.

Probably because of its strong emphasis on professional and vocational education in the Faculty of Health Sciences, on Cumberland Campus of the University of Sydney, a great awareness of the need to teach communication skills well is demonstrated although gaps still exist in the implementation of policy. Departments who service Schools obviously do not need to provide the same type of teaching but their staff are conscious of the deficiencies in their programs. It is hoped that the highlighting of innovative approaches used by a significant number of staff in the Schools will encourage an exchange of ideas not only within Schools on the campus but further afield.

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#### APPENDIX: COMMUNICATION SKILLS SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Do students entering your faculty's programs have adequate pre-requisite communication skills to **commence** these programs?
  - 2a. In developing and describing programs and courses, i) are the communication demands made on students, and the means of developing and assessing communication skills explicitly stated? ii) is there a process for identification of students who do not have adequate pre-requisite communication skills?
  - 2b. In evaluating the effectiveness of programs and courses, is there a process for determining whether students have achieved learning gains in their communication skills, and for reviewing program design and delivery in response to such evaluations?
  - 3a. In undertaking programs and courses, i) are students required to engage in learning activities demanding communication skills; ii) are the communication skills explicitly taught within the programs and courses; iii) are the activities sequenced to make progressively greater demands on students' communication skills?
  - 3b. Are induction programs provided to assist students from other cultures in making the transition to new styles of learning and communicating?
4. Do assessment criteria reflect the communication skills outcomes of programs and courses? Are these criteria stated and explained in student prior to their undertaking tasks for assessment? Is timely feedback provided to students on their progressive development of communication skills, and opportunities provided for students to improve their performance in subsequent tasks?
  - 5a. Are students advised adequately about the communication demands of programs and courses, prior to and during their candidature, about the degree

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to which they are meeting these communication demands within the context of their study?

5b. Are processes in place for supporting students who are not meeting the communication demands of programs and courses?

6. Are there any staff within your school/dept with expertise and experience in teaching communication skills? What are their approaches to developing and assessing communication skills in their students?

7. On which aspects of students' communication skills does your faculty need more information?

8. Are additional resources needed by your faculty to support implementation of the communication skills policy?

9. What special innovative approach(es) being undertaken by your Faculty to improve students' communication skills would you like to highlight?

# The Development of Information Literacy in Undergraduate Programs

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Educators of tertiary students are beginning to help them take charge of their own learning by improving levels of information literacy. Information literacy is defined here as a multi-stage process for finding and using information that is underlain by a range of skills including intellectual, study, library and computer. In combination these are a set of skills that can be described as information skills. The research reported here sought to identify new entry students' perceptions of the information skills they need to succeed in their study. The results showed that there was a strong recognition of a need for information skills instruction but an uncertain understanding of how this should be delivered. This indicates that tertiary educators should examine the possibility that the level of information literacy may be improved through the teaching of these skills within specific learning contexts in the student's programs. An example of where this has been applied in an undergraduate program is discussed.

The arrival of the 'information age' has presented a challenging invitation to the educational community at all levels. Increases in amounts of information available and the range of new technology available to both professionals as intermediaries and to end-users to store, access and manage that information have meant a new response to academic programs and their content is needed. At the same time within education there has been a transition from a teaching model to a learning model and with this change comes a concern with information literacy. Information literacy is seen as a survival skill in this information age. 'Instead of drowning in the abundance of information that floods their lives, information literate people know how to find, evaluate, and use information effectively to solve a particular problem or make a decision...' (Breivik, c1989)

At the tertiary level students have in the past relied on their teachers for knowledge and on the skills of librarians for locating and retrieving needed information. When the volume of knowledge was relatively compact and the increase was slow they could manage with a basic level of information literacy. The

information explosion has turned what was a minor problem into a crucial problem as content changes so fast in some fields that it is difficult to remain 'experts'. To address this problem a new educational philosophy is needed that is based on a redefinition of literacy that includes information skills so that the student can take charge of their own immediate learning and develop skills for lifelong learning. As expressed by one researcher, 'The information literate are those who have learned how to learn. They know how to learn because they know how knowledge is organised, how to find information...' (Bruce, 1990 p.226)

Information literacy then encompasses the philosophy of giving students skills in using information so that they can be successful in their studies and continue their learning lifelong. Information skills as a concept then has several facets. These include: library skills, study skills, cognitive skills, and additional skills such as planning and presenting information. A process which has these facets organised into a logical order was developed by the NSW Department of Education and has been introduced into NSW schools. It has six steps: defining, locating, selecting, evaluating, organising, and presenting information at the appropriate level for the task.

These steps are a systematic approach to information problem-solving using six broad skill areas. The process is based on a critical thinking approach and has evaluation built in at various levels including the explicit level of evaluating information resources.

The majority of information literacy teaching and writing within the tertiary field was normative based on educators' and librarians' perceptions of what students needed to be taught. For example there was (and is) a large literature in the field of librarianship dealing with ideas of 'reader education' based on students (or other library users) approaching the library 'system' and needing to understand all its workings to be able to find the information they needed. Recent work from the British Library Research and Development Department (Cowley, 1990; Morrison, 1992; Markless, 1992), although broader in context than earlier works from libraries, is still very much based on the idea of a student approaching and needing to be taught about a large information system.

Taking both the lifelong learning philosophy and the user perspective into account the authors investigated what new entry tertiary students perceived they needed to succeed in their study (Coombs & Houghton, 1995). The user perspective is the accepted paradigm within the Department of Information Studies and demands that the needs of users be clearly identified before services and products are developed rather than the service/product supplier simply determining what they can provide or making assumptions about user needs.

Students were presented with a questionnaire asking about:

- previous interactions with a library and instruction in information skills
- perceptions of their ability to use various library services and resources when they entered university
- perceptions of the level of ability needed to use various library resources

- and services to be successful in their study programs  
 preferences for types of instruction in information skills.

The findings indicated that all of the students (188 first year B App Sci) had a basic awareness of information skills and that libraries were a complex system of organisation of resources and knowledge. Their perceptions of their own abilities with a range of information tools, resources and services were generally high. However, some anomalies and indecision lead us to believe that some information systems and/or resources had never been identified to them in our/library 'jargon'. They were indecisive about the type of instruction that they needed but generally agreed they needed it. The methods offered were based on traditional library methods and were separated from other learning experiences happening.

They perceived that they needed strong information skills to succeed. If students are to be offered these skills then tertiary educators need to take on a new role. This role is either of understanding and teaching information skills themselves within their discipline, or cooperating with special educators, that is those in Universities who have specific responsibilities for learning and teaching (for example, the Centre for Learning and Teaching in UTS), so as to have information skills taught in conjunction with other subject content.

Traditionally information skills have been taught separately and divided into well known categories of:

- study skills
- library skills
- communication skills including writing skills
- intellectual skills.

All of these have been taught by different people with different disciplinary backgrounds, different purposes, and with no coherent framework.

This traditional, separated approach is beginning to change. Literature in recent years indicates that educators are seeing the value of a consistent and logical approach. Because of this the concept of information literacy is gradually being developed by educators and librarians. Some of the most recent writers to use the concept in the broad based way described here are Eisenberg & Berkowitz (1990), Cheek et al (1995), Farmer & Mech (1992). Mike Eisenberg's work in particular with his 'The Big Six Skills' can be closely identified with the six steps described above and the differences are in labelling rather than conceptual.

From our research it appears that the ideal is for information skills to be taught within the context of each subject so that students understand the level of skill needed and the types of resources needed for the task set. This will involve working with information professionals and with learning professionals in learning centres to develop strategies within the discipline and within each subject. Then students will gradually and logically develop an overall high level of information skills to use after graduation as well as to succeed in immediate study. As this is a process that will take time to evolve, as a beginning a full

semester subject (Communication and Information Skills) has been developed based on the Information Skills process described earlier and was first offered in 1993.

It begins with some basic study skills (time management, note taking, etc. and understanding the university culture) and then moves into topic definition, locating information (categories of information resources and their organisation), selecting information (models of the search process, how indexing and abstracting services work), evaluating information (evaluation models), organising information (analysis and synthesis, argumentation, persuasion, critical thinking), presenting information (report and essay writing, oral presentation). The assignments are set to measure the level of skill they have achieved in researching a topic, which encompasses the first four parts of the process, in oral presentation and in written presentation in the form of an essay.

Although the students have been observed to have a positive attitude about the content, one major difficulty is that there is such a wealth of resource material and search strategies to introduce to the students that the real need is for the subject to have a much longer teaching period. Although they are able to select any topic they are interested in to locate, select, and evaluate resources for within fairly broad assignment guidelines they often can not relate their learning directly to other subject assignments. Every effort is made to help them do this and in some instances resources related to a specific disciplinary area are introduced. Observation and anecdotal evidence from teachers has suggested that the standard of oral presentation in particular has improved in subjects following the introduction of Communication and Information Skills.

The subject is constantly undergoing review and modification and the trend has been to extend the steps relating to analysing, synthesising and organising information. That is, to be able to identify the intellectual processes and use them to present coherent arguments and also to recognise and use critical thinking and persuasion methods. The other learning area which has been extended is the essential one related to how new knowledge is disseminated through journals and other periodicals and the methods of accessing this knowledge using indexes and abstracts. This part of the search process is still complex even though electronic products, such as full text databases, have simplified some of the steps. More investigation of the outcomes of the subject will be needed before any major changes are undertaken. The next step to integrate the teaching of information skills across the curriculum will take much longer but remains the challenge.

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# Critical Practice and Undergraduate Students

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This paper reports on the findings of a two year multidisciplinary research project on the nature of critical practice across six discipline areas - undertaken at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean in response to student demand. It appeared that many faculties expected students to 'critically analyse or evaluate' but few offered information for students on how to do this. The aim of the project was to describe and analyse the ways in which expectations of critical practice varied within and across faculties. While noting the widely varied requirements to satisfy faculty expectations, the project team were surprised by the uniformity of critical practice demands on students within the university. The final outcome of the research project was the publication of a book *Critical Analysis- What is it ?* which contains multiple, annotated 'model' essays and assignments from six faculties at UWS Nepean. The book consists of separate faculty entries containing the 'model' texts which have been annotated with both lecturer and students comments and discussion on major themes and issues raised either by lecturers or students within that faculty.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Among many academics at universities worldwide there is currently a degree of disquiet regarding the quality of students' oral and written assignments (eg Australia: Ramsden 1993, Cope & Kalantzis 1995, Luke, A & C. Luke 1995; UK: Langshear 1994, Wallace 1992; USA: Kurfiss 1988). One area of concern is students' inability to think and write critically. At the University of Western Sydney Nepean, faculties are attempting to redress this issue.

The focus of the critical thinking research project titled 'Critical analysis for undergraduates - unmasking the process' is to examine critical practice from two perspectives: students' current critical practice and the critical practice needs of undergraduate students. Both areas are supported by a wide range of

contemporary papers and research projects (Ramsden 1988, 1993; Clanchy & Ballard 1989, Biggs 1989). The research project at Nepean was in part a response to the University's diverse student population. In 1994, the results of the Student Intake Survey showed that 25% of commencing students enrolled in undergraduate programs gained entry on the basis of mature age status, 38% identified themselves as speaking a language other than English at home, and 49% identified themselves as being first generation university students.

A particular concern to the researchers involved in this project was to uncover for students conflicting and/or implicit discourses about what constitutes 'successful' critical practice. The project was concerned with describing some student and some staff understandings of critical analysis within particular contexts. In doing so, it is intended that the project will make explicit for students a range of meanings for critical practice which are valued within this university. Just as importantly it is hoped that by showing some of the similarities and diversities of critical practices, both students and staff will be able to step back from their present understandings of critical practice and view those understandings analytically (James & Scoufis 1995).

Forty student assignments or essays which lecturers judged as demonstrating critical practice were collected from a variety of faculties across Nepean Campuses. Both the writer of the assignment and the lecturer who promoted the assignment as exhibiting features of critical practice were interviewed to uncover the components of critical practice valued by the student and by academic staff. A further focus of the project team was to make explicit some of the processes the students go through in order to produce their texts. A book, entitled *Critical analysis - What is it?* which contains both student and academic interviews, annotated assignments as well as emergent themes relating to expectations of critical practice has been produced.

## **PROJECT AIMS**

A purpose of this project is to make explicit the nature of the unspoken processes of learning thus ensuring that the courses taught by the participants do not perpetuate privilege and thus exclude certain groups of students. The research project aims not only to benefit the student body but also academics as well as the university in achieving its access, equity and quality assurance goals. Specifically the project aims to

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

## DEFINITIONS

Postman (1987, cited in Bailey 1992) in a discussion on the power of the written word as opposed to other forms of media argues that

the written word means to follow a line of thought, which requires considerable powers of classifying, inference-making and reasoning. It means to uncover lies, confusions and over generalisations, to detect abuses of logic and commonsense. It also means to weigh ideas, to compare and contrast assertions, to connect one generalisation to another.

A broad definition of critical thinking is provided by Hager & Kaye (1992): 'Critical thinking is reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do' (p.26). In a similar vein Kurfiss states that

Critical thinking is an investigation whose purpose is to explore a situation, phenomenon, question or problem to arrive at a hypothesis or conclusion about it that integrates all available information and that therefore can be convincingly justified. (Kurfiss 1988, p.2)

Schlick (1992) too has a holistic view of critical thinking and says that critical thinking is essential for problem solving and decision making. Schlick's definition reflects a work place approach to critical thinking and practice. Critical thinking is seen as essential for problem prevention, effective teamwork and empowerment. The process involves not only 'sharpening the thinking skills of workers but also involves providing a context wherein workers want to and can succeed' (p.18).

For Lankshear (1994), being critical requires that the student knows and values the 'canon' in her/his discipline first - 'there is the requirement of knowing closely ... that which is being evaluated' as well as 'judging, comparing, or evaluating on the basis of careful analysis' (p.9). To define the analytical aspect of critical literacy, Lankshear utilises Shor's (1993) definition

analytic habits of thinking, reading, writing, speaking, or discussing ... go beneath surface impressions, traditional myths, mere opinions, and routine cliches; [it is] understanding the social contexts and consequences of any subject matter; discovering the deep meaning of any event, text technique, process, object, statement, image, or situation; [and] applying that meaning to your own context. (Lankshear 1994, p.9)

Academic research into critical thinking identifies an ongoing debate about the definition and nature of critical thinking. One prominent aspect of this debate, for example, is the relative transferability of such thinking skills. A significant split has emerged between the field-specific school of critical thinking, most notably associated with McPeck (1990), and the generalisability school, associated with Ennis (1987, in Baron & Sternberg 1987), among others. This suggests that students may (or may not) be able to apply or transfer the critical thinking skills acquired within one discipline to another. Hager & Kaye (1992) and Hager (1992) provide an excellent Australian-based review of this debate and other

uncertainties within the research. Their conclusions suggest that there is still much to be done in resolving the debate and applying its deliberations to the university learning context (Craigie, James & Spolc 1995). Toulmin (1958, cited in Hager 1992) had earlier taken a consensus position claiming that broad similarities exist between 'arguments in different fields, both in the major phases of the argument ... and in their micro-structure' (p.5). Toulmin also holds that aspects of critical processes such as judgement and criticism vary with the field but that the universals are transferable from generic to particular fields (Hager 1992). Hager (1992) concludes 'While it is generally agreed that generic critical thinking skills are not, by themselves, sufficient for critical thinking in a given context, the extent to which they are necessary remains an open question' (p.14).

Jackson (1995), working in Australia advocates seven competencies to achieve a '[self] critical attitude'. He claims these competencies need to be developed simultaneously rather than sequentially. The 'core' aspects of developing a critical attitude are access to existing information, command of that knowledge, the ability to criticise existing knowledge, exploration of knowledge/issues, creation of new knowledge, identifying ethical dimensions of a problem/issue, and finally, the ability to work as part of a group. Jackson then suggests that there are additional special competences in any discipline.

Cope & Kalantzis (1995) claim that four central learning activities need to be provided for all students namely 'situated practice', 'overt instruction', 'cultural framing' and finally 'transformed practice' (p7). Situated practice involves the student in an 'immersion in the appropriate discourse of the discipline; overt instruction requires a thorough, systematic, analytical exploration of the topic. The third learning activity, cultural framing, requires the social and cultural explication of texts so that cultural practices are contextualised and when appropriate, criticised. This is perhaps best achieved by the book produced as outcome of this Research Project. The final activity, transformed practice, allows the student to put 'the meaning making practice ... the transformed meaning, redesigned meaning to work in other contexts or cultural sites' (p.7). While these four activities are vital for all students they are even more important for Language Background Other Than English (LBOE) students since they clarify for the LBOE students the local academic, social and cultural conventions.

The demands faced by students in becoming competent in critical literacy are twofold: not only are students expected to be conversant with the term but are expected to put into practice the process that it represents (Meyers 1987) often without any overt teaching about this very exacting academic process.

## MODELLING

Modelling is generally accepted to be a facilitating process and implements for students the four central learning activities of Cope & Kalantzis (1995). While not supporting 'one best way', modelling draws students' attention to the particular requirements of a discipline area and draws together knowledge and content. The provision of multiple successful models as occurs in the book *Critical*

*Analysis - What is it?* allows students to experiment, and to examine or adapt present practices in relation to models provided. The advantage of using models is that it allows the lecturer to demonstrate expectations and the process of argumentation in the academic context (Luke 1995). The explication of these learning approaches for students aims to enhance student learning since 'being aware of our cognitive processes and exerting control over them' can optimise performance (Biggs 1988, p.127). This theory of metacognition is generally acknowledged within the university ie students learn best by interacting with knowledge which results in different ways of learning (Crebin 1994). It is also generally accepted that the manner in which students approach a task determines the quality of the outcome (Ramsden 1993). A study by Li and Body (1993, cited in Bain, Lietzow & Ross, 1994) at Deakin University in relation to metacognition found that 'students... thinking about their learning improved learning outcomes as an awareness of their learning process developed' (p.41). Thus the use of models becomes justifiable on the grounds of justice and equity.

Modelling and a newer strategy Supplemental Instruction being implemented within a number of Australian Universities, are responses to the needs of the student body. Supplemental Instruction (SI) was developed in the US by Deanna C. Martin at the University of Missouri at Kansas City in 1973. It is an 'academic assistance program that increases student performance and retention. The SI program targets traditionally difficult academic courses - those that have a high percentage rate of D or F grades and withdrawals - and provides regularly scheduled, out of class, peer facilitated sessions. SI does not identify high risk students, but rather high risk courses' (The University of Missouri- Kansas City: Centre for Academic Development advertising data, n.d.) . It is foreseeable that the SI program could be adapted to support students working to enhance their critical analysis skills.

Australian universities have a diverse student body with a diverse range of strengths and weaknesses reflecting the range of entry methods namely full fee paying International students, adult entry, and artistic merit among other groups. For each of these groups of students, concepts and practices valued by the faculty teaching staff may need to be explicitly taught and then reinforced by 'recycling constantly in a variety of contexts to enable students to grasp thoroughly and develop flexibility of application' (Achen, 1991, p.34). Thus, some students need to be taught particular skills to maximise their opportunities to participate and complete courses. In addition, existing support programs and services need careful monitoring to ensure that the needs of 'at risk' students are met.

Both university administrations and faculty leaders at least tacitly acknowledge these issues. Bowen (1994), however argues that 'the real barriers to participation in higher education by disadvantaged persons might not be access or support, but *what* is taught in university courses, and *how* it is taught' (p.22, italics in original). Thus in the shift away from 'elite' to 'mass' education and the flexible entry provisions of most universities, it is now important for university teachers to make explicit expectations and practices that once may have been left implicit (Knight 1994).

## **ACTION RESEARCH**

Research has many facets of which action research is one legitimate model. Scientific methods of research are seen to be an objective examination of 'technical' issues (Carr & Kemmis 1986). Habermas (1970, cited in Carr & Kemmis 1989), claims that scientific methodology whose focus is on technical knowledge is not best suited to research in the social sciences. A critical social science for Habermas is a social process which combines collaboration and democratic participation. In an educational setting this would include students, teachers and any interested community members.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **PHASE 1**

This phase involved forming a cross-faculty team and gaining internal funding. During this period the project team, the Writing and Thinking Network, decided to produce a book of 'model' assignments which would demonstrate effective critical practice. The book was to be produced in collaboration with academic staff and the student writer and was to be representative of all faculties. The process of producing the book was seen to be as important as the end product as it was planned to include colloquia with faculties for their feedback.

### **PHASE 2**

Contact was made with each of the seven faculties at UWS Nepean (Commerce, Education, Engineering, Health Sciences, Humanities, Science and Technology, and Visual and Performing Arts) through Deans of Faculties. E-mail requests for suitable assignments were also sent to all teaching staff. Forty assignments from six faculties were received. Sixteen lecturers indicated their willingness to participate.

### **PHASE 3**

After gaining an ethics clearance and formal student and lecturer consents, interviews were conducted. Students and lecturers were conducted separately. The transcripts of recorded interviews were analysed for suitable comments for annotating the assignments. Both lecturers and students were asked to indicate where and how critical practice is evident in the assignment. As well, students were asked to describe the process of developing critical practice in their work. Four pilot interviews were conducted, followed by the interviewing of the forty students and sixteen staff.

### **PHASE 4**

One aspect of our Action Research into critical practice was to hold two colloquia to which all academic staff were invited. In an effort to make each colloquium as 'open' as possible, each was conducted as a two hour session. One was held on the Westmead Campus and an earlier one on the Werrington Campus. The

Werrington colloquium had participants from a wide variety of faculties: Health, Commerce, Humanities, Education, Visual & Performing Arts, as well as representatives from the Learning Centre and from Counselling and Health. Issues discussed included the critical practice objectives of staff, the differences in critical practice across disciplines, the nature of links between different kinds of knowledge, the variations of critical demands within faculties, the direction that appropriate teaching strategies may take, and definitions of critical thinking.

A substantial number of the Commerce faculty staff attended the second colloquium where discussion included the problem of critical thinking/practice for significant numbers of Nepean students, the importance of teaching critical thinking, the lack of consistency between lecturers' expectations regarding critical practice, and the need for academic guidance to ensure students develop analytical skills. At this colloquium it was decided to establish a quarterly newsletter to be disseminated across all faculties to share information regarding teaching critical practice, to share teaching strategies, to have a forum for ongoing debate, and to encourage contributions from both faculties and the student body.

After the colloquia sessions team members took responsibility for collating information to be incorporated into faculty section of the book. It soon became evident that not all assignments could be included in the book. Selection of the most appropriate texts (26) was undertaken in collaboration with the participating academic staff.

The data collected from the colloquia and from taped interviews assisted the project team members in writing the introductory sections to each Faculty section of the book and significant themes and issues related to that faculty.

#### PHASE 5

Currently the book *Critical Analysis - What is it?* is being evaluated by students and teaching staff at UWS Nepean by a process of questionnaires, focus interviews and workshops. Colleagues from other universities (both learning support staff and faculty teachers) are also assisting in the evaluation. Copies of the book have been supplied and evaluation will take the form of focus interviews and questionnaires.

#### FINDINGS

The rationale for producing a book of annotated sample texts is to provide opportunities for students to examine the numerous skills that critical thinking entails. In most faculty areas a minimum of two sample texts are provided. Each model also includes a lecturers' comments and students' explanations regarding the process they went through to successfully complete the assignment.

While keeping an open mind on the issue of whether critical thinking is a generalisable or a subject specific skill, the research team were surprised by the uniformity of critical practice demands within the institution. Broadly, these faculty expectations included being 'immersed' in the topic area; integrating

diverse points of view and relating theory to practice; and developing a personal position in relation to the topic. For purposes of brevity, the first two issues will be considered.

#### BEING IMMERSSED IN THE TOPIC

Immersing oneself into the subject area means reading wider than the prescribed texts and developing an extensive knowledge base. One international nursing student reported she drew on a wide range of resources including textbooks, personal experience, the media, and other subject areas to obtain a broad yet deep understanding of the topic. A Maths student reporting on a problem solving assignment stated 'you don't always do what they (lecturers) say to do. If you use more knowledge than you need to, its really good...just keep fishing for information'. A Humanities lecturer expressed a similar viewpoint by advising her students 'try to take in new ideas that are confronting'.

The purpose of the immersion stage across faculties seems to be a preparation for making 'creative connections' within the subject area and this is for many students an aspect of critical thinking. Immersion in the subject matter allows the student to be aware of conflicting models/theories and to acknowledge these differences. Once this stage of immersion has occurred then students may be capable of going beyond the data and generalising from it: analysing, that is 'pulling apart ideas', and using critical skills to reconstruct an argument.

For first year undergraduate students in a new field of study, immersion is a beneficial strategy. However, many students struggle to achieve minimum requirements of a discipline and may find the demands of immersion a significant problem.

#### INTEGRATING KNOWLEDGE

Generally this is seen by students and lecturers as the ability to apply theory to texts (Humanities & Visual and Performing Arts); and/or applying theory to workplace situations (Science and Technology, Education, Nursing and Health Science). Integrating new texts with current or prior knowledge seems to follow from being immersed in a topic area. Aspects of integration include relating theory to practical situations and looking at the adequacy/limitations of some students integration which also includes awareness of implicit and explicit features of the question. This ability to discern the implications behind texts, was particularly valued by both students and lecturers in second/third year undergraduate programs. Students in all faculties reported that to successfully produce a text at this stage they needed to have time to allow ideas to 'gel'. A Science and Technology lecturer commented 'a high achieving student invests time for the mastery of skills. This needs to be a high priority'. A student in the same faculty reported 'one of my lecturers told me at the beginning of my degree if you want good marks you will not have a social life for the next four years. I wanted a good academic record so I gave up a lot'.

Integration is achieved in a variety of ways but the fundamental procedure seems

to include a questioning approach: 'Why did the lecturer set this topic?' (Commerce); 'What is the significance of this information?' (Nursing and Health Science); 'I always say why, why, why to myself' (Nursing and Health Science). Taking 'large periods of time to think' is reported by students to be a prerequisite for critical practice necessary to allow new information and concepts to be absorbed, and to allow multidimensional perspectives to be explored. Both immersion and integration as aspects of critical practice are raised by a Humanities student:

A critical perspective is the result of hard work and extensive researching to expose yourself to a range of ideas. It is the ability to look at the theory and to see problems with it and to process it in such a way that it relates to key concepts [of the question].

On present indications the nature of critical practice within UWS Nepean has a high degree of homogeneity. Differences in critical perspectives nevertheless occur not just across faculties but within faculties. Such differences in emphasis in relation to particular critical thinking skills reflect perhaps the demands of a particular course, as much as the preferences and insights of lecturers who teach those courses.

An example of the variation of expectations towards critical thinking occurs within two departments of the Commerce faculty. One student when asked to explain her view on critical thinking reported that she centred her attention on trying to discern a motivation for a speaker or writer's perspective and 'not to accept information on face value'. Her lecturer provided an abstract definition which nevertheless incorporated aspects of the student's definition: critical thinking is 'the ability to evaluate the merits of an argument whether implicit or explicit by reference to some other standards that the students are able to identify independently'.

The second student raised aspects of critical practice which included 'understanding complex ideas; ability to condense information and the ability to write good summaries'. This student's perspective reflects the lecturer's concern to have students briefly articulate major ideas presented by 'respected authorities' in the field of study. Her lecturer's definition aligns with and extends the student's definition. The lecturer raised features such as 'comparing and contrasting ideas in the literature; identifying holes in theories and handling variables to suit own purposes'. Generally the data suggest that students tend to articulate at least partially the approach of their lecturers' critical thinking.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESSFUL STUDENTS

Two major factors seem to influence successful critical practice in written assignments: personal qualities and academic qualities. Personal qualities include persistence and dedication, taking initiative as an independent learner, and having confidence to make 'intuitive leaps'. Academic qualities consist of a range of skills and strategies such as making evaluations and judgements and forming

opinions. In short developing a deep approach to learning (Ramsden, 1992). A further notable feature was the synchronicity of ideas expressed by students and lecturers. This ability to be 'in tune' with the lecturer's perspective on a subject may have assisted students to interpret academics' expectations.

## CONCLUSION

There is clear recognition that within Australia as well as in the US, critical thinking skills are poorly developed. This is a cause for considerable disquiet (Bailey 1992). Critical thinking or practice is perceived as an essential skill for successful university study. Yet critical thinking is not generally taught within the tertiary sector. With the advent of internationalisation of education as well as the introduction of mass education in recent times, the need has never been greater to make explicit for students some of the skills necessary to undertake effective critical practice in diverse educational settings. However, students are generally left to develop these skills *ad hoc*.

The product of our research, the book *Critical analysis - What is it?* is an intertextual document, that is a meeting place where students and academics gain new ideas, and the impetus to examine current analytical and critical practices and consider future possible directions for critical literacy.

In the last analysis, students need to create their own processes of critical practice. The publication and dissemination of our research will assist students in this process. Students can be helped to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their personal processes of critical thinking so that they can best present the knowledge they have attained. In some situations the project has highlighted the dichotomy between lecturers' values and student understandings of those values.

This project also allows lecturers to consider options of additional skills in order for students to develop appropriate critical practice skills. The project has encouraged collegial discussion within and between Faculties. Furthermore, certain common themes have emerged concerning the meaning of critical practice and how to demonstrate critical practice in assignments. Lecturers interviewed for this project indicated that critical thinking is a significant area of difficulty for many students. Given the emphasis on critical practice in universities, unmasking the process of critical thinking for undergraduate students appears an important goal.

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# Literacy in the Disciplines: Giving Academics a Language to Talk about Language

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University policy on generic skills has caused many academics to seek greater control over literacy outcomes in their courses. While it is generally agreed that academic literacy is best developed within the disciplines, the responsibility tends to be located within the academic support program, the literacy expert collaborating with the subject specialist. A University of Canberra project aims to encourage academics to take the process one step further by increasing their capacity to provide guidance and constructive feedback to student writers. Typically lacking a language to talk about language, academic staff attend workshops led by a writing specialist, where they identify forms of exposition characteristic of their specialisation. The aim is to bring to the surface and to examine disciplinary assumptions about what constitutes "good" writing, providing the basis for a more explicit formulation of student writing tasks and improved feedback on student writing. The project extends the role of language experts, as they help academics to respond productively to student needs.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT**

Employer surveys indicate the demand for communication skills in graduate employees, and a disquieting level of dissatisfaction with the status quo. In response to such surveys, many universities, including the University of Canberra, have adopted policies on generic skills, putting proficiency in communication at or near the top of the list of desired outcomes for graduates. Programs in the faculties are to be held accountable for their implementation of this policy.

Implementation becomes more urgent when we consider that university enrollments in 1996 have been such that tertiary entrance rankings have been reduced in many programs - sometimes into the 40 percentile. The link between low TER's and deficient literacy skills is not invariable, but experience tells us that students whose scores would not in the past have allowed for tertiary admission are at greater risk of failure when they encounter the discipline - specific demands. At the same time, the proportion of students from a language background other than English is increasing. (It is 20% at the University of Canberra and higher in other universities.) Thus, coincident with the foregrounding of faculty responsibility for language skills is the growing need

for academic literacy support in the student population. The combination of student demographics and employer pressure requires of academics a more concerted effort than has been the case in the past.

Current language and literacy theories tend to focus on the specific context in which literacy is developed; the first year university student is seen as an initiate into a new culture (or cultures), with the complex task of having to acquire the values and knowledge associated with that culture (Ballard, 1984). This definition is the basis for prolific research activity in the field of academic literacy, ranging from an exploration of language and literacy policy at tertiary level (Cowen, 1993, Fiocco, 1995) to the assessment of models of academic assistance (Baskin, 1995; Hicks et al, 1995). Researchers regard as axiomatic the need for academic writing skills to be taught in conjunction with discipline-specific practices.

At the conference held at La Trobe University in November 1994 - *Integrating the Teaching of Academic Discourse into the Disciplines* - overwhelmingly, and not surprisingly, the papers were given by participants who drew on experience in academic support services. The roles they describe are collaborative, either in helping to staff to design units which integrated learning and literacy skills with discipline content, or in going into the schools to present lectures and tutorials on issues related to academic literacy. In her paper, Brigid Ballard represents the study adviser as uniquely positioned to act as mediator between student and academic cultures; the study skills expert must be sufficiently familiar with, yet distant enough from, the definitive priorities of the disciplines to be able to map for the student the new discourses, the different ways of engaging with knowledge. This vantage point is hard won, for it can be gained only by experience. Ballard suggests that the cross-disciplinary overview, once achieved, must not be jeopardised by too close an association with any one discipline: the study adviser who is seconded into one particular faculty or department is in danger of losing awareness of the challenge facing students moving between disciplines.

Another possible role for the study adviser is to work with staff to develop sensitivity to student needs and an awareness of their own discourses to enable them to be more explicit about their expectations. Ballard doubts the efficacy of this role; staff attitudes, amounting to a kind of disciplinary chauvinism, constitute a barrier to change. I suggest that this might be too gloomy a view. In the first place, the majority of staff are not oblivious to the workplace and student pressures referred to above, and many are anxious to play a part in optimising the academic and vocational opportunities of their students. If academics are sufficiently motivated to seek the cooperation of the study adviser in preparation of course guides, for example, they may welcome opportunities to sharpen their own sense of what students need to know about the disciplinary discourse. Furthermore, collaboration is a two-way process, and if the efforts of study skills specialists are to be built on and sustained within the disciplines, it follows that academic staff need a certain level of awareness of the issues involved and the strategies available to them. It is the purpose of this project to go some way towards meeting this need, particularly as it relates to academic literacy.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT

In 1995, the University of Canberra and The University of Newcastle were successful in their submission for funding from the National Priority (Reserve) Fund for a Literacy Support Program. One component of the program, to be conducted at Newcastle, was aimed at the provision of resource materials for students. The second component, to be conducted at UC, was the provision of resource materials and professional development for academic staff to encourage the integration of academic literacy support into the courses they teach. For both components, strategies and processes would be developed and trialed, then documented for use in tertiary institutions. The Newcastle component of the project is the subject of a paper by Robyn Woodward Kron, included in these proceedings. The complementary program at Canberra University commenced in mid-1995 with the appointment of a senior research officer, for a ten month term. Subsequent to the completion of the project in June 1996, a member of staff from the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Scholarship will use the resource materials to conduct occasional workshops, ensuring that the enhancement of literacy skills continues to be a priority within the faculties. This, then, is a report on work in progress.

## FACULTY-BASED WORKSHOPS

Workshops for academic staff were conducted at the end of the 1995 teaching year and prior to the first semester of 1996. One purpose of the first round of workshops was to publicise the project and to raise awareness of the need to develop strategies for integrating literacy skills into the disciplines. Central to the workshop discussion of academic literacy was a view of the new student as an initiate into a new culture - the academic culture - and at least one new style of discourse, depending on the number of disciplines studied. It was my intention in this workshop to highlight the degree to which cognitive and linguistic competence is relative to context. A writer's ability to meet the demands of high school assignments does not guarantee immediate success with university writing tasks: increasing complexity in conceptual load puts strain on grammar and syntax, and new ways of dealing with knowledge in the various sub-cultures require new and unfamiliar discourse structures. By stressing the extent to which academic success depends on linguistic proficiency, in turn a function of a student's mastery of discursive distinctions, I was seeking to put the literacy ball in the discipline instructor's court.

Stressing that students become competent readers and writers in the discourses of their disciplines by exposure and by osmosis, but also by modelling, practice and feedback, I invited participants to consider their practices - whether they were doing all they might do to facilitate this process of becoming academically - and professionally - literate. A brief questionnaire was the prompt for paired and subsequent group discussion.

What came out of the first round of workshops was a set of useful strategies,

some of which were familiar to most participants, others which were seized upon as valuable additions to existing practices. (One of the most valuable effects of getting a group of academics together is the cross-pollination that occurs.)

My contribution was an annotated essay or report - the aim to move the facilitative practice from instruction to demonstration. Throughout the first workshops I kept jargon at a minimum but, by making the sample annotated text a discussion point, I was able to begin to introduce a language to talk about language, to fine focus, as it were, on aspects of student writing that tend to escape comment for want of a conceptual framework. The November workshops are to be repeated in Newcastle in May; the processes and content of these and subsequent workshops are to be documented for inclusion in resource materials to provide the basis for subsequent workshops in the university.

In February, I conducted cross-disciplinary workshops on identifying and dealing with grammatical and syntactical errors in student writing, providing constructive feedback on written assignments, and determining ways to ensure that students act on such feedback. The particular thrust of these workshops reflects the preoccupations of many participants in the first round of workshops. ("Marking" assignments is one of the more time-consuming of the academic's duties, and there is a general need to know that the time is well spent.) The point to be made here is that even with a nuts and bolts agenda, such issues as appropriacy of style, text features affecting coherence, and disciplinary attitudes to authorial voice arose quite naturally. The aim was still to raise an awareness of the writing act as one which has its own terminology, which can be talked about in relation to how ideas and text features interact, with characteristic structures which can be made explicit for the novice in the discipline.

In these workshops there was a lot to absorb; to reinforce new ideas, participants subsequently received a newsletter summarising the issues and strategies raised in discussion and notifying them of further developments.

### **FACULTY PROJECT OFFICERS**

During the first round of workshops I was able to identify in each faculty one or two staff members willing to assist with the project. Guidelines for Faculty Project Officers relate to three principal activities: implementation of literacy enhancement strategies; the maintenance of records of these strategies and their outcomes; and the encouragement and assistance of others in the faculty who recognise the need for a constructive approach to the induction of student writers. Reports from Faculty Project Officers will form the basis for a collection of case-studies of successful practices, to be published as resource material in June: they were asked to record their own strategies, and those of others in the faculty, for integrating literacy skills into their teaching and assessment practices. At the same time, the Project Officers are my point of contact with the faculty, helping to disseminate information about workshops and literacy materials relevant to their disciplines. The project allows for remuneration of project officers to assist in their contributions to the project.

## INTERACTION OF PROJECT PERSONNEL

Interaction between the officers conducting the Project is essential for the maintenance of unity of intention and focus, and for one of the second workshops, the Newcastle Project Officer travelled to Canberra. In May and June there will be an exchange of project officers between the University of Canberra and the University of Newcastle, with a view to trialling the materials and processes in workshops prior to preparation for publication in June, the final stage of the Project.

## CONCLUSION

A view of academic literacy as contingent and relative underpins current thinking about student learning. If there is no one literacy for all learning contexts, the development of an inclusive overview of all the discourse options is certainly pre-requisite to the central provision of academic advice. The rationale for the academic literacy project described in this paper is that there is a need for a concerted approach to making disciplinary discourses more accessible to students, particularly those who may have a certain distance to make up in terms of language background or prior levels of achievement. Academics have the power and opportunity to foreground literacy as determinant of successful learning outcomes, but may fail to recognise their own assumptions and expectations, let alone make these explicit to the students in their disciplines. The project has the potential to extend the role of study advisers beyond the position of privileged outsider and into the area of staff development, as they help academics respond more productively to student needs. Subsequent collaboration between study adviser and staff is facilitated by the development of a stronger web of awareness and understanding of what it means to be literate within the disciplines. Those fearful of loss of territorial rights may be pleasantly surprised to find that they have gained in recognition and respect as practitioners in a previously unrecognised or, at least, under-rated area of expertise. Finally, students are the principal beneficiaries of a course of action that broadens the opportunities to become full members of their chosen disciplinary culture.

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# Tertiary Literacy: Case Study Research into the Literacy Policies, Definitions and Practices of Four Disciplines within a University

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A social cultural view of language provides the theoretical framework for this research. Language learning theories suggest that the acquisition of literacy occurs within a specific social context and culture, and that literacy develops throughout one's life. This study examines how literacy is defined within the context and culture of a tertiary institution. It also examines how literacy development takes place in undergraduate students within the context and culture of their specific disciplines. This paper will present research undertaken within four case studies representing four different disciplines. The research describes views and attitudes of staff in the areas of: literacy policy within the university and their Schools; definitions of tertiary literacy; and best practice in language development. The paper will also discuss student perceptions of literacy practices within their Schools and their own definitions of literacy.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper presents research in progress undertaken during a Masters by research degree, which focused on three aspects of tertiary literacy within an Australian University, that is, policy, definition and practice. The paper deals with research conducted in four Schools representing the disciplines of Social Science, Science, Health Science, and Business.

For almost ten years the literature on literacy both in the field of theory and practice, has presented propositions which are now regarded as axioms. In the late eighties and early nineties Luke (1988) and Gee (1990) established in their literature the tenet that literacy was a socially constructed term, and that any definition occurred within a social and political context. In addition to this principle, our own Australian Language and Literacy Policy in 1991 stated that "effective literacy is intrinsically purposeful, flexible and dynamic and continues to develop throughout an individual's lifetime". (Commonwealth of Australia, 1991:9). In the field of tertiary literacy, as early as 1987, Australian academics were specifically dealing with the fundamental principles of social cultural context in language, and the on-going development of literacy throughout one's life. The significant Australian monograph "Literacy by Degrees" by Taylor, Ballard,

Beasley, Bock, Clanchy and Nightingale (1988) emphasised that literacy developed by degrees within a particular setting for a particular reason. Bock (1987) stated that "most students undergo an explosive language development during their three years of undergraduate study" (Bock in Taylor et al 1988: 30). However, Bock (1987) also concluded that many teachers at university level viewed the teaching of literacy as a contradiction to their academic goals, and that there was a failure to recognise that language and conceptual development extended simultaneously.

It was from the above views that the motivation for this research came. The research objective was to explore how literacy was perceived within a tertiary institution by those other than 'literacy experts'. Few academics working within the area of tertiary literacy development would refute the notion that literacy "is the prime foundation for acquiring and using knowledge...the competency that underlies and secures all major competencies" (Reid 1993:13). In reality, however, literacy may in fact be perceived by many academics and students from other perspectives which could impact significantly on what happens in the areas of literacy policy, definition and practice.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY**

### **COLLECTION OF DATA**

Four Schools within different disciplines were chosen for the purposes of this research so that each major teaching division within the University was represented. Specifically, when questions regarding policy and definition were addressed respondents were asked to reflect on the term 'tertiary literacy'. This focused on:

- what literacy policy was adopted by each individual School?
- how did staff and students define literacy?
- what do staff and students regard as best practice teaching models in the area of tertiary literacy development?
- what teaching practices are employed by teaching staff to foster the literacy development of students?

A total number of nineteen staff were interviewed in the case study and fifty two responded to questionnaires. One hundred and eighty five students across the four Schools, ranging from first to third years completed questionnaires. Whilst it is not possible within the parameters of this paper to report on all aspects of this research, a description and drawing together of emergent themes is presented in the areas of literacy policy, definition and practice.

### **SCHOOL PROFILES**

Each School varied in staff and student population as indicated in table 1.0. The Schools with the greatest number of students from non English speaking backgrounds were School A and D followed with much smaller numbers by School B and C.

**TABLE 1: PROFILES OF SCHOOLS IN THE CASE STUDIES**

<b>Case Studies</b>	<b>F/T Staff</b>	<b>U/G Students</b>	<b>Staff in Study</b>	<b>Students in Study</b>
School A	27	870	16	52
School B	47	1151	18	40
School C	36	1061	24	52
School D	20	600	13	41

Each School in the study had identifiable strategies in place which contributed to the development of literacy. Table 2 provides a summary of these literacy programs.

**TABLE 2: LITERACY UNITS AND PRACTICES IN EACH SCHOOL**

<b>Case Study</b>	<b>Description of Formal Units or Practices</b>
<b>A</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A first year unit of one semester which focused on the mechanics of writing and discipline specific content. This unit was coordinated by a literacy expert and content lecturer.</li> <li>2. A second year unit of one semester which focused on logic and was viewed as enhancing the literacy skills of students. This unit was offered outside the School.</li> <li>3. A second year unit of semester which focused on ethics and was seen as an opportunity to develop writing skills. Coordinated by a content lecturer.</li> </ol>
<b>B</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Three first year units which focused on content, writing and research skills. Taught and coordinated by content lectures.</li> <li>2. Other second and third year units which included writing and research skills. Taught and coordinated by content lectures.</li> </ol>
<b>C</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Diagnostic testing program which had been administered for the last five years at the time of this research.</li> <li>2. If students failed the test they proceeded to a compulsory communications unit. Coordinated by a content lecturer.</li> <li>3. A core content unit which combined content and the development of academic writing skills. A team teaching approach with content lecturers coordinating.</li> <li>4. At second and third year unit which involved content</li> </ol>

that lent itself to personal literacy development. Unit controllers content lecturers.

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- D**
1. Diagnostic testing program which had been administered for at least seven years at the time of this research.
  2. If students failed the testing they proceeded to a remedial unit provided outside the School.
  3. Compulsory first year, one semester communications unit which combined content and literacy development. Unit controller: undergraduate coordinator. Tutorial input by literacy experts outside the School.
  4. Additional mandatory first year unit for at least one stream within the School. Unit controller: undergraduate co-ordinator.
  5. A third year writing unit associated with the discipline. Mandatory for at least two streams within the School. Unit controller: undergraduate coordinator.
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## LITERACY POLICY IN FOUR SCHOOLS

### POLICY - DATA

For the purposes of this research, 'policy' was defined as a 'course of action' which was identified, supported and implemented by all staff in the School. This exploration of policy provided an understanding of the measures Schools had in place to further the literacy development of its students. Importantly, the research also shed some light on 'what' individual Schools perceived their responsibility to be in the area of literacy development and 'how' they were responding to this.

The tables below summarise salient comments made by staff in interviews, and illustrate questionnaire findings relating to the issue of policy. Firstly, all academic staff were asked if Schools should develop individual literacy development policies for their specific needs, and secondly, whether their School had such a policy operating.

### DISCUSSION

As stated above each of the Schools had identifiable initiatives or units in place which were specifically perceived to be developing literacy, a perception which was shared by all staff. Whether these practices or initiatives can be 'termed policy' in the broad sense, is another matter. It is interesting to note the diverse processes by which these units or initiatives had come into practice. Whether the staff believed these practices constituted 'policy' within the School, and whether in fact 'policy' was perceived as particularly necessary.

TABLE 3

Should your School develop its own policy on literacy? Interview and Questionnaire.  
N=number of respondents.

Case Study	Yes	No	Unsure	Interview Comments
A N=16	8	5	3	<i>"it would be helpful...whether these actions can be just as well developed and maintained with a broad consensus feeling is another issue"</i> <i>"we are trying I think to have a policy...it went badly wrong"</i> <i>"I look at action not what is written down"</i> <i>"yes but its very political..if we were to develop such a policy...it would exclude a lot of our students"</i>
B N=18	6	12		<i>"no..but translated to a curriculum"</i> <i>"policy not necessary as it is being dealt with under the umbrella of student progress"</i> <i>"yes we have an understood or consensus position"</i>
C N=24	10	5	5	No comments as all interviewees agreed. School already had a policy.
D N=13	10		3	No comments as all interviewees agreed. School had a policy

TABLE 4

Does your School have a literacy policy? Questionnaire and Interview.  
N=number of respondents.

Case Study	Yes	No	Unsure	Interview Comments
A N=16	9	2	5	<i>"not a formal policy"</i> <i>"not an explicit policy but an implicit one"</i> <i>"there's nothing written down"</i> <i>"emergent policy in that we have certain activities running but no clear firm statement"</i> <i>"its very piecemeal...it seems to change from semester to semester"</i>
B N=18	7	8	3	<i>"no...but we have a commitment to it...its been translated into a curriculum statement"</i> <i>"no policy but a consensus position"</i> <i>"a policy no...a curriculum requirement yes"</i>
C N=24	20	1	3	<i>"yes it spells out what literacy means"</i> <i>"we agreed some years ago we would have a policy"</i> <i>"yes ...but not a complete consensus...but agreement we should have something"</i>
D N=13	11		2	<i>"yes we have to train students of course to be literate in the most general sense but also to be literate in relation to the profession"</i> <i>"Yes we also have consensus position from students point of view"</i>

## CASE STUDY A

The School in case study A was a good example of the complexities involved in developing overall School policies. The responses given in answer to the question on whether the School had a policy or should develop one, reveals some anomalies. Keeping in mind that this School had in fact some literacy development practices in place, there was no obvious consensus amongst the staff that the School had implemented a policy or that the School should develop one. In reality the School was working very hard on a process of developing literacy initiatives but was still at a nascent stage, where staff were looking in many different directions to solve their literacy problems. Comments such as “it went badly wrong”, “if we were to develop such a policy it would exclude a lot of our students”, and “no clear firm statement”, depict a confusion about the intent, objectives and delivery of what could be included in a literacy policy.

A central, unresolved issue which emerged in the interviews with staff of this School was the relationship between subject discipline content and language development. Within this School there was not an academic nor professional tradition where communication through writing was a focus. Although, over recent years it had been made perfectly clear by professional bodies linked to the School, that communication skills were found lacking. As a senior member of staff commented, communication skills “were a major part of being a professional...”. The process of examining how language could be developed with content was proving exceedingly complex for the School for very obvious reasons. Firstly, staff had not themselves been trained in a setting where academic writing skills had been a focus. Secondly, there had been a relatively recent demand on staff to view language development from the perspective of their profession. The pedagogical relationship between language, academic content and the profession, and how they could be developed together, was proving to be complex, and at times politically volatile within the School. “The idea was to integrate ... [discipline content] and communication but the students’ skills were so bad we are teaching remedial skills”, “giving a few lectures and hoping students can write doesn’t work...we refocused it [the unit] on more literacy”.

There was consensus about the need to improve literacy skills, “some staff are sceptical but can see its needed because in third year they can’t write with the sophistication required”, but ideas about implementation were confused and often polarised. Of the units that had been introduced in the School to improve literacy, comments such as these were made, “there are some subject issues we are not covering...some staff feel it is an inappropriate use of a core unit”, and “some of the staff think it’s a fluffy type unit”.

There was also confusion about who should coordinate such units. Was it to be a literacy ‘expert’ or a discipline lecturer? Who should teach the language units and what were the responsibilities of all the staff? “It was always understood that staff development would also take place, this has gone by the wayside. Theoretically those teaching on the course will carry through those skills to their own unit”.

Having an implicit policy rather than an explicit one was in fact not working within this School. In the words of the same senior member of staff quoted above, an implicit policy rather than explicit was in place regarding literacy because “it’s a big step...to say in a professional technical type discipline ... to say we are going to bring in literacy”. All staff agreed that there was a strong directive for literacy development from their professional body but no one was quite clear how the directive should be implemented.

#### CASE STUDY B

Staff within this School overwhelmingly affirmed that literacy was one of the objectives of the overall curriculum. During staff interviews comments and vocabulary emerged which focused on ‘consensus’, ‘curriculum statements’, and ‘commitment’, leading to what can be described as an integrated approach. This emphasis on curriculum planning illustrated the strategy employed by this School to achieve academic and affective objectives.

Firstly, within the School there was emphasis on a holistic approach in meeting all needs of their students. That is, preparing students for their profession and developing their language skills was very much seen as one in the same objective. Academic goals were achieved through curriculum design and a network of committees with both vertical and horizontal staff and student representation to implement curriculum goals. In reference to literacy policy it was stated, “we have something written in the new curriculum...there is a curriculum thread.” There was also within the School a system in place which monitored students’ academic progress. “A policy is not necessary as it [literacy] is being dealt with under the umbrella of student progress. If a student is not doing well we refer them to the Centre for International English or Counselling. I guess if there was a policy on literacy it may mean that perhaps the resourcing of such programs might be a whole lot better. “... I honestly believe that we do try and address the issue and I guess I think we do it fairly well”.

Examining whether School B actually had a literacy policy is perhaps an exercise in the definition of the word policy. Whether the members of the School described their language development initiatives as policy or not, was not seen as such an important issue for the staff of this School. The most significant factors defining School B’s position in the area of literacy development were that staff had developed an understood or consensus position and were doing something about it in terms of their overall curriculum. Most importantly also, the School had established practices through their curriculum development processes, which evaluated and monitored their language and literacy initiatives.

#### CASE STUDY C

The process of literacy development through policy can best be described for School C by the following interview comment: “we did not have a complete consensus but agreement that we should have something ... and we should do something about it”. Staff were in accord to a great extent about the importance of literacy within the School, how it should be implemented, and the advantages

of articulating objectives within a policy. A key initiative was the administering of a diagnostic literacy test to all incoming students. Results from these tests were used to stream students into units specifically addressing literacy problems. "Yes we have been concerned for a five year period...we introduced a three year testing program to trial assessments of incoming first years. This decision was made at a School Board level...the Board emphasised the importance of literacy."

Interview comments illustrated that the process of policy making and implementation was well established and moving towards an evaluation phase in this School. "We agreed some years ago that we would have a policy...all School members were committed to that policy but we didn't monitor it. We don't have anything to check if people follow the policy, but collegial interaction and involvement." One staff member in describing staff involvement summed it up in the following way, "some are desperately committed, some committed and some vaguely or barely committed".

Although staff commitment might not be described as one hundred percent it was evident that the measures put in place five years before this research, had placed literacy on the list of the School's priorities. From the data gathered it was also evident that overall staff perspective was one that viewed literacy as an integral part of teaching and a core of the overall academic development of their students. "It is important for the University to say what is literacy for advancing knowledge of its graduates, and then I think at the School level we have to interpret that, and then come up with our own within the subject discipline focus for literacy. I see the University really providing a policy framework that we then work within".

#### CASE STUDY D

Similarly, School D had commenced a process to provide for literacy development some years before this research. Consequently, staff seemed to share common objectives and perceptions of how literacy should be addressed within the School. "We do not have a written policy on the development of literacy but we do have a consensus position on the importance of writing and maintaining appropriate standards". "Yes we have a policy in that we rigorously enforce entry requirements and we have two mandatory communication units and one optional unit".

There was a strong thread throughout the interviews that staff believed that literacy development in this School, was about being literate in the 'general sense', and also in relation to the profession students were preparing for in their undergraduate course. There was therefore, an accepted responsibility that literacy should be developed within the School, "yes, one of the reasons we have taken on the program within our School is that we feel that there are different types of literacy we have to train students of course to be literate in the most general sense but to be literate in relation to the profession..."

## FINDINGS

In describing the 'policies' of the four Schools certain characteristics emerge. Two Schools recognised a stated School policy on literacy development, one did not recognise a policy as such, but incorporated literacy in overall curriculum, and the last School had literacy practices in place, but they were not seen as School policy. Both Schools C and D had a history of up to seven years where literacy development had been placed on the School teaching agenda as something to be addressed. Staff in those Schools had decided to test the literacy levels of incoming students, and then implement core units coordinated by content lecturers to address literacy. These Schools as well as School B expressed clearly the need to prepare their students with a high level of literacy for their future professions. This sentiment was equally shared by School A but the 'how' issue was proving to be problematic for them. A characteristic shared by School A and D was that it attracted students who would not necessarily identify language as their area of strength, that is, native speakers and non-native speakers of English. Staff in both Schools believed that their students were surprised to find in their first few months at university that their lecturers placed such an important emphasis on language and being literate. School D, however, because of its longer involvement in literacy development had convinced the students that they would have 'the edge' over graduates from other Universities if they could write reports and communicate well. The significance and effect of years of this proselytizing lies in the fact that it was led by the Head of Undergraduates in the School. This senior staff member coordinated and taught the units which incorporated language development. School A, however, because it was in the early stages of formulating policy, was still in the throes of not only convincing students of the benefits of improved literacy, but staff as well. In many ways it was School A with its emerging literacy policy that provided the most vivid picture of the issues that need to be dealt with at all levels of the School. The dilemmas of language 'versus' content, literacy teacher 'versus' content teacher, are those that require in depth discussion and understanding. It is evident that the dilemmas need not be so polarised, however, in the initial stages of policy making, these are the questions which may need to be addressed and resolved with staff participation.

Policy making can be visionary and imposed from the 'top' to motivate change, or it can be initiated from action and consensus. Consensus policy formation could include: investigation and research of the problem or situation, developing aims and objectives through consensus, explaining and promoting the stated aims, devising implementation strategies, promotion, delivery, review, evaluation and modification. It is through such processes that the nature of literacy could be explored by Schools. Addressing such questions as whether staff view literacy as a pragmatic skill or as part of a broad social cultural setting, and what theoretical assumptions are being made about tertiary literacy and its development. As is evident from the research findings, each of the four Schools had embarked on some of the above processes. They had addressed literacy development in diverse ways, reflecting the idiosyncrasies of the social cultural

contexts of their Schools and discipline, and their particular 'history' in dealing with language issues.

**LITERACY DEFINITIONS IN FOUR SCHOOLS**

DEFINITIONS - DATA

All staff and students in the case studies were asked to give their own definition of tertiary literacy. From the interview and questionnaire analysis, re-occurring comments, specific vocabulary, and themes were evident. Four types of definitions emerged and are summarised below using the respondents' language.

1. Professional Definition: Being able to communicate and or function within the chosen career or discipline of the School.
2. Comprehensive Definition: Being able to communicate and express fluently, clearly and concisely a high level of cognitive skills, using extensive vocabulary and with few mechanical errors.
3. Functional Definition: Being able to understand the content and fulfil the university course requirements.
4. Gatekeeping Definition: Being able to meet the literacy entrance requirements as established by the university.

The last definition was given in an early part of the research with key administrative and academic staff on campus, but was not cited in the case studies. The responses from the staff and student questionnaires did not differ greatly from School to School. The table below summarises the percentage of all staff and students in the study defining tertiary literacy according to the first three categories outlined above.

**TABLE 5: DEFINITIONS OF LITERACY GIVEN BY ALL STAFF AND STUDENTS.**

Staff N=71: Students N=185

<b>Definition</b>	<b>School A Staff Students</b>	<b>School B Staff Students</b>	<b>School C Staff Students</b>	<b>School D Staff Students</b>
Professional	8%-15%	13%- 4%	0%-11%	36%-35%
Comprehensive	92%-37%	87%-53%	100%-45%	64%-35%
Functional	0%-48%	0%-43%	0%-44%	0%-30%

All staff responding to the questionnaire were also asked to respond to a statement which read "the definition of literacy for students in our School should be strongly linked with the demands of their chosen profession". It was immediately after this statement that space was provided for staff to give their own definition. The responses to this statement when compared to the above table require some

reflection. Table 5 illustrates the number of staff from each School who chose strongly agree/agree on their questionnaire.

**TABLE 6: PERCENTAGE OF STAFF WHO AGREED THAT TERTIARY LITERACY SHOULD BE LINKED WITH A STUDENT'S CHOSEN PROFESSION.**

Likert Scale 1-5: 1 = strongly agree = 5 strongly disagree

CASE STUDIES	% OF STAFF AGREEING
A	80%
B	64%
C	69%
D	66%

#### FINDINGS

From the data there seems to be consensus on two issues regarding definitions of literacy. Firstly, academic staff related tertiary literacy to the ability to express clearly and fluently the high order cognitive skills. Secondly, there was consensus amongst staff at this University, that definitions of tertiary literacy should be closely linked with the demands of the professions for which students were being trained. There was nothing in the comments of staff to indicate that they believed the comprehensive definition was one that led to being professionally literate, although, one could speculate that this might be so. Speculation, however, is not sufficient and further discussion would be necessary with the staff of each School to extrapolate exactly what they perceive the link to be between a 'comprehensive' definition of literacy and a professional definition. The understanding of such a link would provide further cognisance of whether tertiary teachers view literacy development as taking place within a social cultural context. That is, a context in which teachers impart knowledge, language, values and behaviour (Gee 1990).

In terms of student responses there was an understandable difference in perception of what literacy at a tertiary level might be. It is quite reasonable for students to declare "I'm literate if I can pass my university course" or "I've passed, I'm literate therefore I have the skills for my profession". These assumptions are however, not always valid, as is evidenced by the increasing frequency of professional bodies degrading the literacy standards of graduates.

**LITERACY PRACTICES IN FOUR SCHOOLS**

PRACTICE - DATA

Not all issues researched in the area of practice can be discussed within the scope of this paper. One of the most important aspects researched in the area of literacy practices was the staff and student perceptions of various teaching models for literacy development.

A number of different models were operating on campus at the time of the research, and those chosen for comment were those that the four Schools were most familiar with. All staff and students were asked to rate and or comment on them in terms of their 'support'.

Model 1: Literacy development should be incorporated in all discipline teaching and taught by content lecturers.

Model 2: Literacy should be developed through communication units taught by lecturers in the content area.

Model 3: Literacy should be developed through communication units, developed and taught by a literacy expert in conjunction with lectures in the content areas.

Model 4: Literacy should be developed through communication units provided by Schools with literacy expertise.

Table 7 provides a summary of how each model was rated by respondents who completed questionnaires in the case studies.

**TABLE 7: STAFF AND STUDENT PERCEPTION OF LITERACY TEACHING MODELS.**

Likert scale 1-5: 1 = least support - 5 = most support. Table illustrates percentage of staff and student respondents who gave four or five on the scale indicating support. # indicates model adopted by the School.

CASE STUDY	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 3	MODEL 4
A STAFF	50%	60%	100%#	30%
A STUDENT	31%	47%	59%	47%
B STAFF	62%#	39%#	85%	31%
B STUDENT	26%	39%	56%	64%
C STAFF	58%	42%#	42%	26%
C STUDENT	52%	34%	62%	51%
D STAFF	63%	63%#	63%#	25%
D STUDENT	25%	63%	68%	40%

## FINDINGS

Although, as pointed out in the policy section, School A may have been experiencing confusion about its literacy practices, the above table shows that there was one hundred percent support staff for the model which was operating within the School at the time. School B staff supported their own model to a less extent when compared to the model three, that is, one that would offer them a literacy expert. Students in this School could also see advantages to help being offered outside the School. Students in School C also affirmed the model of having a literacy expert in the School or going outside the School for help. It was students in School D that gave the strongest support for the models operating in their School.

The variance in responses to the four models points to a reality where no one model can fulfil the needs of all students and staff at any one time. In terms of social cultural theory, School based literacy development is essential. However, the diverse student intake by universities, also demands university support outside the Schools. Students affirmed this as did staff who listed central university support for 'remedial' students as a necessary future initiative for the University.

## CONCLUSIONS

The diversities within universities in terms of disciplines and professional cultures create an obvious environment for the cultivation of social cultural theories and practices in the development of literacy. In addition to the specific social cultural settings of individual Schools and disciplines, there must be recognition that the central environs of the University have their own specific social cultural setting. It is within this complexity that the literacy of tertiary students must be developed and enhanced. Without forethought and planning it can no longer be taken for granted that literacy development will take place. School policy in whatever form it takes, be it in the form of an overall integrated curriculum or discrete literacy units, should include staff involvement. Commitment for the policy process needs to come from all levels of staff but an essential ingredient is support and guidance from the academic administration of the School. Initial motivation and energy may come from individuals within the School who have ideas and expertise, but this can only lead to frustration unless support is forthcoming. Literacy is a complex issue which requires equally complex pedagogical deliberation and methodology, if its teaching is to be relevant at a tertiary level.

Relevance can only emerge if academic staff are willing and are encouraged to debate the issues of definition. Gathering together the ideas of staff from varying backgrounds to find a definition or definitions of literacy is not an easy task. It is a task which challenges most including those 'experts' working in the area of language and literacy within the university system. As one such 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...”.

Frameworks or definitions within which to work are necessary, especially if implementation and practice are to become relevant in meeting the needs of students and staff alike. There is no doubt that within the climate of ever diminishing resources and heavier teaching loads within universities, that there is an urgent need to think creatively and laterally about how literacy can, as Gee (1990) suggests, be 'acquired and learned' by students in their everyday learning experiences. If indeed Schools wish to be at the centre of literacy development promoting high levels of literacy within their own disciplines and professions, there is a need to rethink overall teaching practices. There is also a necessity to recognise that in any one School, or for that matter across the university as a whole, many different models may need to operate to support staff and meet the diverse needs of the students.

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# Academic Discourse on the Internet

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New electronic media on the Internet are bringing changes to academic discourse in universities, colleges and schools, ranging from the introduction of new genres, to radical innovation in established genres. In turn, new demands are being made on the literacy practice of tertiary students, who are increasingly referred to Internet resources and references.

World Wide Web pages are an excellent resource for teaching subject content in tertiary courses, and this paper will address the issues of the resources available to lecturers, and the demands made on students. In particular, this paper will discuss examples from student assignments written in the form of World Wide Web pages, which utilise hypertext, and make profound changes in demands on readers and on the expectations of lecturers. Uses of email as a new genre in tertiary education subjects will also be discussed, as part of an overall effort to make student learning more flexible.

The traditional expectations of university teachers are often not made explicit, whereas the new media require explicit definition and explanation. The contrasting demands of new electronic discourses therefore present interesting dilemmas for tertiary literacy, for both teachers and learner.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The history of academic discourse in English is characterized by the construction of genres such as the research article by discourse communities united by a common agenda for the production of knowledge (Swales 1990: 110). Academic communities are now deploying very similar processes in the construction of electronic academic genres on the Internet, which itself owes a great deal of its current form to the efforts of universities, initially in North America, and more recently world wide.

Academic discourses on the Internet are multiplying in a variety of ways, adding greater resources and increased demands on student literacy practices. New genres have sprung up, such as e-mail texts and Web pages, and they are being put to extensive use in a range of areas. This paper describes specific experiences of the use of the Internet for teaching university students, including a project to increase the resources available for educating students in the language and literacy education field.

In particular, this paper will discuss an example of a student assignment written

in the form of World Wide Web pages, which utilizes hypertext, and makes profound changes in demands on readers and on the expectations of lecturers. Uses of e-mail as a new genre in tertiary education subjects will also be discussed, as part of an overall effort to make student learning more flexible.

The improved accessibility of the Internet, including e-mail and online chat systems, is making a significant impact on tertiary literacy practices. With the growth of Internet in education, greater user-friendliness and ease of access for non-computer experts is now more feasible. As Chris Baker put it at the LERN95 Conference: "The medium of the WWW now provides us with a tool by which those of us who are not computer science graduates can readily manipulate online delivery and communicative technologies." (Baker 1995: 7). In a sense, "computer literacy" is in the process of becoming "information literacy", with more emphasis on content, and less on technology.

Like desktop publishing a few years ago, those of us previously not able to publish readable newsletters and so on suddenly found that (with a bit of trial-and-error) the sort of small-scale publishing that used to involve trips to printers and the help of experts was now possible from a desktop computer. Much of this desktop publishing capacity is now possible with current word processors. Similarly, we are now in the early stages of making the resources of vast, global computer networks available to anyone who has access to the Internet, and who is willing to develop "on-line literacy" (Tuman 1992).

## THE INTERNET AND TERTIARY LITERACY

### NEW FORMS OF READING AND WRITING

Online literacy makes accessible a huge range of resources for university students and academics, with every university having their World Wide Web Home Page (see a listing of university Web pages from around the world at <<http://www.ariadne-t.gr/univ.html>>). These pages usually have a corporate style, carefully planned by university marketing departments, and have a range of information for students, about courses and services, and a variety of information for academics such as contact details, research application information, conference news, and so on.

Typically, the first computer screen to appear when accessing the World Wide Web is the Home Page of the institution's network. For example, the Faculty of Education at Griffith University has a Home Page (<<http://www.edn.gu.edu.au/>>), which lists such things as faculty courses and general information, and gives links to school home pages and popular sites around the country. I am part of a team<sup>(1)</sup> that has been building Internet resources for language and literacy teacher education which will be accessed from our Faculty Home Page. Instead of simply telling a student looking for resources for an assignment to use a certain Internet address, the information is collated and disseminated through one or more computer screens of interconnected links.

A growing function of the Web in universities is to use them for teaching purposes,

with subject pages added to the various genres of Web pages already in place. Course delivery on the WWW is a growth area, with my own university displaying its WWW course offerings and those of other universities on a special Web page (*Course Delivery on the World Wide Web*, <[http://www.gu.edu.au/gutl/res/res\\_home.html](http://www.gu.edu.au/gutl/res/res_home.html)>). For example, current listings on the Course Delivery page include a page for the first year Bachelor of Information Technology subject *Computers in the Human Context*, with subject outlines, details of resources, and so on. This concept has already been taken a great deal further, of course, for course delivery in distance education, illustrating the power of the medium. My own interest is focused more on use of the Web as a teaching resource within classroom boundaries, particularly in the form of an electronic worksheet, and as a writing resource.

While the publication of electronic books and journals has made the influence of “electronic writing” self-evident, the use of Web resources as a feature of computer-assisted writing for student essays is still new ground for most computer literate teachers and academics. An example is a recent assignment submitted for a postgraduate course in applied linguistics at Griffith University which took the form of a Web page, with internal hyperlinks to the bibliography and other parts of the essay, as well as external hyperlinks to Web sites in Europe and the USA (see discussion, below). The writing of assignments and various classroom projects as Web pages is also occurring in schools around the world, introducing quite young students to the task of creating their own Web pages. Thus the new literacies give not only new forms of readership, but new writing processes which are redefining the genres and forms of knowledge at the heart of our education systems (Knoebel & Lankshear 1995).

#### WEB PAGES AS ELECTRONIC WORKSHEETS

A Web page for an MA in Applied Linguistics coursework subject in Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) is currently being trialled for linkage to the Faculty page (see Appendix 1). This page (henceforth the TELL Web Page) is being used as a model for further development of Web pages in Bachelor of Education subjects <sup>(2)</sup>. At this stage the Web page is on disk, and is accessed by students who can make their own copy of the page, just as they can with any Web page on the Net. The TELL Web Page acts as an electronic work sheet in the sense that it provides a focus for student work on Web pages, in an attempt to overcome the very real problems of navigation that frustrate student work on the Web, as emphasized in the following quote on our e-mail forum:

“After many hours spent surfing I have made little progress in my research into language teaching applications of e-mail and the Internet. What am I looking for? What am I doing wrong?”  
(Quote from student embarking on WWW searches)

This student later managed to overcome these difficulties, but they are very real problems which need to be addressed when the Web is used for teaching purposes.

Given that navigation is one of the major problems of Net use, certain strategies have to be learned to avoid wasted time and frustration. Johnson (1995) refers to the following strategies, amongst others, for finding and using Net resources:

- learning to use Net tools such as e-mail, World Wide Web software, and search engines;
- learning to scan, skip, read, delete and save electronic data systematically;
- finding out how to find help on the Net.

Developing these Internet search and communication strategies takes a very real amount of effort, although the issue here is whether the effort is worthwhile. What is required for information literacy is a similar amount of effort to the attempts that students make to master library searches, essay writing, and other facets of academic discourse. In other words, I would argue that the whole enterprise of learning Net use should be seen as one of the fundamentals of tertiary literacy.

While there is undoubtedly a significant learning curve with any application of computers in education, the tools necessary for using the Net are in themselves no more difficult to learn than some of the extra features on current word processing programs. Setting up a Home Page of the sort shown in Appendix (1) takes rather more effort, including learning the HyperText Markup Language (HTML), but this is in effect only a rather idiosyncratic form of word processing itself. The main variable for developing networking strategies, as with many features of educational computing, is the user's mind-set, which can be described in terms of the capacity for tolerance of ambiguity, or as a willingness to persist with a "trial and error" approach.

The TELL Web Page, when used as an electronic worksheet, becomes the reference point for the student's searches. These searches on the Web are much like searches in a library online catalogue search, only with a visual, graphic presentation which works through clicking the mouse on the hypertext links on the Page. Each underlined word or phrase (which appears in blue on computer screens) is "clickable", and leads to relevant sections within the Web page itself, or to external Web pages around the world. The current version of our TELL Web Page (developed by Stephen Heimans - see Appendix 1) contains, for example, global links to sites relevant to Technology Enhanced Language Learning, English as a Second Language, Languages Other than English, teacher resources and examples of student assignments. This last feature, student assignments, is a powerful way of making examples of student work available to new classes, resolving the awkward business of photocopying "model essays".

An example of a Web site on the TELL Web Page is *Impact! Online*, a "hypertextual news reader for intermediate and advanced learners of English as a second or foreign language" - a joint project of the University of Illinois College of Education and Passport Educational Publishing (<<http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/>

impact/>). The news on this site for 11th March, 1996 included the news items shown in Appendix (2), about land compensation rights for Australian Aborigines. An interesting feature of this page, as shown in the underlined words and phrases in the extract in Appendix (2), is the hyperlinks to further information about the subject. In this case, the hyperlinks connect to a *Guide to Australia*, and the *Aboriginal Studies WWW Virtual Library* at ANU. Thus a reader of this virtual "newspaper" anywhere in the world is able to pursue all sorts of avenues of enquiry by following the hyperlinks made available on this Web page back to Australian sites.

The array of Internet sites which can be included in any Web page, including the TELL Web Page, is more or less endless. The benefit of using a limited number of sites on subject-specific Web page lies in the focus given to Web searches, while still providing global resources. This also applies to another example of subject-specific Web pages, which is the use of Web pages for student assignments.

#### A STUDENT ASSIGNMENT AS A WEB PAGE

As noted above, I have given students the option of submitting independent projects in the form of Web pages. One completed example so far is a recent assignment submitted for a postgraduate course in applied linguistics at Griffith University (Heimans 1995), which took the form of a Web page with internal hyperlinks to the bibliography and other parts of the essay, as well as external hyperlinks to Web sites in Europe and the USA.

An assignment in the form of a Web Page, submitted on disk for use on Netscape, has several striking features. These include:

- the reader can be referred immediately to a huge range of multimedia resources, not merely in the form of an article title, but in the form of a hyperlink taking them to international Web sites instantly;
- the text has a fluidity and malleability that exceeds word-processed text - it can be saved as a Web page and put on disk for use with the WWW, and it can be added as a link on a Web page.

In the assignment under discussion, rather than describing Web resources, Heimans (1995) is able to provide hyperlinks in the body of his text, for the reader to check instantly. This provides multimedia resources without the need for CD-ROM, including sound, video and graphics. These hyperlinks can be seen as a new form of cohesive device, helping to carry out the writer's argument in a non-linear network of references.

#### AN E-MAIL FORUM

The approaches to use of the Internet in the tertiary classroom that we are currently trialling include the use of e-mail, with an E-mail Forum. The E-mail Forum is an internal mailing list that students can post e-mail to, for reading by their classmates and lecturer only.

The E-mail Forum is an additional benefit to a communications medium which puts students in touch with all sorts of mailing lists around the world, in relevant topic areas. In the *Technology & Language Learning* subject discussed above, students have been able to pursue their interests in a wide range of areas, including French and Japanese mailing lists, a variety of English language teaching lists, as well as Technology Enhanced Language Learning forums.

Opportunities to set up e-mail exchanges are plentiful, like the e-mail shown in abridged form below, from one of the students to the mailing list, discussing some early explorations of resources for French language teaching and learning on the Net.

From: "Lachlan Hackett [student]" <LHACKETT@ed-lab.student.gu.edu.au>  
 To: "Masters of Arts & Applied Linguistics" <maal-l@ed-hydra.edn.gu.edu.au>  
 Subject: TT71092: French on the Net  
 Date: Thu, 21 Sep 1995 20:14:28 EST-10  
 Organization: Faculty of Education - Griffith Uni

... I reckon the most useful aspect of the Internet will turn out to be the chat/forums which can be used to provide students with real people to communicate with. The best source of French chat and other interactive services is 'CHAB', now at <<http://www.cybermax.fr/>>. As well as a general chat line (Le Forum) there is an interactive novel you can contribute to. For a French mailing list style forum subscribe to Frenchtalk <[listproc@list.cren.net](mailto:listproc@list.cren.net)>. It will fill up your e-mail as it is an active list. A more serious list is 'Francopolis' <[listserv@univ\\_lyon2.fr](mailto:listserv@univ_lyon2.fr)> which specialises in French politics. These are part of Frognet which also offers a magazine called Frogmag' and a daily French news update 'Revue de Presses RFI'...

... The best place to let students actually explore is probably the Paris pages <<http://www.paris.org>> They offer a wealth of cultural info, tourist info, maps, pictures, museum tours etc... Tours of French cities or regions can be accessed via: <<http://www.urec.fr/france/>> and French tours of Canadian cities such as Ottawa or Montreal can also be found easily by simply punching the city name into the search doovy.  
 ... That's all for now.

LAH

This student went on to write an assignment which is being added to the resources on the TELL Web Page. In addition, he developed his assignment into a journal article on the topic of French language resources on the Internet (Hackett 1996), after starting the course as a newcomer to Internet resources.

The linguistic and cognitive demands of e-mail, as a new electronic genre, present new opportunities for authentic communication to be incorporated in student projects (Hoffman 1994; StJohn & Cash 1995), as well as to perform important tasks for teacher development in the exchanges occurring at increasing rates on e-mail forums. Hoffman argues that in using e-mail and computer networks with language students, it is possible to shift the locus of control from the teacher to the students, achieving higher levels of collaboration between students, and

disengaging teachers from their traditional role of assessor and censor of student work. What is becoming possible, it is claimed (Hoffman 1994: 55), is a more collegiate approach to learning tasks in teacher-student exchanges on computer networks. This is certainly our experience with students using e-mail, with the proviso that ease of access to an e-mail facility is very important, given the obvious advantages enjoyed by students with e-mail facilities at home or work.

### **“COMMON SENSE” IDEOLOGIES AND CULTURAL CAPITAL**

Some aspects of the Net have already become a matter of “common sense” practices, standards and protocols. In Fairclough’s (1989) terms, “common sense” matters in our social life and language are established for us by those with real power in our society. In the case of the Net, for example, e-mail operates according to commonly accepted conventions, a development of startling speed considering that new written genres have been generated in English by a minority of the speakers of the language. This is a common pattern, of course, since all that is required is that the innovators have a position of power that drives such changes. Historically, the Internet and computing generally has been driven by big business and the military and science establishments in Western culture, particularly in the USA, joined more recently by the media and communications industries. Academic discourse has grown out of the linkage of universities to these powerful groups, creating new forms of discourse as the influence of the networks has spread.

A product of this growth nowadays is that the Net is an immediate conduit for a great deal of linguistic and cultural influence, particularly for English as a world language (for example, upsetting President Chirac because French, as he sees it, has been denied its rightful place in the world). This applies across the board for all languages, and causes even more difficulties, presumably, for languages with a non-Roman script, particularly nations and languages without high-tech resources. This influence is of course paralleled in education, with universities and schools in the USA enjoying a dominant position on the Internet. This is being counteracted to some extent for Australians by some impressive Web sites from local schools and universities, although very much in the minority in a global sense.

Access to the Internet is a major issue, of course, and educational institutions and students denied this access, or who find access difficult or expensive, will experience yet new forms of inequity, and loss of cultural capital (Emihovich 1990; Mason 1995). In my own faculty, which has utilized information technology more than most, the reliance on e-mail and the Web by staff for all but the most formal communications is now nearly complete. Inevitably, however, even here some staff members are more information-rich than others. This situation is even more true of students, of course, since those who can connect to university networks through modems at home have a very real advantage over those who cannot.

In an attempt to overcome the problem of inequitable access, Australian

government organizations are currently negotiating a common network to provide widespread education use, with a network called Education Network Australia, or *EdNA*. According to recent reports *EdNA* is at the planning stage, and is aimed at all sectors of education, including higher education, and will be accessible at the cost of a local call charge from anywhere in Australia (DEET, January, 1996). Proposed uses include distance education, with electronic mail facilities, and access to the Internet and the World Wide Web.

In the meantime, "common sense" ideologies regulating Net conventions and usage are becoming quite entrenched, visible in every form that the Net takes, down to the etiquette for e-mail messages (Harris 1996), similar to the common knowledge of shared expectations for letters and memos. This process is occurring too for academic discourse on the Net, most obviously in discussion of conventions for citing references that involve Web pages (Beckleheimer, 1995).

## CONCLUSION

The growth of new electronic forms of academic discourse is redefining tertiary literacy, with new genres and new literacies making radical changes to academic expectations of students. The flow of global information is increasing at an increasing rate, demanding new teaching and learning strategies if students are to gain membership of new virtual academic discourse communities. These communities shape and control new forms of cultural capital, and our students will need assistance to access these resources with maximum benefit.

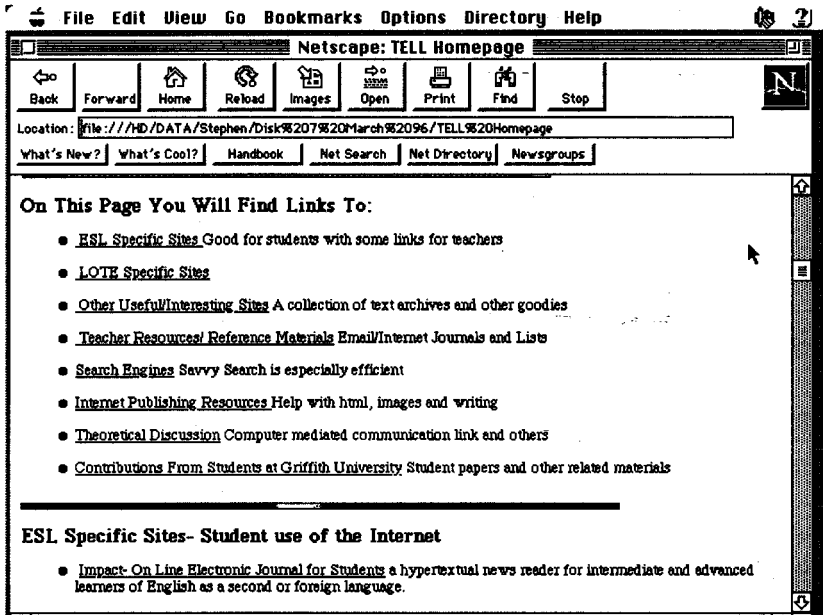
Given effective access and participation, our students will then be able to tap into and contribute to the vast resources generated in global knowledge production sites on the Net.

## Notes

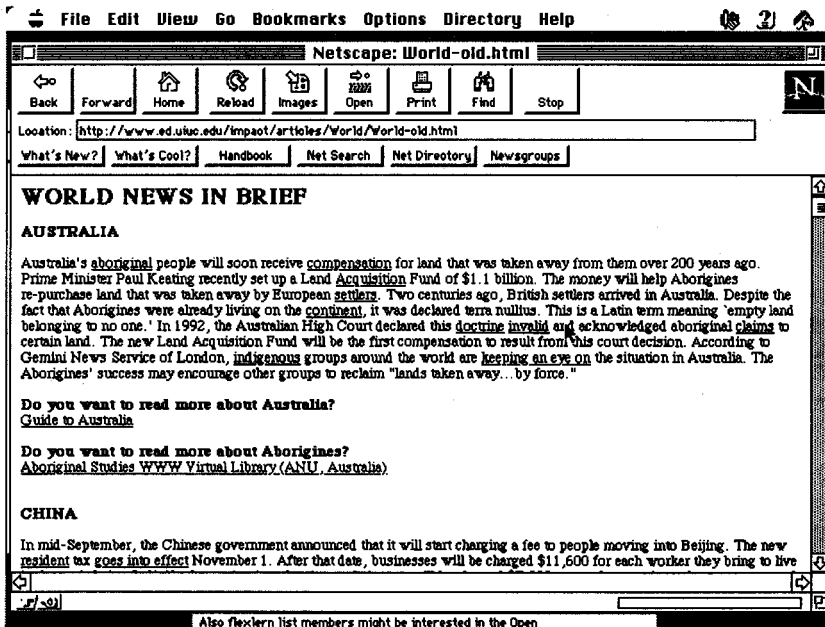
(1) Members of the team include Barry Downes, Lecturer in Computer Education and Technology Learning Facilitator in the Faculty of Education, Griffith University, and Stephen Heimans, research assistant responsible for the content of the Technology Enhanced Language Learning Web page.

(2) This project is funded by a fellowship from the Griffith Institute of Higher Education, with colleagues Claire Wyatt-Smith, Greer Johnson, and Barry Downes.

APPENDIX 1: TECHNOLOGY ENHANCED LANGUAGE LEARNING WEB PAGE



APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE SITE FROM TELL WEB PAGE



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# Changing Literacy: Changing Teaching and Learning

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The frequently expressed concerns by employers, the community and academics about poor standards of literacy among university graduates have been taken up by Adelaide University in the form of a recommendation passed by the Academic Board to *monitor student literacy in the University, ... and to make recommendations to assist the University in the teaching and management of literacy-related matters.*

This paper describes the strategies used in the first year of a project to define departmental expectations of tertiary literacy and communication skills, and to build models that departments can use to identify their expectations of literacy, to implement changes in their curriculum and assessment, and to support staff in the changes that need to flow into their teaching. The project is being undertaken by the Advisory Centre for University Education which comprises both academic staff development and a Language and Learning Service for students and works extensively with departments in their own context. The first year of the project, particularly in the Department of Commerce, has produced exciting results as staff have expanded their focus from initially selected subjects to include the literacy and communication requirements of the course as a whole, and so making literacy a curriculum issue for all their students and staff.

Changing literacy is a a complex process of managing change in academic departments. This paper discusses some of the strategies engaged in a project aiming to lift the performance of university undergraduates in literacy and communication skills. The project is part of a larger enterprise - to shape an institutional literacy policy.

In response to growing criticism by academics and employers of literacy standards, Ian Reid remarked in his *Campus Review* article in 1994,

We need to rethink our attitude to literacy requirements and literacy support for university students. It is a matter that should be inscribed urgently on the policy agenda of every Australian institution.

One step towards such an agenda was The University of Adelaide's Academic Board approval of a 1994 Teaching and Learning Report which, in part, recommended that

The Advisory Centre for University Education monitor student literacy in the University, the attitudes and practices of teaching towards expression, and the ways these attitudes are reflected in the assessment of students' work. Recommendations arising from the inquiry should be framed to assist the University in the teaching and management of literacy-related matters.

The emphasis on teaching and assessment signals student literacy as a curriculum issue which in turn needs to be understood within the larger economic and industrial issues of employer-driven demand and a general over-supply of graduates. Economic imperatives include the recent massive increase in student places, reduced government funding and the need for overseas student income.

Once viewed as a remedial problem for individual students, literacy is now being construed as a curriculum issue. For this purpose, the Department of Employment, Education and Training definition is useful:

Literacy is the ability to read and use written information and to write appropriately in a range of contexts. Literacy involves the integration of speaking, listening, and critical thinking with reading and writing. (DEET 1991:9)

The recent work of socio-linguists and tertiary literacy researchers such as Fairclough (1992, 1995), Gee (1990), Kress (1985), Lee (1994), Wignell et al. (1993), Nightingale, (1986), Prosser and Webb (1994), firmly locates literacy within the broader social context and within particular sub-cultures, such as the individual field of knowledge or discipline in the tertiary education sphere. Literacy in context is not a matter of English expression; it is a matter of communicating in language that is appropriate to the needs and traditions of the discipline. More than this, teaching students to gain control over language at the discipline level enables them not only to enter into that sub-culture: it is a means of their critiquing of culture and so participating in society with the capacity to act for its betterment.

National concerns have been expressed over literacy standards by professional bodies. Criticism has been levelled at graduates generally by the Australian Association of Graduate Employers (1994), while in the accounting profession, the Institute of Chartered Accountants (Capelletto, 1993) and the Mathews Report (1990) have been highly critical of graduate skills. The coordinator of the Professional Year Seminar in Adelaide in 1994 commented, 'It is well known that accounting graduates cannot write. In the Professional Year it is found that written essays are failed badly by most PY candidates.' Despite strong public criticism, there is scant reference to promoting the development of literacy and communication skills in this University's strategic planning, or in faculties' curriculum documentation. One exception, however, is the Department of Commerce, whose Strategic Plan includes the development of communication skills throughout the three year undergraduate degree.

Late in 1994, the Department of Commerce applied for a Teaching Development Grant to develop communication skills, at the same time as the Advisory Centre

for University Education (ACUE) sought funds for the implementation of the Academic Board's literacy recommendation. Funds were granted on a joint basis (\$49,050 over two years), the project including two other departments - Labour Studies and Mathematics. A separate grant is funding a related literacy project in the Bachelor of Applied Science. A further \$29,000 has been granted to expand the project in 1996. The ACUE's aim is to support and develop a range of approaches to literacy which fit the differing needs and interests of disparate departments, in order to recommend a range of strategies for consideration at faculty and departmental level. Each approach focuses on literacy and communication through subject and course development. This paper focuses on the work in progress in one department, Commerce, where the development of communication skills will be integral to the whole course. In other departments, the focus is on

- a core first year subject in the BA (Labour Studies)
- a credit bearing elective subject: English as a Second Language for Information Science
- a compulsory Communications unit for a cluster of Agricultural Science courses
- a History unit

As the ACUE provides services for both staff and students, the project has been able to capitalise on the skills and collaboration of academic staff in both areas. Underpinned by the philosophy that the most effective support for change takes place within the context of the discipline and the department, we have been implementing the recommendation in departments which have already signalled a desire to implement change. These departments each presented different problems and potentially different models of managing literacy. In all cases, staff from the ACUE have collaborated with Heads of Departments and subject coordinators, with the assistance of Teaching Development Grants from Quality Audit monies. In the long run, the continued development and maintenance of these initiatives must be managed by the departments themselves, so that literacy development can be firmly embedded in the curriculum and progressively accounted for by staff in their teaching, assessment and evaluation. The DEET definition of literacy served our wider purposes of focusing on the multiple literacy demands of the disciplines themselves, with their own peculiar discourses in the university context. In this context, grammar and spelling (often termed 'English expression') are subsumed in the broader context of thinking, arguing, writing and reporting according to not only academic, but discipline-specific conventions.

The project team for Commerce includes a Language and Learning lecturer with a linguistics background (Barbara Wake), a lecturer in staff development (the writer) and a research assistant (Alison Southwick), advised by a Literacy Committee set up in the Commerce Department. Initially, there was resistance to the name 'literacy'; departmental staff preferred that it be called a Communications Project. Staff were relatively comfortable with the latter, but

'literacy' was not seen to be their field and certainly not their responsibility - "The schools should be taking care of that; we are here to teach Commerce...". Tradition, habit, a hesitancy to involve outsiders and time pressures all contribute to resistance to change. Top-down policy cannot shift such attitudes and values, but changes made by colleagues can ripple outwards to include the majority of the department over time, if they are given the strong support of the head of department. The Department's own concerns about their graduates' communication skills, the pressure from the profession, and the joint grant were, however, strong catalysts for action.

The forces for and against change were aired at a departmental meeting early in 1995 to discuss the project. It was agreed, finally, that three first year subjects would be involved: Financial Accounting 1A, 1B and Information Systems 1. The first two subjects would focus on developing students' skills in short answer assignments, short essay assignments and report writing, and the third on oral presentations. Over four hundred students were enrolled in these courses. Analysis of 1994 examination answers indicated that students were often unable to analyse, evaluate or interpret, or apply what they had learned to new situations. They frequently presented no point of view or logical discussion, and only one student had written in an acceptable report format. Staff also complained that students copied from each other and regurgitated information. In oral presentations, interpretation, analysis and logic were also lacking, while papers were boringly read rather than discussed. Significantly, there was little interaction in tutorials; the student charged with the presentation, or the tutor, was expected to do all the work.

The Head responded to the analysis of the examination scripts by changing 'what' questions to more analytical 'why' questions. A visit from consultant Helen Bonanno of Sydney University's Language Assistance Centre confirmed the necessity for this approach. A professional development meeting was led by the ACUE staff development lecturer in which gaps between student performance and staff and employer expectations were identified; this step led to the setting of agreed teaching/learning objectives for the setting of tutorial assignments and examination questions. Attention to these objectives led to the Language and Learning lecturer developing linguistic structures for assignments, and the writing of model texts by the lecturers, and subsequently the collaborative revision of assignment and assessment tasks. Next, assessment criteria for both content and literacy were negotiated with the subject coordinators.

Once the objectives and criteria were agreed by staff, they were communicated to tutors and students. Money was made available for four tutor training sessions to train the fourteen tutors to use the materials and model answers with students. Comprehensive notes on short answers and short essays also were prepared for the students, based on a genre methodology. The first two tutorials were dedicated to answering short essay questions and short answer assignments, and the following two to practising marking the students' answers according to detailed criteria. This process raised another problem, despite the practice session - striking

inconsistency between markers. A second problem emerged from the tutorials themselves: a very low level of student interaction. Students were silent, and expected the tutors to give the answers to the (often unprepared) questions with little discussion. Tutors, of course, had been brought up on this method. And so the necessity for training in small group processes arose. One half day session was held for all staff, and included presentations by Commerce staff skilled in group process. Although this is a very social department, staff have little idea of how their colleagues teach. For both credibility and furthering staff awareness of their own resources, we have made a point of utilising in-house expertise wherever appropriate. The following table (Table 1) displays a timeline of the events as they unfolded during the project.

**TABLE 1: IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIES IN COMMERCE: TIMELINE NOV 94- DEC 95**

Desire for change	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Funding	■													■
Support of head	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Needs analysis		■				■	■							■
Consultation	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■						
Consultants		■		■										
Shared objectives				■										■
Core dept staff				■				■						■
Staff development				■	■	■	■	■	■				■	
Lectures & tutes					■	■			■					
Assess & marking					■			■					■	
Evaluation								■					■	■
Review; planning								■					■	■
Rewards								■						■
	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

As the first semester progressed, the cycle of consultation and identification of objectives for the second semester subject, Financial Accounting 1B, took place, with changes to assessment and marking criteria. Further tutor training was not undertaken as there was little turnover in staff mid-year. In the meantime, the Project Officer had begun work on a handbook for students providing information on style guides for Commerce assignments and a discussion of common spelling and grammatical errors appearing in first year assignments. The handbook was distributed to first years on enrolment in 1996; its usefulness will be evaluated later in the year.

Committed staff development over an extended period is essential to the integration of literacy and communication skills into the curriculum. Each step has to be negotiated and implemented in a slow process of trust, persuasion and risk. The culture of change builds over time. Test and exam results have clearly shown improved control over short answer and report writing formats, and we have all learned from the first year's experiences! A critical mass of staff is now convinced that the changes are working and are worth extending. In the second year of the project, the pace is already much faster.

The final meeting of the Literacy Committee, augmented by a number of interested staff, was held on December 15, 1995. The ACUE staff sought a meeting to consider the extent of the department's commitment to the project in 1996. Serendipitously, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in Australia had published in October an Exposure Draft of Guidelines for Joint Administration of Accreditation of Tertiary Courses by the Professional Accounting Bodies. Their outline of a Core Curriculum in Generic skills Areas (App. B: 16) proved to be a strong ally: the department was required to report on the implementation of generic skills teaching, and the project provided much of that data. The aim of the meeting was to decide on the qualities the department is aiming for in graduates, and where (indeed whether) these are taught and assessed.

We began with an empty grid of first, second and third year subjects in order to identify the skills potential graduates would need by the end of third year. Beginning with the identification of literacy and communication skills for one of the major written assignments at the end of third year, a research project, the staff soon realised the value of the exercise, and decided it was an issue for the whole department, not just the Literacy Committee. As a result, all staff were surveyed to 'enable the Committee to draw up a map of the flow of communications skills taught throughout the degree, and [to] help us respond to the Exposure Draft of the joint accounting bodies' (Memo to staff, Dec 1995). Responsibility for the development of literacy was now being taken on by the department as a whole.

Evaluation of the project so far has centred on end-of-year examination results (not yet complete), a cost-benefit discussion at a November staff meeting and a feedback session early in December to the ACUE staff involved. Seven of the eight Commerce Literacy Committee members were present. Selected comments are indicative of the strong response - and issues yet to be resolved:

- Now we talk about what goes on in other subjects
- Staff have accepted responsibility rather than blaming high schools
- Need to think more deeply about how you set assignments
- Staff were accepting; training of staff - all good fun
- There is a difference in how tutors take tutorials
- It has improved our teaching, how we should be training staff, our commitment to assessment, how we ask exam questions
- It's been necessary to have a Head of Department to encourage and coerce

**Issues:** How long is it necessary to have a language expert?

Use of part time teaching staff militates against effectiveness: high turnover, not cost-effective.

Diverse student evaluations to oral presentations: what do they indicate?

Raised issue of research and how to indicate effectiveness of what we've done.

Minutes of meeting 17 November, 1995

The issues raise the following questions for policy development:

- Who will spearhead and maintain curriculum development for literacy? What resources are needed, and for how long?
- Honours and postgraduate students are used extensively in many courses - because they are cheap, they need jobs and teaching experience is valued for their cv. Most are untrained; high turnover makes training cost inefficient.
- Changes to teaching do affect student evaluations, not always positively.
- Research is still valued over teaching. Does the institution value teaching and research into teaching sufficiently for staff to put real effort in?

Further evidence of the need for change is being gathered by a series of structured interviews with year twelve teachers of commerce and related subjects, with first year students, first year staff, third year students and employers. This process is not yet complete, but early results are indicated in Table 2.

**TABLE 2: PERCEPTIONS OF GENERIC SKILLS REQUIRED FOR COMMERCE STUDENTS AT YEAR 12**

State school teachers n=5	Private school teachers n=8	Constraints on teachers
ability to recall	analysis, evaluation, logic	wide range of students
coherent expression	exam technique	public exam demands rote learning, regurgitation
use the language of the subject	independent learning	students like 'hands on' work, not theory
reason, analyse, interpret, deduce	critical thinking, interpreting information	poor literacy skills in Year 12
listen	communication skills: reading, writing, listening, viewing	

Table 2 Sample drawn from volunteers attending two regional teachers' meetings in 1995.

At each level, literacy is a concern. State schools in particular are struggling with a very wide range of students, many of whom have poor language skills for year 12 study. At the same time, the need for high marks for university entry drives rote learning.

While better prepared students are taught critical thinking, analysis and evaluation, first year lecturers perceive these skills to be lacking, as do employers. (Lack of experience is an additional factor here.) Evidence of gaps between year 12 skills and expectations of first year students, and graduates' skills and expectations of employers may prove useful in motivating change and reallocation of resources for teaching. There is political and economic leverage here, but we are also looking for better teaching and learning experiences to benefit students by developing their critical awareness of and impact on the cultures they negotiate through life.

While the process outlined here is undoubtedly successful, it is expensive. Other models being explored in the project are less labour-intensive, as they focus on single subjects. We would argue that while these models are cheaper, they are severely limited by their isolation from the course as a whole. Students cannot be expected to transfer literacy skills gained in one subject unless most staff have a coherent course design that aims to develop and reward communication skills. Although communication skills are called generic, they are also specific to the language and customs of the discipline, the profession and the social environment. Student understanding of the interplay between language, content and context takes time and effort. We are now seeking advice from heads of departments involved in the project, then from deans and senior management, to determine appropriate strategies for policy formation to foster the development of literacy and communication skills in the university as a whole.

TABLE 3

<b>Perception of first year students' preparedness (structured group interview)</b>	<b>Perceptions of graduates' preparedness (individual interviews)</b>
<b>First year teachers n=12</b>	<b>Employers n=5</b>
describe concepts and issues well;	good technicians; good theory
cannot predict effects or apply concepts to problems; difficulty with logical argument	poor diagnosis and solutions; do not understand there may be more than one solution
plagiarism	
poor grammar, vocabulary and oral skills	poor communication: use jargon; can't set out a formal letter; poor grammar and spelling; poor oral presentation

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# Social Identities and Literacy Practices

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The focus for this paper is some of the reading and writing practices which students engage in as part of the requirements for an undergraduate degree in the Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA) faculty at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean. Students major in a performance/practice field, or in a theory field, identifying themselves as predominantly performers/artists, or theoreticians, and bring these diverse positions to their writing practices. In the process of acquiring disciplinary control in the faculty of VAPA, students struggle in various ways to find a place for themselves in the different disciplines or specialisms, intersected as they are by theoretical and practical discursive considerations.

In this paper I use a variety of texts: extracts from students' writing, interview transcripts, and extracts from set texts to explore some of the issues concerned with the construction of knowledge and the movement towards expertise of some students in the faculty of VAPA. These issues revolve around notions of intertextuality, authority and subjectivity. In simple terms the study looks at *what* can be written/read, *how* texts can be written/read, and *who* can write and read. This paper raises issues about how people involved in supporting students' tertiary literacy practices might best engage in a practice which does not 'paper over' the different subjectivities students bring to learning, while at the same time deals realistically or perhaps creatively with the literacy demands of particular disciplines.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on some of the reading and writing practices which students engage in as part of the requirements for an undergraduate degree in the Visual and Performing Arts faculty at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean. Students studying within this faculty choose to major in a performance or practice field (Visual Art, Design, Dance, Music or Drama), or in a theory field (Art History). Because students identify themselves as predominantly performers/artists, or theoreticians they bring these diverse positions to their writing practices. Students also need to take up multiple and at times conflicting positions to meet the reading and writing requirements of their disciplines. Yet despite moves towards criterion referenced assessments there is an apparent lack of agreement about what counts as 'appropriate' reading and writing practices within the faculty. Notions of appropriacy are not clearly divided even along lines of theory and performance focused writing practices. Instead, what counts as 'appropriate'

reading and writing practices are diverse, conflicting and fluid.

My work in a learning support unit has raised questions about how to support students' literacy development in ways which acknowledge these diverse and conflicting practices, and the diverse positions or social identities that students bring with them to their learning. My purpose in writing this paper is to stimulate discussion about whether we should, and how we can, view this diversity not as a deficit to be remedied but as a resource which can help bring about more equitable and transformative educational practices within the university context.

In part, chance has influenced my choice of Visual and Performing Arts as the faculty on which to base this paper. The campus on which I work is where most of the VAPA students study and some of these students make use of the Learning Centre (LC). Students from this faculty are by no means the highest users of the LC. However, a number of students from the faculty have made use of the LC at various times throughout their undergraduate degrees and this has given me the opportunity to get some understanding of their particular learning experiences over a period of time. Interviews with one of these students "Mei" (a third year visual arts major), as well as extracts from her written work and from the articles she read as research for her written work make up the central core of this paper. Other interviews and written work from VAPA lecturers and students gathered from another project (Critical analysis for undergraduates - Unmasking the processes) also form part of the data. While VAPA writing practices are the focus of this paper, I think it is possible to generalise, to a certain degree, some of the central themes I want to develop in this paper to courses in other faculties (particularly those which contain both theoretical and practical components).

### 1.1 STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER

Section two outlines the themes and the theoretical frameworks that are central to the paper. Section three takes some of the theoretical concerns raised in the previous sections and ties these to some specific reading and writing practices in VAPA. Systemic functional linguistics is employed to help analyse and interpret some of the text examples in this section. Finally, section four poses the question - what do we do? I have raised some specific questions here which I hope will act as a reflective framework for us to examine our own practices in relation to teaching/learning tertiary literacy.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

... every time a student sits down to write for us he [she] has to invent the university for the occasion-invent the university, that is or a branch of it ...The student has to learn to speak our language, to speak as we do, to try on the particular 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. (Bartholomae, 1985, p.134)

## 2.1 DISCIPLINARY LITERACY

Successful [re]invention of the university involves students being able to make 'sense' of the texts they read and need to produce in any particular environment. Within the university environment, this 'sense making' in many ways involves learning "...the patterns of knowing about, and behaving toward, texts within a disciplinary field" (Haas, 1994, p.43). The literacy practices of reading, writing and oracy are in this view, social, historical, and cultural practices. Authors create texts and readers read texts within a complex historical, social and cultural framework. Texts are produced and read by human beings who are specifically situated in terms of beliefs, values, culture, and history (Haas, 1994; Gee, 1990; Fairclough, 1989).

Within this understanding of literacy practices, making sense of a text involves adopting a particular reading position, and writing or speaking 'sensible' texts means adopting a particular writing or speaking position (Freebody, Luke and Gilbert, 1991; Fairclough, 1989; Kress, 1985).

## 2.2 LITERACY AND DISCOURSE

Literacy practices are not neutral events but are mediated by and through discourse. Gee (1990, p.142) provides an accessible definition of the term discourse/s as "...ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, social identities, as well as gestures, body positions and clothes". Literacies are secondary discourses in that they are socially constructed forms, usually learnt or acquired after our enculturation into the primary or 'family' based discourses of birth. Literacies are shaped by and reflect wider social practices, relations and values (Lankshear and Lawler, 1987).

Kress (1985) highlights the discursive effect of texts when he argues that the texts valued within a particular institution are systematically organised and are embedded in discourses "...which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution... [and] limit and define what it is possible to say and not to say" (p.7). There is no knowledge or subject matter which is not influenced by a particular cultural, social, and historical perspective.

## 2.3 THE 'NATURALISATION' OF DISCOURSE

Since literacy practices and indeed social practices in general are mediated by and through discourse, there is competition among and within social groupings for particular social practices to be seen as the 'natural' way to do things. In the 'naturalisation' of what Fairclough (1989) calls a "discourse type" (the conventions, like genres, which people employ in living out a discourse), the discourse type actually "appears to lose its ideological character" (p.92) and is represented as a neutral part of the institution in struggles for power and change. When naturalisation occurs, "learning a dominant discourse type comes to be seen merely as acquiring the necessary skills or techniques that operate in that institution" (p.92).

An example of the naturalisation of a discourse within the university context is

the "skills competency" notion. In an article in the Sydney Morning Herald (17/4/95), Michael Jackson, a Sydney academic, argues for seven generic competencies which if met would lead to what Jackson describes as an "educated" person: one who, to use Jackson's words, has a "... (self) critical attitude and the capacity to distinguish, judge and act". To describe "the educated person" in terms of these generic skills or competencies is to mask the fact that there are particular ways of distinguishing, judging and acting which are privileged and others which are dismissed within the university. Students can really only become "successfully educated" when they gain acceptance from the university by being complicit with its practices, values, meanings, demands, prohibitions and permissions.

In a similar vein, tertiary students' literacy levels have also come under attack (Sydney Morning Herald 31/5/95). In an article by Luis Garcia, the chairman of the University of Sydney's Academic Board called for "basic communicative competence" to remedy "poor levels of communication skills exhibited by incoming university students". Yet literacy practices are not neutral events. Only certain kinds of texts have currency and prominence within an institution (Kress, 1985). The move to technologise literacy practices into decontextualised competencies does nothing to address and make explicit for students the ways of being in the world that underpin these competencies, nor does it expose the views of knowledge and ways of 'being' constructed by a 'competency' view of literacy practices.

#### 2.4 SOCIAL IDENTITIES AND POSITIONS WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY

For students this situation is further compounded because educational institutions are complex and involve various sorts of discourse in various discourse types or conventions (eg. genres and styles) (Fairclough, 1989). We could expect therefore, that at any one time, there would be a number of competing discourse types within any situation. Being 'competently' literate involves learning/acquiring a number of discourse positions.

Some work has been done on uncovering discourses which underpin literacy practices in specific sites within educational institutions (for example, Lee, 1993; Luke, 1993; Kamler and Maclean (forthcoming). Other work has focussed more on understanding how students come to master discourse types and practices within specific disciplinary contexts (for example, Stockton, 1995; Haas, 1994).

Discourse, and this includes literacies, situates us in society and constitutes us as a person. This connection between discourse and social identity is highlighted by Gee (1990), Fairclough (1989), and Green (1987), and is an issue of importance for students trying to make sense of literacy practices and the discourses embodied in them. The work done by Stockton (1995) and Haas (1994) on how students come to adopt the identity of a writer or reader in the areas of history and biology respectively, highlights some of the tensions involved in adopting a secondary institutionally situated identity which conflicts in some way with the identities which students bring with them from their families or even with other

later acquired identities. Conversely, these mainstream discourses "...often incorporate attitudes and values hostile to, and even in part define themselves in opposition to these minority students and their home and community based discourses" (Gee, 1990 p.148). As adult readers or writers, we have to negotiate the multiple subject positions available to us.

### 3. READING AND WRITING PRACTICES IN VAPA

The 'I' who speaks is always an historically specific 'I', however, an 'I' who speaks with, at the very least, a gender, class, racial/ethnic and generational specificity. All these aspects of social identity are not simply given but are socially constructed in a complex of (i) culturally learned forms of interaction, (ii) structures of knowledge formed by the habitual forms of representation available to and used by the individual speaker, and (iii) structures of feeling about those structures of knowledge and interaction. The 'I' who speaks has, furthermore, a unique personal history, again with consequences for structures of feeling, knowledge and interaction and the relationships between them. (Poynton, 1990, p.251)

#### 3.1 INTERTEXTUALITY AND AUTHORITY

In the process of acquiring disciplinary control in the faculty of VAPA, students struggle in various ways to find a place for themselves in the different disciplines or specialisms, intersected as they are by theoretical and practical discursive considerations.

Ivanic and Simpson (1992) argue that students are under pressure to submerge their individual identities when writing in an academic institution. According to Ivanic and Simpson, writers who write in the impersonal style still expected in many academic institutions are not cutting themselves out of the text but instead creating an image of themselves as having an objective view of knowledge. While this is indeed an expectation that many lecturers still have of their student writers, it is not one held by the lecturers who were interviewed in this study. Each of the student writers discussed in this paper do at some stage inject themselves into the text with the explicit use of the pronoun 'I'.

However, this positioning of the self in the text is usually not acceptable unless this self gains authority by making reference to other 'valued' writers. Student writers seldom are seen as having this 'authority' in their own right. The comments made by one VAPA lecturer, 'Mary', about a first year drama student's ('Harry') essay:

...but there are statements like "man can live in harmony with the world around him" ...they were kind of generalisations, which I think you know perhaps is also a positive point about his writing, is that he doesn't just repeat parrot fashion what he has been told and what he reads. But at the same time some of his statements aren't backed up clearly enough. (interview with Mary 22.12.94)

as well as the final comments on Mei's essay made by a different lecturer "...some occasional interesting points are raised, but are intermingled with some rather ordinary sounding speculations based on personal opinion", bear witness to this.

### 3.2 CONFLICTING DISCOURSES

This notion of 'authority' seems to clash with the notion of art as self expression held by Mei:

[in visual arts] we have to be a bit more creative and self expression but for the theory we have to do about what other people's thinking.  
(interview with Mei, 12.7.95)

Likewise, "Jill", a first year dance student, comes to her writing (extract 1), a log book about a dance performance, from a performer's perspective which also seems to value 'self' expression:

#### Extract 1

My space is cold, a rock hard structure. I chose this place to see if I could show a contrast in my solo of my space. As I said before my space is solid and stiff, I want to show softness and curve type movements as well as strong and aggressive movements.

Jill's conceptualisation of the space she had to work with, and her considerations of the possibilities for performance in that space were defined and valued by her lecturer as self reflective practice. Jill's writing appears to be highly personal. She is of course writing within a genre which values a recording of personal experience, and so there appears to be no need to appeal to an 'authority' to support her writing. However, Jill's lecturers had in fact canvassed some of these ideas about contrasting bodies with space in discussions in class. So Jill also *is* incorporating other 'valued' texts into her writing.

There is an apparent tension here between 'performance' based and 'theory' based understandings of writing practice. The former seemingly valuing 'personal' judgement, and the latter valuing 'supported' judgement. Mary suggests this tension is reflected in the attitudes of the academic staff within the faculty:

...we find the same sort of schism between the practice and the theory staff here and like we've at times have heated arguments where one lot think that what they do is more intellectual or I don't know more challenging or something. And in fact they are not either one nor the other, but they're just two completely different modalities and once that's grasped and that's why its difficult for students particularly in first year to then go and write about something like a painting, and they tend to say oh well you know, I like it, yeah but why? It's harder definitely harder for them to be critical than if they were talking about an essay or a book or something cause they're used to that at school [but] they're not exposed to writing on images. (interview with Mary 22.12.95)

Mary's suggestion that it is the 'modality' which differentiates theoretical from performance based concerns is perhaps close to the truth. It is possible that what is occurring here is competition among different specialisms and registers (Lee, 1993), yet some of the discourses that underpin theory based writing practices may at times be similar to those underpinning performance based writing practices. At times there seems to be a clear definition of boundaries between valued theory and performance writing practices (supported opinion on the one hand, personal opinion on the other). However, if the notion of intertextuality is expanded to incorporate 'valued texts' *spoken* by lecturers (as I argued is the case in Jill's log book) then there seems to be a blurring of boundaries between the discourses embodied in those writing practices. The difficulty for students lies in recognising and negotiating these differences and similarities.

Specifically students often find it difficult to negotiate amongst the often conflicting positions of injecting themselves into their texts, appealing to a recognised authority to support their views, and engaging in what is seen as plagiarism. Yet plagiarism is itself an ideologically invested notion. Gilbert (1990) following Barthes (1977) argues that all authoring relies to a large extent on imitating known language systems, on juxtaposing, incorporating, and parodying previous texts. Without this sense of 'familiarity' texts would be unreadable, and unrecognisable. If we take the view that all texts are connected in some way (intertextuality), then the notion of plagiarism really relates more to the differential status of the writer. Students must reference their opinions if they are to be taken 'seriously', and many students find themselves referencing almost every paragraph. However, 'recognised authorities' (usually those who have been conferred this status by virtue of the number of publications they have achieved in prestigious journals) do not seem to need to reference their opinions as frequently to the works of others (a glance at most 'scholarly' texts shows this); these writers *are* the authorities.

### 3.3 WHAT CAN BE WRITTEN: VALUED AND NON-VALUED WRITING POSITIONS

Culturally learned forms of interaction within the university context influence not only who has the 'authority' to speak, but also what position/s one can speak from. This interaction is in part shaped through feedback which lecturers give their students, often via comments made on students essays. Mei's lecturer, for example engaged in trying to shape Mei's writing practice. The following comments were written on Mei's essay <sup>1</sup>

I wonder to what extent you are picking out Pollock's critical comments [text comments indistinct here]. It seems that you are gleaning her writing for the 'historical facts' without acknowledging her criticisms of the way in which this 'history' is created.

These comments came at the bottom of the fourth page of Mei's seven page essay. The comments define what the lecturer sees as valued/non valued (ie critical, not historical) approaches to the content.

In table 1, I look at the thematic choices made by Mei in the topic sentences of the paragraphs leading up to these comments. My interest in analysing the thematic structure of Mei's text is in uncovering the strategies Mei uses to construct her text. These strategies, as Fairclough (1992b) suggests, give some insight into the writing position or identity Mei is constructing for herself. In this section, I am interested in how these strategies and writing position do, or do not mesh with Mei's lecturer's expectations.

Theme is the point of departure for the message of the clause (Halliday, 1985). Eggins argues that what gets to be theme in a clause "contributes very significantly to the communicative effect of the message" (1994, p.273). Theme affects the structuring of a text and, according to Eggins, while it *doesn't* add new reality or affect the interpersonal dimensions of a clause, it does provide the potential for the reorganisation of the clause to achieve different purposes. However, Fairclough seems to suggest that thematic choice *does* have the potential to affect the interpersonal dimension of a text, especially in relation to the social identity that is constructed by the text. Text cohesion (in which thematic choice plays a major role) provides:

a way into looking at the sort of argumentation that is used, and the sorts of standards of rationality it presupposes; this in turn will give some insight into the sorts of social identity that are constructed in the text. (Fairclough, 1992b, p.171)

Thematic choice along with transitivity structures (ie. participants and processes or, who's doing what to whom) allow the foregrounding or backgrounding of information, so they also have implications for ideological dimensions of discourse. In other words, what is placed first in a clause can provide insight into implicit assumptions and strategies used by the writer to develop a text.

In table 1, the themes have been underlined for each topic sentence.

TABLE 1

1. The notion[s] of madness and art often [have] been bound together in the representation of artist as genius.
2. In her essay, 'Artists Mythologies and Media Genius, Madness and Art History', Pollock (1980) wanted to discuss the similarity between the psychiatric analysis of an artist and the typical ways of art history.
3. In Germany the expressionist movement took up the figure of Van Gogh as an artistic subject.
4. Born in 1853 at Zundert in Holland, Van Gogh was the son of a Dutch Pastor.
5. Van Gogh was an unsuccessful impressionist.

6. By 1889, Van Gogh's palette had lightened.
7. Van Gogh's work while lacking recognition during his life time, later was recognised as the work of a genius.<sup>2</sup>
8. The suicide was to be taken as a significant movement of Van Gogh which needed explanation.
9. However during his life time, Van Gogh was not recognised as a great artist.
10. Van Gogh did not like the liberal bourgeoisie because his work was badly criticised by them.

In the ten thematic choices Mei made, all but one contained topical themes in the initial position in the clause. The exception was clause 9 which contains both a textual theme (**however**) and topical theme (**during his life time**). Also, most of the topical themes (clauses 2,3,4,6,9) are circumstantial adjuncts, and because these, rather than the clause subjects are thematised, then these themes are 'marked'<sup>3</sup>.

Because these themes are atypical choices, we might then consider the general contribution they make to the overall structure of the text. Firstly, the effect of thematising the circumstantial elements of location and time, as is mostly the case in the examples above, is to locate this section of the text more within an historical discourse or even a biographical discourse. The biographical notes that often accompany an artist's work in an exhibition catalogue have similarities with some of Mei's text. The lecturer's comments about Mei gleaning the "historical facts" from her readings instead of picking out "critical comments" about the "way in which this history is created" pick up these points without recourse to any extensive text analysis.

Secondly, the method of text development, or how the thematic elements succeed each other and contribute to text cohesion and coherence, reinforces Mei's positioning of herself as the writer of an historical/biographical text. Eggins (1994), points to three ways themes can be developed to keep a text focussed: **theme re-iteration**, where the same participant is made theme on several occasions; **theme zig zagging**, where an element which is introduced in the rheme<sup>4</sup> becomes the theme of the next clause and so on; **multiple theme** pattern, where the theme of a clause introduces a number of different pieces of information which are subsequently made themes in the following clauses. Mei's theme development is somewhat erratic, although "Van Gogh" forms part of the themes in many of her clauses. The other theme development occurring in her text also employs re-iteration, this time of circumstantial adjuncts. Together, these reiterated themes focus the text on the biographical and historical concerns. As a consequence of this method of text development, it is very difficult for Mei to develop a "standard of rationality" which is oriented towards persuasive or critical writing; something which her lecturer had wanted her to do. Instead, in

this piece of writing, Mei has adopted the “standard of rationality” and the “identity” of an historical biographer.

### 3.4 NEGOTIATING MULTIPLE SUBJECTIVITIES

The question is why did Mei do this in a subject area that is titled **Mythologies of the artist** and in an essay which asks for her to discuss the idea of art as self expression, rather than provide historical or biographical information about an artist. Even the subject notes that accompanied the essay question highlighted the fact that:

The course is not designed solely to provide some sense of ‘historical movement’ as such...but to provide some sense of the development of *meaning* of what an artist is, and what/who they come to represent in a particular period.

The answers to these questions have to do with the subjectivities that Mei brings with her to her reading and writing practices and to the subject position/s she needs to adopt in order to write in a way which is valued. Mei sees herself as a ‘practical’ artist concerned with self expression. She is less concerned with what she terms the ‘philosophy’ of the theoretical subjects which are a compulsory part of her degree. In her pre university art training, written assignments required historical and biographical information about artists and art movements. The theoretical component of her university degree however, confronts her with the nature of her position as an artist within the university context. In order to write in a way which is valued, Mei has to take on board a number of post modern theories about the social constructedness of the artist. Her essay question challenges her notion of herself as an artist (self expression) with a different notion that art is a social construct. Mei’s indecision about these two constructions of ‘artist’ is picked up in her lecturer’s final comments on her essay:

You seem to oscillate between two poles throughout but seem to capitulate in the end to the myth. What do you think?

Mei and her fellow students not only bring diverse subjectivities to the learning situation, but must also negotiate multiple reading positions and subjectivities (including that of ‘artist’ versus ‘theoretician’) in order to write in ways that are valued by lecturers. Mei’s comments pick up the tension of moving between the positions of artist and theoretician: a tension that she indicates may not exist so starkly anywhere except for the university:

The Visual Arts lecturers value what our thinking is, personal thinking, um identity, sort of self expression as well in the visual form. And especially we are doing the contemporary degree which is more about contemporary art, its not traditional, so we have to be a bit more creative and self expression. But for the theory we have to do about what other people’s thinking. I mean they give all the topics about, just like this one, the idea of self expression about Van Gogh, or references about some other artist. So we have to look at some other people’s

writing, so not create our own. Is to criticise others, which is for me, it is not very. It is the opposite way, from one part to the next. And they say that why they doing this is to make us think more about just ourselves, want to develop somebody, not just a visual artist practical. They want to have somebody more academic, they, people doing critical criticise-curator I think,...and organise more exhibitions or curator sort of thing than just a visual art student doing art...They reckon if you want to have more [practical art] skills you should go to TAFE first. Go to the technical college before we come, that's what some lecturers say. (Interview with Mei <sup>5</sup> 12.7.95)

Mei does not seem to recognise (or perhaps accept?) the discursive practices which are valued within the 'theory' based discourses of the VAPA faculty. Mei's drafts and notes leading up to the final essay indicate a selective reading of the texts in which she did predominantly pick out historical and biographical information. The themes of Mei's essay reflect this 'reading' of her texts.

The texts however also have other things to say. The following selection (extract 2) is the first part of the first paragraph of Pollock's article titled Artists mythologies and media genius, madness and art history, an article which Mei cites a number of times in her essay.

#### Extract 2

IN THE GROWING marxist literature on the history of art considerable attention has been paid to the defaults of current art history: the failure of that discipline which purports to provide a *history* of art, to engage with, or even acknowledge, any but the most simplistic, recognisable notion of history let alone of production, class or ideology. Crucial questions have not been posed about *how* art history works to exclude from its fields of discourse history, class, ideology, to produce an ideological, 'pure space for something called 'art' sealed off from and impenetrable to any attempt to locate art practice within a history of production and social relations. (Pollock, 1980, p.57)

In this selection all original type face changes have been reproduced with the exception of the underlined words. These are the words which Mei herself underlined and then wrote dictionary definitions (in English) for in the margins of the text. For the word 'discourse' however, Mei wrote the meaning in Cantonese. The English translation for this is something like "the final essay submitted for a graduate or postgraduate degree". Mei often looks for synonyms in the texts she is reading so that she can change words around and paraphrase sections to be used in her essay. Mei wrote this word in Cantonese because she could find no English synonym which she felt made the reading more understandable.

However, if we take just the first sentence of Pollock's text, we can get an idea that there is more to 'translate' than individual lexical items in order to start to unravel its possible meanings. The whole text is made lexically dense<sup>6</sup> through the use of embedded clauses<sup>7</sup> and grammatical metaphor<sup>8</sup>.

The first sentence, for example, begins with a large nominal<sup>9</sup> group as marked topical theme: “**IN THE GROWING marxist literature on the history of art**”. This nominal group also contains the grammatical metaphor, or metaphor of transitivity; “**growing**”. Likewise the section after the colon: “the **failure** of that **discipline** [[which purports to provide a *history* of-art]], to engage with, or even acknowledge, any but the most simplistic, **recognisable** notion of history let alone of **production**, class or ideology”, contains the metaphors **failure**, **discipline**, **recognisable**, **production**, as well as the embedded clause marked out by the double brackets[[ ]].

These are the features which render this text lexically dense, abstract, and consequently inaccessible to a large number of readers. Martin (1987) estimates that only 10% of Australian adults are able to read and write English of this type. Furthermore, the use of metaphor enables the writer to turn processes into entities in themselves, thus concealing the participants who are actually ‘doing’ these things. This has the effect of presenting the reader with a view of the world which is abstracted from what people actually do and so this also functions to force the reader to unconsciously accept the writers position if he/she is to make sense of the text. The writer’s ideological position becomes naturalised.

Mei’s own writing (extract 3) differs markedly from Pollock’s style of writing.

Extract 3

However during his lifetime, Van Gogh was not recognised as a great artist. In January 1890, Albert Aurier a symbolist critic published a first essay on Van Gogh in France. According to Aurier, Van Gogh was a maddened genius and close to pathological status. Aurier argued that his art works were beyond reason and extremely rude. His paintings reflected his character as a cruel savage rather as an artist. Aurier also argued that Van Gogh’s paintings had a strong feeling of violence in expression. He showed his dislike of the bourgeois and he showed an excess of nervous energy. Van Gogh tried to show himself as a powerful man and showed little of his technique (Pollock, 1980).

Her first few sentences for example (table 2) contain no grammatical metaphors, no embedded clauses and relatively uncomplicated topical themes.

TABLE 2

1. However during his lifetime,
2. In January 1890
3. According to Aurier
4. Aurier

Only the first clause contains both a textual theme '**however**', as well as a topical theme. All the other sentences contain topical themes only. In this section of her writing, Mei positions herself in the text as a writer who is interested in 'people' 'doing' things, the participants in her text are clear. In general, Mei does not write like the authors of her textbooks, instead she reads and writes from within an historical/biographical framework which perhaps poses less of a threat to her own conception of herself as a self expressive practical artist.

### 3.5 'FRAMING' READING AND WRITING PRACTICES

Thus, the subject position Mei needs to adopt to be able to write like an 'expert' and to make sense of other 'expert' information depends not only on her being able to unpack the text, but also to entertain the same assumptions that the writer of the text does. As a reader, Mei needs to frame the text in such a way as to fill in the gaps and make the inferences that make the text sensible (Fairclough, 1992b). This involves being able to make sense of ideologically variable discourse types. Gilbert (1990) clearly states the struggles that many students like Mei experience in attempting to do this:

...once a word is read from within a known set of discursive expectations and placed within a reading *frame*, it can be produced in a particular way. Until it is 'framed'- until it is read in a particular way from a particular reading practice- the work can be produced in a number of very different ways. (p.69)

It appears that Mei frames the 'theoretical' subjects she is required to take as part of her degree program from a position of resistance. She does not position herself differently with regard to the different 'specialisms' of VAPA (the theory and the practice specialisms). Mei explicitly states her resistance to adopting the multiple subject positions that might enable her to make the transitions between the variable discourse types of theory and practice in VAPA:

...a lot of Visual Art students don't really want to do very good in the theory, or not to spend too much time in the theory, because three years degree is very short term degree already. If we have to concentrate two theory [subjects] each year so that is not much writing, it can be around 10,000 words writing. But the time we have to spend to read, before we can write, before we have to go look at other writers, not just write something about what we think or what we say, or not just a tutorial. And we spend so much time on that and we have less time for our practical. How can we earn a living if we are not professional artists? That's what I think. (interview with Mei, 12.7.95)

Mei is 'getting by' without having a commitment to 'getting into' the theoretical discourse practices of VAPA.

Another student in this study, Kathy, perhaps has less resistance to filling in the gaps between herself and the texts she reads. Firstly, she comes to the theoretical discourses of Art History from the subject position of an Art History (not a

Visual Art studio or performance) major. In doing so, she does not obviously have to straddle the theory/practice dichotomy. Secondly, she has, by the third year of her studies, recognised that there are certain valued discourses in her field, things you can write about and things you cannot:

...you couldn't say Picasso was a genius! That's part of the postmodernist critique of the modern. You can't eulogise the genius. I think it's good to do away with that sort of idea. Arts writing now is a lot of things visually, review, representation, is important, obligatory pointing at Lacan and Freud. You have to have an understanding of vision and visuality debates. <sup>11</sup>(interview with Kathy 23.12.94)

And, finally (given an earlier comment that she starting off writing essays her mum could read) Kathy has also worked out how language 'works' in her field. Together, these give Kathy access to eventually taking up a position as expert rather than apprentice, outsider, or resistor to the debates that surround Art History. This brief excerpt (extract 4) from Kathy's essay illustrates this point:

Extract 4

Within the space of two paragraphs, Wigley has made what I consider to be a quantum leap. He began talking about 'sexuality'-a term implicated in psychoanalytic and anatomical circles-and finished talking about 'gender'-a term used to separate sexuality from anatomy; metaphor from 'the real'; ideality from materiality. There is no explanation for this leap from one term to the other, yet this shift has considerable magnitude.

Kathy frames her reading of Wigley in current debates of sexuality and gender. She also makes use of the common metaphors of the discourses of her field: **psychoanalytic, ideality, materiality, shift**. Indeed her argument here is an argument about the metaphors employed by Wigley. Metaphors construct the way we think and act. Our systems of knowledge become naturalised within a particular cultural framework and we can't escape from them in our thinking action and discourse (Fairclough 1992b). Kathy has immersed herself in her chosen field of Art History, and incorporated many of the language features and discursive practices of her text books into her own writing. This immersion has been a conscious process for Kathy:

The more reading you do the more you can think in those concepts. I used to keep words I didn't understand in a notebook and put meanings and usage down. So I'd use those words in my writing to develop an idea. You build your knowledge slowly...if your living out here you rarely see the artworks you're talking about, but you have to go and see as much as possible. Ring 013, and get them to put you on the mailing list, so a lot of the art you can get to see in Sydney you can write about, you or, people you meet will be very handy when you research something. Go to openings. Talk to artists and ask writers. Get work experience in a Sydney gallery or the Lewers Gallery. That's when you really start to see what the art world is about. (interview with Kathy, 23.12.94)

#### 4. REFLECTING ON OUR TEACHING/LEARNING PRACTICE

In this paper, I have argued that students bring different subjectivities to the learning environment and that inclusion in, or resistance to particular discourses of Visual and Performing Arts is bound to the subject positions students bring to, adopt, or reject in their reading and writing practices. Lecturers in the different specialisms of Visual and Performing Arts also attempt to 'discipline' the identities that students take up to fit with their notions of 'appropriate' disciplinary reading and writing positions. Reading and writing are indeed social rather than individual practices. They do not occur unmediated by particular socio culturally determined ways of being in the world, beliefs and values.

Gee (1990) suggests that people who experience themselves as being somewhat outside a desired discourse are more likely to have insights into the workings of the discourse and its connections to wider social institutions and arrangements of power than people who are totally enmeshed in the discourse

... [This] contradictory interpellation is likely to be manifeste experientially in a sense of confusion or uncertainty, and a problematisation of conventions. These are the conditions under which awareness as well as transformative practice is most likely to develop. (Fairclough, 1992b, p.90)

It is at this point that the opportunity to critique the 'naturalness' of discourses and discursive practices can occur. Critical discourse analysis and critical linguistics (for example Lee, 1993; Fairclough, 1992b) are not concerned with reproducing existing literacy practices but with challenging wider social patterns of domination and marginalisation implied by particular literacy practices.

In the light of the issues raised in this paper I am interested in how others see their work in tertiary literacy teaching. Mei, for example, is a student whose first language is Cantonese, yet her struggle with the literacy demands of her courses is not primarily about controlling the language of the discipline, but rather about being complicit with the meanings and values of a specialism within the faculty. For me this raises the following questions:

- How can literacy teachers work in way which acknowledges the different subjectivities that many students bring to the learning situation and also acknowledges the literacy demands of the course?
- How can literacy teachers work in a way which challenges wider social patterns of domination and marginalisation implied by particular literacy practices (here I'm thinking particularly of the issues of 'authority' and 'intertextuality' discussed in this paper). Should literacy teachers work in this way?
- Given the time restraints that many literacy teachers in tertiary institutions work under (1 hour consultations, short courses and workshops), how is it possible to deal with the slippery nature of discourses that underpin literacy practices ? - its certainly easier to concentrate on "structure"!

Hopefully these questions can stimulate discussion about our own literacy teaching practices.

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<sup>1</sup>The topic of Mei's essay was: Discuss the idea of Art as self expression with reference to one or two artists. This topic was provided by the ART History department in a subject titled: **Mythologies of the artist**. Mei undertook this subject as part of the compulsory theory component of her third year undergraduate degree in which she is a ceramics studio major.

<sup>2</sup> Eggins (1994) says that when the dependant clause comes before the main clause in a clause complex then there are two levels of thematic structure operating. Firstly, each clause can be considered as having its own theme and secondly, the entire dependant clause can be seen as operating as theme for the main clause.

<sup>3</sup> According to Eggins (1994) marked themes occur when something other than the subject of the clause appears in theme position. This has the effect of highlighting that there is something atypical or unusual about the context of the text.

<sup>4</sup> Halliday's (1985) description of the rheme of a clause is that it is everything that is not part of the theme. It provides more information about the topic introduced in the theme.

<sup>5</sup> The original question Mei was asked was: Is there a set of skills that are valued in your area. Mei had queried the focus of this question by asking: "Do you mean the Visual Arts lecturers or the Art History people"? I then asked; "Well do you see them as valuing different things - what do the Visual Arts and the Art History people value"? This extract is part of her response to that question.

<sup>6</sup> Lexical density is calculated by "expressing the number of content carrying words of a text/sentence as a proportion of all the words in the text/sentence" (Eggins, 1994, p.60). Turning verbs and other parts of speech into nouns increases a text's lexical density.

<sup>7</sup> Embedded clauses can increase the content of a clause. Most often they occur in post modifying positions after a nominal (noun) group where they provide more information about the head noun (Eggins, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Grammatical metaphor occurs in situations where "meanings typically (congruently) realised by one type of language pattern get realised by other less typical (incongruent)

choices" (Eggs, 1994, p.63). An example of grammatical metaphor is **nominalisation**, or the turning of verbs and other parts of speech into nouns.

<sup>9</sup> A nominal group is "the part of the clause that contains nouns and the words that can accompany nouns" (Eggs, 1994, p.60).

# Free to Write: On-Line Class Discussions

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On-line class discussions help students to develop positive attitudes towards writing, and facilitate writing fluency, thus contributing to the development of overall literacy in ESL. This assumption is investigated in this exploratory study by examining the effects of on-line discussions on the writing of two groups of native Cantonese speaking university students at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Student opinions about on-line discussions and oral class discussions were surveyed and compared, and the hardcopy discourse for several on-line discussion sessions was analyzed in terms of its quality and quantity. The study has found that the majority of students prefer on-line class discussions to oral discussions, and that they are more confident discussing topics on-line than orally. Discourse analysis reveals that participation in discussions is consistently at a high level, and that on-line discussions generate a large amount of good quality writing. Overall, the findings show that students are positively orientated towards on-line discussions, and that on-line discussions facilitate the development of writing fluency. Further research involving a larger number of students, and yielding a greater body of data for analysis is needed in order to substantiate these exploratory findings.

Networked computers have recently been introduced at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and are being used in several English Language Teaching (ELT) courses to teach English as a second language (ESL) writing. Research to date has shown that the effects of using networked computers for writing are largely positive, and that they are beneficial for the development of writing, as described below, but to date most research carried out has involved first language (L1) writers rather than second language writers (L2). The introduction of networked computers at the CUHK provides a unique opportunity to study the effects of networked writing on a group of ESL writers, who are also a homogeneous group of writers in terms of their common first language (Cantonese), and their cultural and learning background. The paper describes the reactions and responses of students to the introduction of networked computers for on-line class discussions in comparison with their experience of traditional oral classroom discussions. The paper also examines the quality and quantity of writing produced by students participating in on-line discussions. *On-line discussions* are defined as real time written networked discussions where students can send messages to each other via networked terminals, and receive

responses almost immediately.

### **NETWORKED COMPUTERS AND WRITING PEDAGOGY**

Networked computing has developed rapidly in recent years, and many universities and colleges around the world have incorporated it into their native speaker and ESL writing programs. The idea of using Electronic Networks for Interaction (ENFI) for writing instruction was pioneered by Trent Batson in 1985 at Gallaudet University. Batson was quick to recognise that the interactive nature of ENFI fitted in well with the collaborative writing pedagogy put forward by Brufee (1984), Elbow and Benaloff (1989), Bizzell (1982), and others. Collaborative pedagogy emphasizes writing for real audiences, writing in small groups, and peer review of writing, (Kemp, 1993) and embodies the now generally accepted view that group work and interaction facilitate the second language acquisition process (Batson, 1993; Long and Porter, 1985; McGroarty, 1991). Collaborative writing encourages the development of supportive and interactive writing communities, with writing being seen as a social activity that occurs within a social context. (Brufee, 1985; Elbow, 1973, 1981; Eldred and Hawisher, 1995; Gerrard, 1993; Handa, 1991)

Kemp, (1993) however, points out one notable difference between collaborative writing in the traditional classroom situation and collaborative writing on networked computers. In the traditional classroom groups collaborate orally for most of the time, but in the networked writing classroom nearly all of the collaboration is done in writing via the networked terminals. Network writers learn how to write by *writing*, rather than by listening to others *telling* them how to write, which is the case in traditional writing classrooms. It is generally acknowledged (Hughey, Wormuth, Hartfield and Jacobs 1983; Raimes, 1985) that this is more desirable state of affairs for the development of writing, and although collaborative writing has its problems, its effects on composing and writing are largely desirable ones (Gerrard, 1993).

### **NETWORKED WRITING AND NATIVE SPEAKER WRITERS**

Most of the research about using networked computers for writing has involved using native speakers as subjects and has involved ethnographic and descriptive evaluations of the effects of using networked computers for writing, rather than empirical research. Barclay (1995), claims that networked class discussions can enhance the quality of students' compositions in terms of content and ideas because they model the process of actively and critically reading literature, thus forcing students to reconsider their ideas in a different light, consider ideas that are different or opposed to theirs, and consider ideas that arise tangentially to their original ideas. Bartholomae (1993) studied the differences between ENFI and non ENFI compositions and found that overall the ENFI compositions were more informal, more idiomatic, more conversational, more personal in terms of the writer's self orientation, and more direct in addressing the audience.

Other studies that are also largely descriptive found positive effects overall for networked writing, but reported that technical, pedagogical, and other practical problems were experienced by students and instructors in varying degrees, and that some students prefer the traditional classroom writing to networked writing. These authors report that effective implementation depends on a multitude of interrelated and complex factors which require careful consideration and balance within the given context. (Batson, 1993; Kreeft Peyton, and Bruce, 1993; Neuwirth, Palmquist, Cochran, Gillespie, Hartman & Hajduk, 1993; Barclay, 1995; Eldred and Hawisher, 1995) Fowles (1993), and Hiltz (1990), report empirical data, comparing essay scores for ENFI and non ENFI writers and found that there was no significant difference in scores between the two groups. As well as this, Fowles failed to find any significant differences in writing features for the two groups. Finally, Neuwirth et. al. (1993), report that students writing collaboratively on networked computers preferred face-to-face activities to network activities, and felt that network writing slowed down the amount of discourse they produced.

#### NETWORKED WRITING AND ESL WRITERS

Studies involving networked writing by ESL subjects have not been as numerous as studies involving native speakers to date, and have shown mixed results, especially those studies attempting to show writing improvement as a result of ENFI (Eldred and Hawisher, 1995). Ghaleb (1993) compared ENFI ESL writing scores and non ENFI ESL with mixed results. ENFI scores showed less gain than non ENFI scores over the course, but showed more improvement in terms of a decrease in the number of errors in the writing, while the writing output of the ENFI class was considerably greater than that of the non ENFI class. These findings, however, are difficult to substantiate because of the rather irreconcilable differences in the learning conditions for the two groups studied. Dziombak (1990) found when comparing a network writing class and a traditional writing class, that little collaboration or interaction occurred in either class, and that students in the network class felt isolated and missed the interaction of the face-to-face classroom setting. It seems then, that the mere presence of networked computers does not in itself guarantee success in terms of the quality and quantity of writing, and the amount of interaction and collaboration amongst students. A plethora of factors, such as the role of the instructor, and the nature of the activities and tasks, would also seem to play a pivotal role (Bruce and Kreeft Peyton, 1993). Dziombak (1990) notes that the instructor failed to exploit the potential of the communicative nature of the networked classroom, and that instructors should design specific activities that can be used for collaborative writing.

In contrast to these two studies, a recent study by Pratt and Sullivan (1996), reports a significant mean increase in the scores of ENFI compositions compared with non ENFI compositions for ESL writers, a 50% higher level of participation by the ENFI writers in written discussion activities compared to non ENFI

participation in traditional oral discussions, a much stronger focus on writing tasks by the ENFI group, and a far greater writing output also by the ENFI writers. The results of this study are important as they are the first known to report scores for ESL ENFI writers compared with non ESL ENFI writers.

### **WRITER APPREHENSION AND NETWORKED WRITING**

The effects of writer anxiety, or writer apprehension on ESL writing is an important area of consideration for writing instructors and researchers. It has been shown that ESL writers have a higher anxiety level about writing than native speaker writers (Chaudron, 1988), and that the presence of this anxiety can have a negative effect on writing (Horwitz and Young, 1991). Some studies using native speaker writers have reported that networked writing has a positive effect on writer attitudes because it provides a neutral and impersonal space that writers can communicate in (Batson, 1993; Cooper and Selfe, 1990; McCrosky, Fayer and Richmond, 1985). A study by Neuwirth et. al. (1993) using native speakers shows that some networked writers are less apprehensive and have more confidence when participating in network writing, but that most prefer face-to-face activities and find them more useful. However, Pratt and Sullivan (1996) found no significant empirical difference between the anxiety levels of the ENFI group and the non ENFI group, with apprehension decreasing for both groups by the end of the course. Taking all this into account, it seems logical, that some ESL students would be nervous about such things as having an accent, not being understood, mispronouncing words, getting "stuck" for a word, or just feeling embarrassed about making mistakes and speaking in front of others (Ghaleb, 1993). If writing on the network can alleviate these negative feelings, it follows that the development of writing fluency would no longer be adversely affected by negative feelings in the way that Horwitz and Young (1991) claim that it can be.

### **FOCUS OF THE STUDY**

This study reports on the effects of using networked computers for class discussions in two ESL undergraduate writing classes. The quality and quantity of the writing produced is examined, and student reactions and responses to the challenge of using networked computers for writing in comparison with their reactions and responses to traditional oral class discussions are discussed. The study also looks at the effect that network computer writing has on writer apprehension.

Qualitative and quantitative data are discussed descriptively in this paper with a view to investigating the effects of implementing networked writing within a given context. Generalizability is not the purpose of this paper, rather, the paper is exploratory and the findings are described and analyzed with a view to making modifications and adjustments to subsequent implementations of networked computers for writing for the same course in order to make it more efficient, and the instructional goals more achievable. The paper also seeks to generate further

areas for research and discussion.

Research questions for the study are:

- What are the reactions and responses of ESL writers to using networked computers for writing?
- How does networked writing affect the attitudes and anxiety level of ESL writers?
- Do ESL writers prefer networked class discussions, or oral class discussions?
- Do ESL writers see networked discussions as being valuable for developing their writing fluency?
- Does networked writing enhance writing fluency?

## METHODOLOGY

### SUBJECTS

The subjects were 32 Cantonese speaking, Hong Kong Chinese, undergraduates from mixed faculties and year levels who were taking an ESL writing course in composition. One group consisted of 15 students, and the other of 17 students. Although individual writing ability varied in the groups, the majority of the students were of intermediate to upper intermediate standard. Both groups took part in written networked class discussions as well as traditional oral class discussions. All students already had computing skills ranging from basic to advanced, and could use word processing. Of the total sample, only 13% had experienced collaborative writing. Most students already used computers either frequently or infrequently to write or type up their assignments and essays outside of the ESL writing class.

### DATA AND PROCEDURE

A questionnaire was also used to gather data about the students' reactions and responses to using networked computers for class discussions in comparison with oral class discussions. Students were asked to respond to items about networked class discussions and oral class discussions, and were asked to describe and compare their level of anxiety about using networked computers for writing at the beginning of the course compared to at the end of the course. The questionnaire took the form of mixed items requiring the students to either tick yes or no answers, or choose from a number of options on various 5 point scales. Almost all items included an open-ended space which allowed students to comment or provide reasons for their answers.

Students quantitative responses to the questionnaires were tabulated in Table 1. Open-ended qualitative comments and opinions were conglomerated into broader descriptive statements, and those comments made most frequently are listed for the given items. The questionnaire was seen as a way of collecting qualitative data which could be used to explain students' quantitative answers.

In order to examine the nature of the discourse arising from the networked discussions i.e. its quality and quantity, a modified version of Corbett's (1990) Stylistic Study Guides was used. Three stylistic studies for the two transcripts were undertaken providing an objective means of identifying the following language features, (1) a general evaluation of the writing including such things as the number of words, the number of sentences, etc., (2) frequency of sentence types, and (3) frequency and variety of sentence openers (see Tables 2, 3 and 4).

Because Corbett's study of style is based on analysing native speaker essay prose and the transcripts for analysis for this study represent written *conversations*, some modifications had to be made to his Stylistic Studies. For Study 1, General Evaluation (see Table 2), the number of conversations per discussion were counted instead of the number of paragraphs, and the longest and shortest conversations were counted instead of the longest and shortest paragraph. The number of participants and average number of contributions made by the participants was also counted in order to look at participation patterns. For Study 2, Types of Sentences (see Table 3), imperative and interrogative sentences were also counted, because these are an integral part of conversations including written ones. This can be seen by the high percentage of these types of sentences found in the transcripts compared to written prose. For Study 3, Sentence Openers (see Table 3), only declarative sentences were selected for study as these are more suitable for identifying the frequency and variety of sentence types and patterns.

One representative transcript was chosen from each group on the basis of the following similarities- length, topic, number of participants, date when the discussion took place, and duration. The transcripts chosen were of the fourth Interchange discussion held out of a total of six. Verbatim transcripts of the discussions were printed out at the end of each discussion session and were analysed according to the Corbett (1990) stylistic study guidelines. The results were tabulated in Tables 2, 3 and 4.

### INSTRUCTIONAL SETTING

The duration of the course was 13 weeks, and the instructional goals were to develop writing fluency by reading and discussing ideas in writing on given topics in preparation for essay writing. Both class groups were taught by the same instructor, and learning conditions such as course content, tasks and activities, and teaching methodology were held as constant as possible for both groups. The networked discussions took place once a week over a six week period during the first six weeks of the semester. Typically, the students would prepare by reading articles on the various essay topic areas.

The topics were discussed in writing on networked computers using the Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment (DIWE) Interchange which allows real time, on-line, synchronous discussion to take place between either the whole class group, or smaller conference groups within the whole class group. As small group Interchange Discussions (IDs) were the most popular, these became the

norm. When using the Interchange, students type messages into a dialogue box and "send" them to other discussion group members where they appear almost immediately. Students can scroll up or down to read or reread messages whenever necessary. In this way they can respond to any message they choose, and keep up with the discussion in their own way at their own pace. After the first couple of IDs, most students needed little prompting or guidance from the instructor, and were able to use the Interchange efficiently to discuss the topics.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### THE QUESTIONNAIRES

Student feedback about networked writing reveals some insightful, meaningful, and interesting reactions and responses for discussion. Overall feedback about the Interchange is positive with some qualifications. Differences between the groups are not significant enough to warrant a separate analysis across groups, and qualitative statements made by each group were very similar. The major findings are stated below.

50% of the students prefer IDs to oral discussions (ODs), and 72% are more confident expressing their ideas in IDs than in ODs, with 81% claiming that IDs have helped them to become better writers. In addition, 66% were either not anxious or were relaxed about using networked computers for writing by the end of the course, compared with only 29% who were not anxious or relaxed about using networked computers at the beginning of the course - a positive gain of 37%. The reasons given for being more relaxed about using networked writing mainly centre around such things as getting used to using it, mastering the software programme, finding it interesting and enjoyable, and valuing it for its ability to train one to write and think, as well as provide writing practice. Furthermore, on overall 81% thought that the Interchange helped them to become writers, with the most frequently occurring reasons being very similar to those just previously stated (see Table 1).

50% of the students prefer IDs to ODs, with the two most frequently occurring reasons being that it is a relaxing and less embarrassing way to communicate than ODs, and that once again, it gives them time to think and decide what to write, and that it is enjoyable and interesting. Those who prefer ODs do so because they value the direct interaction that they provide, and they want to improve and practice their oral skills. By far, the major reason that the majority of students (72%), say that they are more confident expressing themselves in IDs than ODs is because, once again, they have more time to think and organize their ideas before writing, and are more confident and free to express their ideas in writing, because their poor oral skills make them fearful of speaking. The 28% who are more confident participating in ODs feel that they can communicate and express ideas better in face-to-face discussions where they can get immediate and direct feedback, and that ODs are more stimulating (see Table 1).

FREE TO WRITE: ON-LINE CLASS DISCUSSIONS

TABLE 1: QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

Item	No.	%	T%	Open-ended comments*
Prefer ID to OD	7 9	47 53	50	Relaxing to communicate; express ideas without embarrassment (5); time to think and decide what to write (4); enjoyable and interesting (4); more writing practice (3); express ideas in depth (3).
Prefer OD to ID	8 8	53 47	50	Can get direct and immediate feedback from others (8); can improve oral skills (6).
Prefer both OD and ID^	0 2	0 12	6	Both are good for discussions (2).
Kind of ID preferred	MG 1 4 SG 10 10 PG 4 3	7 24 67 59 27 18	16 63 22	More ideas, more people to share ideas, more free to share ideas (7). More efficient, suitable size group (15); better for concentration and discussing in-depth (12) variety of messages (6); more time to read messages (3). Can concentrate and discuss in-depth (4); more interactive and immediate interaction (3).
More confident on OD than ID	11 12	73 71	72	Time to think, organize and correct before writing (16); more confident and free expressing ideas in writing (9); Oral skills are poor (5).
More confident on OD than ID	4 5	27 29	28	Stimulating and relaxing, and can express ideas better with face-to-face contact and direct feedback (8); weak typing skills.
Attitude to I at start of course	N 5 5 NT 6 7 NN 3 2 R 1 3	33 29 40 41 20 12 7 18	31 41 16 13	Fear of a new programme, making mistakes and poor computing skills (6); slow typing speed (2). Easy programme, similar to others (8). Interesting and enjoyable (3); easy to use, similar to other programmes (2). Easy to use, similar to other programmes (3).
Attitude to I at end of course	NT 6 5 NN 3 2 R 6 10	40 29 20 12 40 59	34 16 50	Feel the same (2); computer too slow (2). Mastered the programme, not so difficult, got used to it (4); interesting and enjoyable (2). Got used to it, mastered it (13).
Better writer on I	11 15	73 88	81	Trains us to think and write more quickly (9); can practice writing (9).
Not a better writer on I	4 2	27 12	19	(very few comments were given)

Abbreviations: I - Interchange; ID - Interchange discussion; OD - oral discussion; MG - main group discussion; SG - small group discussion; PG - pair discussion; VN - very nervous (no responses given); N - nervous (no responses given for item 8); NT - neutral; NN - not nervous; R - relaxed. Total no. of students = 32. \*Some students did not fill in comments. ^Some students chose two options for items 1 and 2.

Although 81% of students say that IDs can help them to become better writers they are not without their criticisms of IDs. Students were asked to fill in their likes and dislikes about using the Interchange, and the most frequently made negative comments in open-ended items about IDs in order of frequency were that typing is slow and holds up discussions, that Interchange functions are too limited and slow, that there was not enough time for discussions, and that they missed the interaction that face-to-face contact provided, as well as the opportunity to practice their oral skills. Conversely, the most frequently made positive comments in order of frequency are very similar to those discussed above, with students finding the Interchange interesting and enjoyable, being able to express ideas freely and confidently, and having time to think before writing topping the list of comments.

In summary, student response to the Interchange was positive and they saw it as valuable for helping them to develop their writing. However, a significant number still wanted some face-to-face discussions even though a significant number reported that they were more confident expressing themselves on the Interchange than in face-to-face discussions.

#### DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

An analysis of the two transcripts studied reveals that the quantity of writing output is high, and that the writing produced is of a good quality.

TABLE 2: STYLISTIC STUDY 1 - GENERAL EVALUATION

Code	Discourse Features	Group 1	Group 2	Total
A	Total # of words in the ID*	1096	1081	2177
B	Total # of sentences in the ID	69	75	144
C	Longest sentence (# of words)	37	43	-
D	Shortest sentence (# of words)	3	3	-
E	Av sentence (# of words)	15.8	14.4	15.1
F	# of sentences with > 10 words over av 10		5	15
G	% of sentences with > 10 words over av 14.5%		6.6%	10.4%
H	# of sentences with 5 words or more < av 21		30	51
I	% of sentences with 5 words or more < av 30.4%		40%	35.4%
J	# of participants in ID	3	3	6
K	# of conversations in ID	28	17	45
L	Av # of conversations per person	9.3	5.7	7.5
M	Shortest conversation in words	4	12	-
N	Longest conversation in words	62	135	-
O	Av # of words per conversation	39	63.6	48.4
P	# of conversations with > 1 para	1	3	4
Q	Longest conversation (# of sentences)	4	7	-
R	Shortest conversation (# of sentences)	1	1	-
S	Av conversation (# of sentences)	2.4	4.5	3.2

Abbreviations: #-number; ID-Interchange discussion;; %-percentage: >-more than; <-less than; av-average; para-paragraph. \*All words were counted including articles and prepositions. Hyphenated words were counted as two words. Contractions were counted as one word.

According to Table 2, students produced a total of 2177 words during the two 50 minute conversations which equals a total of 21.77 words produced per minute. This is a high output, considering the fact that the subjects are ESL writers and have to take time to plan and organize their thoughts before writing. Some students also reported that slow typing speeds held up their participation in the discussion. Despite this, participation levels were observed to be sustained at a high level, with students being on task almost 100% of the time, and being very involved in the IDs. Neuwirth et al. (1993) also reports that some students say that they express themselves slowly because they have to think about what they are going to say, and then type it into the computer.

Results for the two transcripts were very similar except for categories M, N, and O in Table 2, which show that group D produced longer conversations overall, 63.6 compared to 39.0 words per average conversation. One group had a larger percentage of Cp-Cx sentences, 18.2% compared to 8.3%, even though their conversations were shorter overall, and group D used more Cx sentences, 50% compared to 33.3%. Although one group used more Cx sentences and the other used more Cp-Cx sentences, both groups used a high proportion of mature sentence structures, with 52% Cx and Cp-Cx sentences being used overall out of the 144 written (see Tables 2 & 3). The percentage of Cx and Cp-Cx sentences is even higher if one discards the 20 more simple interrogative sentences and imperative sentences.

TABLE 3: STYLISTIC STUDY 2 - TYPES OF SENTENCES

Code	Sentence Information for ID	Group 1	Group 2	Total
A	Total # of sentences in ID*	66	72	138
B	Total # of declarative sentences	56	59	115
C	% of declarative sentences	84.8%	81.9%	83.3%
D	Total # of Interrogative sentences	9	10	19
E	% of Interrogative sentences	13.6%	13.9%	13.8%
F	Total # of imperative sentences	0	3	3
G	% of imperative sentences	0	4.2%	2.2%
H	Total # of simple (S) sentences	26	24	50
I	% of S sentences	39.4%	33.3%	36.2%
J	Total # of compound (Cp) sentences	5	6	11
K	% of Cp sentences	7.5%	8.3%	8.0%
L	Total # of complex (Cx) sentences	22	36	58
M	% of Cx sentences	33.3%	50%	42.0%
N	Total # of compound-complex (Cp-Cx) sentences	12	6	18
O	% of Cp-Cx sentences	18.2%	8.3%	13.0%
P	Total # of Cx & Cp-Cx sentences	34	38	72
Q	% of Cx & Cp-Cx sentences	51.5%	52.8%	52.2%

\* 1 sentence was discarded because it was too faulty grammatically to be included for analysis, and 2 sentences were omitted because they contained long quotations. 3 sentences were omitted that contained quotations, and 2 exclamations and 1 comment were omitted as they did not represent full sentences. Abbreviations: #-number; %-percentage; ID-Interchange discussion

Hunt (in Mellon, 1969), and Corbett (1990) describe subordination as being representative of mature language development, and Cp sentences as being representative of underdeveloped immature writing. As both groups used only a small percentage of Cp sentences, 8% of the total sentences written, and a high percentage of mature sentences, 52% Cx and Cp-Cx, it could be said that the students are producing good quality writing (see Table 3).

Students' displayed a variety of sentence openers in their writing although some types such as prepositional phrases, verbal phrases, front shifts, and absolute phrases were either low in occurrence, or not represented at all in the case of the latter (see Table 4). Adverbs, conjunctive phrases, and adverbial clauses, were the most frequently used sentence openers by both groups and represented 9.5%, 6.0%, and 9.5% respectively, of the total number of sentences. Differences between the groups in terms of sentence openers (see Table 4) were not significant except for the occurrence of adverbial transitions with one group using 13.6%, and the other using only 5.3%.

TABLE 4: STYLISTIC STUDY 3 - SENTENCE OPENERS

Code	Sentences Beginning with*	Group 1		Group 2		Total	
		#	%	#	%	#	%
A	Subject	29	50.9	27	45.8	56	48.3
B	Expletive	8	14.0	10	16.9	18	15.5
C	Coordinating conjunction	4	7.0	1	1.7	5	4.3
D	Adverb word	3	5.3	8	13.6	11	9.5
E	Conjunctive phrase	5	8.8	2	3.4	7	6.0
F	Prepositional phrase	0	0	2	3.4	2	1.7
G	Verbal phrase	1	1.8	0	0	1	0.9
H	Adjective phrase	1	1.8	2	3.4	3	2.6
I	Absolute phrase	0	0	0	0	0	0
J	Adverb clause	5	8.8	6	10.2	11	9.5
K	Front-Shift	1	1.8	1	1.7	2	1.7

\* 57 declarative sentences were studied for group 1, and 59 for group 2. Total sentences=116

When compared to Corbett's (1990) sample analysis of the frequency of sentence openers found in professional writers' sentences, the variety found in the ID transcripts stands up well. In ID transcripts, the professional writers used adverbial sentence openers the most (27.20%), inverted openers rarely (0.40%), and coordinating conjunctions less often (8.75%), with use fluctuating according to the individuals' own styles. The figures in Table 4 indicate that students are using a similar variety of sentence patterns, but that they are not using them as frequently as the professionals. Considering that they are ESL writers this is hardly surprising. Another comment to make is that the type and frequency of sentence openers was counted in 200 sentences for each professional writer in the Corbett (1990) study, whereas the total number of sentences for this study was only 116 for the two group discussions. One could reasonably expect greater frequency of occurrence, and perhaps a wider variety of sentence openers

if a larger number of sentences was to be studied, even allowing for fluctuations in individual style.

Considering the fact that this is a *written* conversation it could be expected that it would have at least some of the typical features of oral conversations such as, to name the major ones relevant to this study- shorter length of clauses, more incomplete structures, less use of subordination, simpler sentence structures, a higher level of informality, more use of compound coordinators such as *and* and *but*, and less variety of sentence patterns (Mellon, 1969; Brown and Yule, 1983), but in the main it does not. One feature that the transcripts have in common with the above characteristics is that although complex and varied forms of writing are used to express ideas, the writing still retains its informal character largely due to the presence of the interrogative and declarative sentences, and the small number of exclamations. These findings are similar to Bartholomae's (1993) description of network writing, but his descriptions are related to essays rather than on-line discussions.

It seems then that the ID discourse is somewhat of a halfway house between spoken and written text, displaying the characteristics of both. Students are able to enjoy writing informally during IDs, but are also able to express themselves more formally by using a variety of sentence types and patterns that are representative of mature good quality writing.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Overall most students like the Interchange. As Cooper and Selfe (1990) found, they find it enjoyable and interesting and they find it useful because it provides writing practice. Similarly to the findings of Dziombak (1990) and Neuwirth et al. (1993), they miss the interaction and direct contact that face-to-face contact provides, but even so, as Neuwirth et al. (1993) find, many students feel less anxious communicating on the network than communicating face-to-face. Unlike the Neuwirth et al. (1993) study, students for this study also saw network writing as a way of improving their writing.

As found in other studies (Ghaleb, 1993; Pratt and Sullivan, 1996), the quality of the discourse examined for this study was high, and even though it was a written conversation, it still retained some of the characteristics of spoken language discussed earlier and found in the Bartholomae (1993) study.

Considering all, it has been shown here that on-line class discussions facilitate the development of writing fluency for ESL writers, and that a significant number of students are more comfortable communicating in writing on-line than in traditional oral class discussions. Further research using a larger number of ESL subjects at multiple networked writing sites needs to be carried out in order to substantiate these exploratory findings. More empirical studies like the Pratt and Sullivan (1996) study, and the Ghaleb (1993) study also need to be undertaken, in order to determine whether or not networked discussions and other networked writing translates into writing gains for students' writing compositions.

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# Abrasions: Dilemmas of Doing a Critical Literacy Pedagogy within/against the Academy

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In this paper we will explore some concerns that have arisen for us as tertiary teachers in the process of attempting to undertake various forms of critical pedagogy through literacy. Data is derived from reflections on our practices in our classrooms during a period of teaching two different units in the first year of the BA/BTeach degree at a provincial university. Student journal writing provides the lens with which to view students' perceptions of their learning, and with which to see our practices refracted. Contradictions emerge regarding the varying discourses about literacy which construct and constrain the 'doing' of academic work. Moments of 'abrasion' between these varying discourses seem to provide both opportunities and constraints for doing a critical literacy pedagogy.

**"Academics insist on teaching students they wish they had, rather than those they do have"<sup>1</sup>**

The above comment was overheard at a recent conference (see footnote 1 below), and it reflects one of the issues that adds to the growing debate in Australia at present about how to adequately and effectively meet the educational needs of differing groups of students entering tertiary institutions. The 1990s particularly have witnessed the extension of tertiary opportunities to societal groupings less likely in previous years to be able to access them. Briefly, some of these include 'mature-age' students, women who wish to study in 'non-traditional' areas, Koories, and those disadvantaged by distance, language or income. The new diversity of students in tertiary education is sometimes indicated as a new phase in tertiary education, a movement from an elite enterprise to that of mass tertiary education. The educational situation that is seen to accompany this new diversity of student is often referred to through a discourse of deficit; that is, one where the new students are seen to be 'problems' for the practices and understandings of an institution which has previously set and continues to adhere to uncontested constructions of what counts as knowledge and learning in the academy.

These new realities of contemporary tertiary teaching set the scene for what we have termed 'abrasions', by which we mean the discomforts felt by all participants

as these realities are played out in tertiary classrooms. We see 'abrasions' as indicating moments of connection/disconnection which provide instances at which we are called upon to notice, explore and problematise what is happening. These instances disrupt the taken-for-granted nature of our own and students' lives in the academic classroom. Many 'abrasions' become apparent to us when we listen to students' 'voices'. We acknowledge that the notion of student 'voice' is a contentious issue, and are aware of the various writings and research on this subject (Giroux 1990; Simon 1987; Ellsworth 1989). We would also suggest that the notion of teacher 'voice' is equally problematic, given the concerns that have been raised by Belenky et al (1986), Gilligan (1982) and Hekman (1995) regarding the problematic of 'voice' per se. However, we are not exploring these nuances in this paper.

#### FOCUS OF THIS PAPER

We are interested in problematising both the so-called 'literacy problem' of recent undergraduate students and also the orthodox canonical understanding of academic form and knowledge. We are led to these questions by our own roles as tertiary teachers of first year Education students at Ballarat University. In confronting the immediacy of the question, "What do I do on Monday morning in my classroom?", each of us in different ways has found common ground in approaches that we describe as critical literacy pedagogies.

Our concerns in this paper are the tensions between the competing discourses that are brought to our tertiary classrooms as we try to engage in a critical literacy process, and which manifest themselves in students' and our own discursive practices. We have selected from written student texts to shape this paper, with comments grouped according to the issues that appeared to be dominant in students' thoughts and writings regarding their understanding of literacy. For each of these themes, we seek to interweave students' voices as heard through their writing, teachers' voices (ours) as we try to articulate and reflect upon our understanding of our pedagogy, and theoretical voices from the academic canon. We seek to identify and explore some of the tensions between these competing discourses which are played out within our classrooms.

By critical literacy pedagogies we do not mean to label what we do as a particular recipe, and certainly not as some new invention. We use the term to indicate the intellectual families (critical literacy and critical pedagogy) upon which we have drawn for support in working out what to do in our classrooms. We see ourselves engaging in a critical pedagogy, that is, a way of engaging in the teaching/learning process which questions taken-for-granted understandings, whether these understandings occur within the students' own tacit knowledges, or within some part of the canon. Giroux (1989) and Shor (1987) have written of Freire's model of empowering pedagogy, and have sought to involve students by fostering an 'intelligent engagement and effective dialogue that considers the interrelated dynamics and effects of social class, gender, race, power and history on their lives' (Giroux 1989:50).

In our classrooms, we use talking, writing, reading as means of engaging with ideas, and as means of translating understandings into a 'public' discourse which can then be interrogated with others. Specifically, we foreground writing as pedagogy. With Brodkey (1987), we believe that writing is a social practice, that we use language to shape meaning, and that we write our way to understanding. Using writing pedagogy as a focus, we are interested in exploring the possibilities and implications of reconceptualizing the curriculum of academic units as content, as pedagogy, and as literacy, so that curriculum praxis is viewed as critical, political and transformative. This means focusing on the centrality of language in the construction of meaning in human interaction, as well as enabling the recognition of the shifting, contradictory and many faceted aspects of human subjectivity.

We draw from the work on critical literacy, acknowledging that to define critical literacy is as problematic as trying to define literacy. We are informed by the notion of 'critical' as provided by Freebody and Muspratt (1992) who describe it as both 'important' and 'oppositional', the latter term also deriving from a Freirian construction of Critical Literacy. We also agree with Agger's (1991) point that challenges the notion of a literacy which unproblematically accepts the canon as an ideologically neutral construction of wisdom and knowledge, calling for a critical literacy that is 'not transmission as much as construction ... thoroughly textual and dialogical' (Agger 1991:11).

Recognising the risks of conflating our two theoretical frameworks, we nonetheless envisage a critical literacy pedagogy as a way of developing in students a range of particular knowledges and skills which will enable them to develop a critical view of society and culture. For example, we encourage them to challenge the idea of identity as single and autonomous, providing instead pedagogical conditions which explore the construction of identities through different subject positions. We endeavour to engage them in a critical reading of how ideology, politics and culture work to disempower some groups of people while privileging others. Major focus is placed on the language in texts, and we implement a range of classroom strategies centring on a variety of text types and discourses which are interrogated, analysed, challenged, and reconstructed in critical ways.

We make three basic assumptions. First, we see literacy as a social and cultural construct, always changing and evolving. Therefore, we view students' so-called literacy 'standards' within broader parameters, rather than through any fault-finding deficit view of students and their literacy abilities. Thus, the situation which is named as a so-called decline of standards should be, we contend, seen as constructed in and by particular historical, economic, cultural, social and political circumstances, and power relations, rather than through any characteristic of the student. Second, we see literacy as being a matter for mainstream academic curriculum, part of the general consideration of how and what learning takes place. Therefore, we consider 'literacy' is not something that is remediated in isolated 'tool' sessions, but is integral to the teaching and

learning of academic material within academic units. Third, we believe that by placing the question of 'literacy' within the broader question of how students learn, we must also question, what they are to learn, that is, what counts as academic knowledge. The dominant institutional construct of the canon which students are supposed to be initiated into, reifies this knowledge in a way that is exclusionary to those not already within its ambit.

We do not wish to be understood, however, as saying that there is no cause for tertiary educators to cease being concerned with enabling students to engage successfully with the discursive practices of the academy. To the contrary. All teachers, and specifically in this instance those who teach undergraduate students, are aware that students' capacities to engage with the varying demands of academic discourses are as diverse and varied as are the students themselves. This does not mean reifying difference and celebrating theoretical individualism. We believe both 'difference' and 'individualism' are themselves constructed and provide moments for interrogation. The 'difference' that may be made public through students telling their own stories can be a content which is to be critiqued, and it can also provide a point of interruption and entry into engaging with and critiquing the canon. In order for this critiquing of the canon from a point of difference to occur, one needs to provide the means by which the students can at least begin entry to the discourse of the canon. This means enabling them to not only read the canon, but also to demystify it. We wish to validate students as knowing persons - but not uncritically so; and we wish to validate knowledge that exists in books - but not uncritically so.

We are in agreement with McInnis and James (1995) who call for 'more than tinkering around the edges of tertiary teaching', in order to 'address the needs of students from a wide range of backgrounds while maintaining the higher order goals of universities'. They suggest that to do this requires a 'shift in the values and attitudes of many academics'. They see as critical 'the way in which teachers and students treat each other in their day to day routines as member of a learning community' (McInnis and James 1995: 16-17). We take as a starting point the concerns raised by McInnis and James, acknowledging that we differ from them in that we take a critical perspective on pedagogy.

To this point we have outlined the theoretical perspectives which inform our classroom practice. Out of this practice come student 'voices' as evidenced through their writing. What follows is a selection of student writing which concerns matters of literacy. Around these examples, we interweave our reading of their perspectives of the canon, of the content, and of language. Moments of abrasion between student understandings and our understandings are generative for us as teachers in that they cause us to rethink our practices.

### COMPETING DISCOURSES ON LITERACY

Bartholomae (1985) suggests that the problem for all students entering the academy is the need to 'try on a variety of voices and interpretive schemes, to write ... as a literary critic one day and as an experimental psychologist the next'

(Bartholomae 1985:135). As he puts it, students 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. We would argue that students have a certain expectation of what constitutes study in a tertiary institution, and that they may have a tendency to 'invent' the university in ways that are not dissimilar from the way they expect it to be. Given our belief that writing is essential to the existence of varying kinds of knowledge, an early point of disruption to the students' understandings occurs when we examine what counts as knowledge, and how it is constructed in language.

#### LANGUAGE AND LITERACY AS 'SKILLS'

One student wrote of being aware of the differing demands now being made on an individual's literacy abilities; although it should be noted that the writer comments on an understanding of '*language changing dramatically*'. Many students showed initial confusion between 'literacy' and 'literature', expecting the unit to offer them readings in books or poetry. In general, they saw 'literacy' as being able to read and write - 'basic' skills which they learned at a very early age, and which they did not expect to have to 'learn' again at University.

Another early perception the students had about language and literacy was that language was a 'tool' for communication. Closely allied with the above view on 'basic' skills, they saw language in 'common sense' terms as transparent, as having no force of its own, as simply a 'natural' tool with which to describe the 'real' world. One student commented that he wished he had a wider vocabulary, perceiving his lack of experiences as detrimental to his development of language, or, as he put it *I don't have an exciting life, I don't have a strong grip on exciting language*. In this instance, he was conflating a class discussion on 'powerful' language with his own view of 'power in language'. Another student commented disturbingly:

I know that I have limited my vocabulary range through lack of reading. Even at the present time, I still don't read books and only seem to read the newspaper and magazines. Only on one occasion have I ever read a book from start to finish, every page.

Considering that the above students have recently completed 13 years of schooling, the comments have ramifications for their future educational possibilities, not to mention the perspectives that they may bring to their chosen profession of primary teaching.

#### ACCESS TO ACADEMIC 'WORDS'

It is one of our aims to engage the students in critical interrogation of social and discursive practices. However, there are many occasions for new students when their first contact with the language, which is constitutive of academic discourse, presented an obstacle rather than a gateway to engagement, and more importantly, a critique of the discourse. The following comments encapsulate

the feelings of many students:

My first thoughts about ideology and education was what does that first word mean?

Words like technocratic and epistemology nearly gave me a long series of heart attacks.

We find ourselves in a dilemma about this situation. On the one hand we recognise that the words which are the 'stuff' of theory, and which are legitimated in academic discourses can be seen as constructions of elite academics that make it [theory] '...a critical terrain that only the chosen few can enter' (Hooks 1994:61). On the other hand we also agree with hooks (1994) about the importance of theory in that it may also contain 'important ideas, thoughts and visions' (Hooks 1994:65). We need to solve this dilemma so that our students are not frightened off by the words, but are enabled to position themselves within/against (Lather 1991) a particular discourse. We do think it is important that they begin to hear different speech in the 'patient act of listening to another tongue'; that they may learn to know 'in fragments' and from the 'spaces of silence as well as spaces of speech' (Hooks 1994:174).

#### ACADEMIC WRITING AS SKILLS AND CONVENTIONS

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). There are serious problems, however, with conceiving of writing only as a basic skill and with the pedagogies that flow from such a conception (Collins 1993; Gilbert 1991; Rose 1985; Burhans 1983; Colvino et al 1980)). Teaching basic skills underestimates and undermines both teachers and students, because writing is not just a skill with which one can present or analyse knowledge.

Some students appeared to recognise that they were learning more than the 'skills' required for reading and writing in the academy. One student commented: *The academic work (essays) became a new literacy for me, as it included the use of a new type of writing and process.* Another student commented in Week 3: *Each different subject has had a different style of language. There was what I have learned in computing classes that has dealt in a totally new language that I doubt I'll ever use again.* Still another said: *University was the beginning of a whole new language for me.*

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). Additionally, 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 of reading 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). This would seem to be the case with the

following student, who feels she must show the '*right people, such as lecturers*' that she can conform to the rules, and presumably be successful:

Academic writing at university has enabled myself and other students a chance to enhance knowledge and express opinions (both your own and others) in a form that is widely accepted, especially by those in the upper ranks of society. This type of writing gives people a chance of showing they can incorporate a idea into an essay, to the right people, such as lecturers, business people etc.

Another student wrote:

Academic writing is far more structured than journal writing. It still allows personal ideas but it also includes proof and the other side of the argument (whatever you are going against). That sort of writing is connected to a greater extent to middle/upper class society

The issue of academic writing/journal writing we shall refer to later, but what is most disturbing about this comment is the allusion to 'middle/upper class society', echoing 'hierarchies', and the 'right people', and 'upper ranks of society' of previous writing. Again, while this comment does show some awareness of power relations, there was no following critique of this construction of language as a 'status symbol'.

#### ACADEMIC WRITING AS CRITIQUE

Perhaps the following extracts from student writing can be contrasted with some of the previous comments made by students who appeared unable, at this point, to see that they could use both the structure of writing in each discipline to produce a successful outcome, as well as grasping the opportunity to see how social and cultural meanings underlie the words that they had used.

When a person writes, s/he takes on the power which language has. They have the ability to trap their readers and hold them in their writing. They are capable of changing that reader's views and feelings, in accordance with the author's views and feelings.

The notion of academic writing, when just confronted with it, gave a feeling of confusion as it was a 'foreign' element within my literacy and writing. What I didn't realise at the time was that the 'power' of language was already influencing my thoughts. The mere word 'academic' represented fear, as the word itself was affiliated with high standards, university level and intelligence.

It would appear that these students have begun to grasp the notion that writing is essential to the 'very existence of certain kinds of knowledge' (Rose 1985:348), and to acts of knowing that are to be stimulated and grounded in an individual's own being, needs, circumstances and experiences (Freire and Macedo 1989), and which cannot be considered independently of the social forces which have set up the conventions of appropriacy for that context (Fairclough 1992). Thus,

they may be coming to understand that writing can serve in two ways; it offers the chance to manipulate words and ideas; and it provides the opportunity to deal with systems of social meanings that underlie the words that are written.

#### CRITICAL JOURNAL WRITING

Our reasons for placing an emphasis on journal writing and individual expressions of meaning are, in essence, twofold. One reason is concerned with our standpoint as feminist educators, and our aims 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-judgemental forum for an exchange of ideas between the students and ourselves, and to subvert the 'structured hierarchical relationship' which can exist between a teacher and the students (Perry 1987), and in which can be revealed the 'importance of 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.

It was certainly our hope that the students 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 by which they could write of their experiences, and critique discursive practices which shape and construct their subjectivities. We considered that our task was to explore educational possibilities and discursive practices which could impact on what students actually do in classrooms. It was also our aim to educate them to take risks, to critically appropriate forms of knowledge that exist outside of their immediate experience, and so envisage versions of a world which is 'not yet' in order to be able to alter the grounds upon which life is lived.

#### THE JOURNAL AS CRITIQUE

The following view sees the journal as a place for critical review of issues.

The first few entries into my journal allowed me to express how my culture's discourses and my own experiences had led me to believe what language was. It surprised me to discover exactly how little I knew about language, other than it being a means of communicating and expressing my own opinions. Acknowledging this limitation caused me to become aware of new areas of concern in relation to the topics of 'language' and 'literacy' and to later reflect upon these. For example, analysing forms of media and the sets of 'rules' that are used to govern the content enabled me to have access to new groups of individuals, and awareness of their discourses.

This student comments on an increased awareness of the ways in which language is constitutive of meaning, causing her to reflect on the ramifications of this and to centre her concerns, in this instance, on the ways in which the media can be seen as a powerful influence on people, society and culture. Her singling out of the media for specific comment echoes perspectives taken by other students, both in their writing and in class discussions.

## JOURNAL AS PERSON-AL WRITING

One of the critiques of journal writing is that their so-called personal nature constitutes an 'invasion of privacy' in which 'issues of self-protection and self-censorship (can) inhibit the reflective enterprise' (Convery 1993:137). The ethics of inviting students to bring the 'private' areas of their lives into the official discourse of education has been queried by Giroux and Simon (1989), suggesting that 'encouraging student voice (in journals) can become .. a way to satisfy a form of ego expansionism constituted on the pleasures of understanding those who appear as 'other' to us (Giroux and Simon 1989:247). While acknowledging the difficulty of conceptualising 'private', 'personal', and 'intimate', we believe it is essential to our view of critical pedagogy for students to engage 'personally' in their journal writing. We find in our pedagogies at the moment that the best way of constructing a learning situation which validates and interrogates student experiences is through 'personal-al' journal writing.

For us, the journal is first and foremost a 'critical' document, where the author's experience is constructed, reconstructed, placed within a cultural, social and economic context, and brought into counterpoint with the canon. However, for many students, academic writing and journal writing are seen as binary opposites, in which journal writing is considered the lesser of the two. Overall the students' comments indicated that they saw these two 'writings' as separate, and as one student commented, *different to other types of writing*. While most of the students appreciated the opportunity to write in their journals and saw them as a means of exploring and investigating their thoughts on critical issues, the overall perception is, we suspect, that they saw them as less 'powerful' than 'academic' writing, and therefore possibly not as significant and important in their academic careers.

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, we 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.

## LEARNING A NEW LITERACY IN A NEW PLACE

Through a comparison of an early and later extract written by one of the students, we can see changes in the abilities to use language that is powerful, individual and contestatory. The writing in this extract also shows the development of 'voice', and the differing subjectivities, as the writer negotiates meanings and experiences for himself, develops an understanding of the discipline, and discovers how these are realised in language.

First Entry: I hoping that their is something available for me at university as I feel I have finally found myself. I never relised how much knowlege there is for me to learn. I dont know what else to write it is very frustrating not to be able to get words to flow, I better finish off here I think.

Entry in Week 10: Mr Hayward, Minister for Education, made an interesting statement. He said "Every child has strengths and talents, and it is the role of schools to draw out these strengths and talents. This is particularly the case for the child who is not performing to the expected standard" (Victorian School Education News, Vol 3, August 1995). This statement would be particularly argued against from a Freirian perspective. Rather than looking at why the child is not performing to the 'expected standard', he and his followers would look into why the other child is performing to the expected or above standard. As Lynne Noone has said, they would not use the term disadvantaged, rather they would question the advantaged.

The first entry is tentative, ungrammatical, hesitant, and it has spelling errors. The writer was not inarticulate to speak to, but he obviously felt very constrained when he had to write for another person. His perceived ability to write counters the sense of hope and potential open to him at university. The inconclusive way he completed this first extract is in contrast to the assertive manner in which, in Week 10, he focuses on the LAP test, an issue that had been discussed in the classroom. Not only is he critical of Mr Hayward, he also places this educational ideology against a Freirian perspective. This later writing is assured and confident, and his writing explores not just the LAP test, but also the competing views that can be held on educational issues from an ideological perspective.

Interestingly, in his journal entry he quoted from a text to explore his understandings of the LAP test and its implications. Indeed, most of the student writers in their journal entries referred to other texts to support what they were writing about; 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.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper our concern has been to explore the dissonances or abrasions between varying discourses about literacy. We have explored certain themes as they are lived out within our tertiary classrooms in which we have sought to engage in a critical literacy pedagogy. We have sought to interweave student 'voices', our 'voices', and theoretical 'voices' as a means of gaining greater understanding of working within the 'web of relationships' (Kemmis 1995) that constitute the classroom.

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<sup>1</sup> The Inaugural Pacific Rim Conference on First Year Experience held at QUT, Brisbane, July 1995, consisted of a range of papers concerning this issue.

# Expectations of Tertiary Literacy: the Attitudes and Experiences of Lecturers and their LOTE Background Students

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Victoria University has one of the highest proportions of students of non-English speaking background of any university in Australia with more than 35% speaking a language other than English at home and approximately 30% of student born overseas in a non-English speaking country. In such a context literacy skills and the performance of students in assessment tasks which require the student to demonstrate oral and/or written communication competence pose particular challenges for lecturers and for the students themselves.

As part of a larger study of LOTE background students in the University funded by DEET this paper will analyse qualitative data which has been gathered to understand the experiences of LOTE background students in tertiary study and contrast these with the experiences and attitudes of the lecturers who are developing the curriculum, teaching classes and assessing students' performance. The focus of the analysis will be the attitudes of lecturers and students to the language demands and requirements of undertaking oral and written communication tasks in their subjects. How do lecturers value the literacy skills of their LOTE background students? To what extent and in what ways do they accommodate to the students' literacy difficulties? What are students' attitudes to the literacy demands of their subjects? What do they believe is valued by their lecturers? Is there any mismatch between the two?

## **INTRODUCTION**

Victoria University (VU) has one of the highest proportions of students of non-English speaking background of any university in Australia with more than 35% speaking a language other than English at home and approximately 30% of students born overseas in a non-English speaking country. A University-wide concern to understand and respond to the broad range of educational issues and needs of "LOTE background" students led to the award of a DEET Equity

Grant to investigate the performance of these students. The project brief is fairly broad and encompasses detailed analysis of statistical data on student progress and performance together with extensive qualitative research to explore the experiences of LOTE background students at the University and the attitudes, experiences and responses of their lecturers.

### NESB STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The very choice of terms for this sort of project signals something of our preconceptions and assumptions concerning issues that may affect students success. Terms such as "NESB" and "LOTE background" imply the significance of language and language-related issues in students' experience, as opposed to migration, ethnicity or other factors. Yet, even within such parameters, as those of you who are familiar with the area would already be aware, it is an area fraught with controversy/misperception and confusion. For example, what do we mean by NESB? Who is included? Who decides who is included? Within VU we have most recently and regularly collected data on those who use a language other than English at home. Presumably most people would interpret "use" in its active meaning (ie speaking and hearing), rather than the more passive (hearing only), but nevertheless there can be different degrees of usage. Contrast a young person who has grown up in Australia in a household where the parents' mother tongue is mainly used for communication in the family with parents' and grandparents' generations, but where the young person him/herself has been educated in and is dominant in English, with a mature-aged person recently arrived in Australia in their 30s who still predominantly uses their mother tongue, other than at School/University. Both of these would answer YES to the LOTE question, but their experiences and needs are clearly likely to be very different. In work undertaken for DEET, Lyn Martin (1994) proposed a narrower definition for equity and social justice purposes, restricting the term "NESB" to those who have been in Australia for less than 10 years and who were born in a non-English speaking country. Within our university data is collected annually according to this broader definition, but can also be derived for the narrower one. More recently the term "LOTE Background" has started to be used virtually synonymously with "NESB", although it is quite unclear how or why this should be preferable as it still values through negative rather than positive association.

A further definitional complexity is added to the issue when we start to consider the working definitions being used by those at the 'coalface' of the University - lecturing staff. Our discussion with staff has indicated that many of them use accent as the cut-off. Students with an accent considered non-standard are spoken about as NESB, as "recently arrived", and as having language difficulties; students without an accent are spoken of as "born here" or "educated here". On one level this is perfectly understandable. For a linguistically untrained person accent is the most salient indicator of being a non-native speaker of English. Yet we know from the literature on second language acquisition that it is not an accurate indicator of language proficiency as the presence of an accent merely indicates

that the person has probably started to learn to speak English after puberty. There are many extremely proficient adult non-native speakers of English, who have not started speaking English until their teens or adulthood. In contrast, we know from the work of Cummins (1981, 1984) and Skutnabb-Kangas (1981) that there are a number of speakers of English who attain a native speaker equivalent level of communicative competence in spoken language, but who, for a variety of possible reasons such as interrupted schooling (eg. moving from country of migration to home country and vice versa) and/or insufficient opportunity to develop English literacy and related cognitive skills within their school program, experience quite serious difficulties in being able to express themselves in more academically demanding written contexts. To add a further complexity, lecturing staff in some interviews also seem to use the term "Asian" as interchangeable with "newly-arrived" or even "NESB".

The term "international student" has recently received fairly broad acceptance, but in the classroom context the differentiation which is important to the University as the receiver of student income is not salient, so these students tend to be grouped according to the categories outlined above. There is a noticeable tendency among some staff to use the term "international student" to refer to any student of Asian appearance and/or with some degree of difficulty with English and cultural knowledge, irrespective of the student's actual status.

Such definitions presuppose that there are some shared problems/issues for groupings such as NESB. Whilst at the most superficial level this may have some validity, as the few examples already given demonstrate, such terms mask incredible diversity of social, cultural, linguistic and educational experience. Some research on disadvantaged groups is indicating that it may be factors other than language that are more significant in reproducing disadvantage eg immigration, refugee status, multiple disadvantages.

From a community perspective, debate/perceptions about the needs of NESB groups have been further coloured by simplistic and stereotyping coverage given to contrasting pieces of research dealing with aspects of the performance of NESB students. Such coverage has fed two contrasting positions. On the one hand, there is the image of NESB students in Higher Education as high achievers. This image is associated both with better performance by NESB students and with a proportionately higher number of NESB students than English Speaking Background (ESB) students in Higher Education, in particular significant over-representation of certain language groups such as speakers of Chinese languages (Dobson, Birrell and Rapson, 1996).

On the other hand, a common perception exists of NESB students as low participators and achievers. This is associated with evidence of their language difficulties with English and lack of culturally appropriate understanding of the demands and expectations of tertiary study in Australia, leading to failure and/or dropout (Power and Robertson, 1987 quoted in Holton and Salagaras 1988).

A premise of our project was that we needed to understand more about how various important groupings of the student cohort are managing with their studies

to ensure that an equitable and relevant education is being provided to these groups. Perceptions and attitudes of lecturing staff are affected both by their personal experiences as teachers and members of society, but also by the community attitudes and expectations which are reflected in the coverage given to these issues in the public sphere.

Initial statistical data which was available to the project team indicated that potentially there may be less success in performance at University by NESB students (refer Table 1, Table 2). However, such aggregated data indicating small differences between NESB proportions of commencing students against the proportion in the cohort as a whole could be masking a number of possible actual outcomes. For example, if the NESB proportion is increasing over time within the University as a whole, then these figures could indicate equivalent or even superior performance by NESB students - only cohort figures or comparison of some uniform measure of student progress can show us comparative performance. Contrastingly, they could be masking pockets of much larger discrepancy within particular courses/subjects and/or year levels. The difficulties in engaging in debate on the access and equity of NESB students in tertiary education relate both to a lack of definitional clarity and the lack of detailed, easily comparable and meaningful statistical data on NESB student access and progress.

**TABLE 1: COMMENCING VS TOTAL NESB BY COURSE TYPE (FOR 1994)**

<b>Course Type</b>	<b>NESB % of Commencing Students</b>	<b>NESB % of Total Students</b>
<b>Arts</b>	32.4	31.1
<b>Business</b>	37.7	34.5
<b>Engineering</b>	62.5	57.1
<b>Human Development</b>	20.7	17.7
<b>Science</b>	47.4	45.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	37.4	35.2

(Source VUT Equity Plan Update, 1995-7, p.23)

**TABLE 2: TOTAL, COMMENCING AND GRADUATING STUDENT NOS. BY LANGUAGE SPOKEN FOR 1994**

Language	TOTAL Students		Commencing Students		Graduating Students	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<b>English</b>	7510	63.7	3008	60.6	1709	67.2
<b>Vietnamese</b>	729	6.2	370	7.5	92	3.6
<b>Greek</b>	535	4.5	199	4.0	102	4.0
<b>Chinese Lgs</b>	499	4.2	246	5.0	101	4.0
<b>Italian</b>	465	3.9	190	3.8	123	4.8
<b>Spanish</b>	189	1.6	74	1.5	27	1.1
<b>Macedonian</b>	162	1.4	58	1.2	38	1.5
<b>Croatian</b>	158	1.3	55	1.1	29	1.1
<b>Arabic</b>	139	1.2	67	1.4	24	0.9
<b>Turkish</b>	125	1.1	64	1.3	17	0.7
<b>Filipino Lgs</b>	112	1.0	47	1.0	20	0.8
<b>Maltese</b>	110	0.9	44	0.9	31	1.2

The statistical analysis of student progress and performance is an important component of the project which is not being reported on in this paper. However, from the beginning it has been the intention of the research team to examine issues in much greater depth than that permitted by such statistical analysis. An important part of the project has been the collection of qualitative data which documents the experiences of NESB students and their lecturers. In a diverse University community, such as clearly exists at VU, literacy skills and the performance of students in assessment tasks which require the student to demonstrate oral and/or written communication competence pose particular challenges for lecturers and for the students themselves. An important component of the qualitative data collection has involved gathering student impressions and experiences of the demands made on them in their studies and the attitudes and experiences of their lecturers in teaching and assessing students. This material provides some important insights into literacy issues within the NESB group.

## LITERACY AND NESB STUDENTS

Research undertaken in different research traditions has investigated literacy skills and skill development of non-native speakers, especially regarding writing skills. Whilst some of the difficulties experienced by NESB writers may be the same or similar to those of ESB writers, this literature highlights important differences. In his recent study of the writing of NESB undergraduate students across a range of subjects Silva (1993:657) concludes that there are "a number of salient differences between L1 and L2 writing with regard to both composing processes ... and features of written texts ..... and structure ....". Silva's findings call into question the appropriateness of adopting practices from L1 writing pedagogy in teaching writing to NESB students. As a result of their work in the Australian context which was particularly motivated by the need to improve the outcomes for those traditionally disadvantaged within the education system, such as students of migrant and/or working class backgrounds, a range of researchers working within a genre approach to literacy pedagogy (eg. Kalantzis and Cope, Christie) have argued for the importance of teaching explicitly the conventions that operate in various genres if those who are not part of the mainstream culture are to have genuine equity of access and inclusion in the society. They argue against process/child-centred/naturalistic approaches to learning to write, precisely because such approaches avoid making explicit the knowledge needed by students from non-traditional backgrounds if they are to meet expectations<sup>1</sup>. Such exclusion operates even where the young person may have grown up with English as their main language of communication. Students who are more recently arrived are faced with an even more daunting task, as in addition to learning the conventions of the genres relevant to their disciplines of study they also may be grappling with the morphology, syntax and semantics of academic written and spoken English. The extensive body of research on cultural differences in argumentation and discourse structuring (eg. Clyne 1981, 1994, Kaplan 1988) adds a further layer of complexity for those who have achieved a level of proficiency in comparable genres in their first language. These related issues have recently been brought together in the work of Ian Malcolm and colleagues at Edith Cowan University (Malcolm, 1995).

Whilst there is a considerable material in the literacy, composition and applied linguistics literature concerning the acquisition of academic literacy in a second language, there appears to be comparatively little research on the expectations and understanding of content lecturers concerning the literacy skills of their students, or on their approach to the development and assessment of these skills. Similarly, there appears to be very little on how students themselves conceptualise this aspect of their academic work. These areas form the focus of the research questions formulated for this study.

The concepts of linguistic and communication accommodation as developed by Giles and his colleagues (cf. Giles and Coupland, 1991) have achieved wide acceptance. Whilst much of the work of Giles and his colleagues has focussed on the development of a framework for understanding, first, processes of linguistic

accommodation, and, more recently and more broadly, processes of communication accommodation, for the purposes of this analysis we propose to apply the notion of accommodation even more broadly to refer to the adjustments or lack of adjustments which may take place in the actions of participants in classroom interactions (lecturers and students) which are shaped by the interpersonal and intergroup context. Such accommodation may occur in terms of language, other features of communication (verbal and non-verbal) and pedagogical practices and may encompass in a tertiary learning context not only the interactional accomplishment of a person's intentions but also decisions that might be taken on the content to be delivered and judgements about the acceptability of work which is submitted for assessment.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

What do academic staff and students see as the major literacy issues?

To what extent do they see accommodation as appropriate? Why?

What techniques of accommodation are proposed?

What are the strategies adopted to assist students' literacy development?

How adequate/effective are these for NESB students?

### **QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION**

The qualitative data reported upon in this paper has been collected from students and staff. Data from students consists of material from 2 small group interviews and 12 individual interviews. Student interviewees were located using a combination of volunteers responding to classroom appeals and existing class groups, in an endeavour to get broad coverage of the University in terms of faculties and courses. Data from staff was collected in 15 individual interviews with academic and student service staff, and in a group interview with staff employed by the student union. Many staff interviewed had responded to a call for expressions of interest, but some additional staff were targeted to ensure broad coverage of courses, departments and faculties. Interviews were loosely structured and all interviews covered the same themes. They ranged in length from 30 - 90 minutes.

### **MAJOR LITERACY ISSUES**

This section of the paper represents work in progress. It is based on a preliminary analysis of a part of the qualitative data, and will only raise a few of the issues that seem to arise from this analysis. A brief report will be made on data relating to the above research questions and some selected issues commented upon. However first we would like to make some brief observations about literacy and oracy in the University.

In preparing this paper, we began with a definition of literacy involving the written word. Traditionally, academic culture is seen as a written culture. However

it is striking when analysing our data on NESB students that faculty teaching staff (as opposed to support staff) talked far more about oral activities than written ones. This led us to further consider the relationship between oracy and literacy in the university.

In general it appears that student oracy is strongly associated by teaching staff with the process of learning and with informal assessment. It is seen as a developmental process in the classroom, which may be encouraged within the timeframe of a single semester unit. Student literacy, on the other hand, particularly student writing, is associated with formal assessment; as such, it may only come to the attention of the academic once or twice during a semester unit. It appears from interviews and from anecdotal evidence that requiring students to complete a piece of work not for assessment but rather for diagnostic or other purposes is relatively rare in the university. Staff interviewed were very conscious of the workload implications for themselves of responding to any student writing which was not directly required for assessment; commenting on drafts of assignments before they were submitted had been tried in several areas, but discontinued in some due to the time required. So in most courses, any development in student writing as a result of intervention by teaching staff can only occur over a sequence of semester units.

One issue arising from the comparative frequency with which staff may experience the oracy skills of their students is that this experience of student oracy during the semester may form staff perceptions of student learning, which may in turn influence how much significance is placed on poor writing skills. More orally fluent and outgoing ESB and NESB students may have their writing difficulties underestimated, resulting in their not receiving the support they need but perhaps having their written work marked with "the benefit of the doubt", while quiet students' writing difficulties may be overestimated and their work marked accordingly.

In the interviews, academic staff and students were asked what they saw as the literacy areas presenting most difficulty for NESB students. One area consistently mentioned by students, but mentioned much less by academics, was academic reading. For students, the difficulty was the sheer quantity and difficulty of the required reading. Staff, however, saw students as lacking facility in reading; they did not read enough, and could not use books for reference. One particular implication of this lack of facility was that NESB students often did not "know the ropes"; they were not familiar with course structure and guidelines even though these had been issued; this was felt to be exacerbated for those students who had oral difficulties and whose social networks did not include better readers by an inability to pick up such things "on the grapevine".

The most frequently mentioned area of difficulty mentioned by teaching staff was formal assessment. While this area was occasionally mentioned by students, the problem was most likely to be described as running out of time in the exam. NESB students were described by teaching staff as having difficulty reading exam or test questions, and making errors in written work submitted for

assessment. Specific faults mentioned represented a range of types. Grammatical faults ranged from lack of the "s" on the ends of words to "sentence structure"; other difficulties included, for example, lack of precise language in laboratory reports and lack of critical analysis in essays. Interestingly, the way staff described the accuracy standards they required varied enormously, from statements like "work should be error-free by 3rd year" to a requirement of comprehensibility only.

Predictably, many staff commented upon the problem of "plagiarism". Quite specific differences emerged during the interviews as to the definition of plagiarism being applied. For some academics the requirement was simply that students attribute their quotes, while others were applying an implicit rule about how extensively students may use quotes. Few of the subject teaching staff interviewed appeared to have considered the implications for students of such definitional questions, or to have spelled out their requirements to them in such precise terms.

Some staff felt that NESB students with English language difficulties, while not the only ones involved in plagiarism, were more under pressure to plagiarise because of their difficulties with language. One staff member pointed out that those whose English language literacy production is not native speaker-like are more likely to be detected when they plagiarise, due to the clear irregularities in the degree of mastery of English displayed in the work they submit. On a more general plane, the issue of "plagiarism" raises the whole question of the relationship between student and academic "authority", which as we know may be quite different in other cultures.

A related area where definitions may also vary is that of "collusion" between students. Some staff appeared to be taking for granted that not only their awareness but also their definition of collusion was shared by students. Others raised the difficulties as they saw them for NESB students, who they felt tended to work together for practical reasons and who in many cases had not been socialised into our cultural assumptions about individual work by schooling in this country. While such students may know that they may not hand in the same piece of work, it may or may not be acceptable to a given tutor, for example, for students to work together on research and produce slightly different reports on that research. In such circumstances, how different the reports must be to escape the charge of collusion is rarely discussed.

Sanctions for "plagiarism" and "collusion" may also be inconsistent and inadequately specified. Deliberate flouting of known rules may be tolerated for various reasons. On the other hand, innocent mistakes may be labelled "plagiarism" and heavily censured, with the resulting embarrassment for the student and possibly leading to continuing stigmatising of the "guilty" individual or the group to which s/he is seen to belong. It is clear from student interviews that the way in which such situations are handled does send messages to other students about what is acceptable; unfortunately these messages may be contradictory and lead to a sense that the whole system is arbitrary and

unpredictable.

### ACCOMMODATION

Most staff were in favour of some degree of accommodation to NESB students' perceived difficulties, but most preferred not to alter course structures or assessment as this were seen as potentially lowering standards, or creating difficulties for non-NESB students.

Reasons given in favour of accommodation were generally based on the belief that effective teaching must start "where students are at". There was also a widely shared ethical argument: that acceptance of a student into the University implied a judgement that the student was capable of tertiary study and therefore a responsibility to provide the support necessary for that student to pass, as long as they worked hard. In one particular case a kind of "consumer sovereignty" argument was rather cynically attributed to management - "they pay so they pass" - and this was seen as a pressure in favour of accommodation on the assumption that accommodation necessarily involved passing students who did not merit a pass.

Teaching staff offered a number of arguments against accommodation. There was a distrust of students reporting cultural difficulties; one interviewee's reaction to another's account of a difficulty reported by students was: "they're fleecing you again!". Another argument was that at tertiary level we need to be able to make assumptions about students' readiness to cope with the course work, so accommodation should not be an issue. There was the "accommodation is the beginning of the end" argument - if we start accommodating for certain students, it will lead to a completely separate course; this is neither possible nor what students would want, and therefore we should not start at all. Other concerns about the deleterious effects of accommodation on courses included the view that due to time constraints, to accommodate in the area of assumed cultural knowledge will mean sacrificing subject content. There was a sense of powerlessness for some academics who felt that subject based academics are not capable of teaching "remedial" language or expression, and/or that in any case, students take no notice of feedback given on language or expression. Finally, in some cases reluctance to consider accommodation was justified by reference to the belief that accommodation means passing students who should not pass.

A number of techniques of accommodation were proposed by faculty teaching staff.<sup>2</sup> One option raised by several staff, but endorsed by none, was to teach NESB students in a different stream from ESB students, and to assess them on different basis. Several staff suggested strategies which may assist students in the short term but appeared to offer little long-term promise, such as decreasing the number and length of writing tasks, substituting where possible multiple choice questions, diagram-labelling, model making and other activities seen as assessing content knowledge with a minimum language skills component. More useful strategies in the long term included giving clearer instructions, modelling writing tasks for students, monitoring, counselling, commenting on drafts of

work prior to submission, repetition and reinforcement of information and instructions, allowing the use of dictionaries in examinations, giving more time in examinations (although some staff anticipated problems with backlash from students who were not allowed the extra time), relaxing language demands on all students in exams (as opposed to assignments); and referral to counselling and to language and academic support services. It was suggested that it is valuable to know something about NESB students' backgrounds even if no specific element of curriculum or pedagogy is altered.

A lack of confidence among some staff in their ability to be of use to students in the area of written English was of concern. Several interviewees were convinced that faculty staff generally lacked the expertise to help students. This was sometimes because the issues were complex and it was not their area; they did not know enough about language/literacy or about techniques for giving effective feedback. In other cases it was felt that staff members' own skills were often inadequate to model for students. This was linked to both the recruitment of more NESB staff members and an implicit recognition that standards had risen - it was suggested by one academic that those in technical professions had for many years been able to "get away with" poor writing skills due to the expertise of their secretaries! Although this was not specified by the interviewee, it appears likely that the inadequate skills referred to are those related to surface grammatical correctness rather than fundamental issues of structure, argument, relevance etc. This raises interesting issues about the standards of surface correctness which are expected from current students.

Also of concern was the cynicism among some teaching staff as to whether students took any notice of the feedback they gave. This point was raised mostly in the context of written feedback given on major assignments after submission, together with the assessment or mark. Staff who had tried giving written or oral feedback on drafts of written work or on non-assessed work seemed satisfied that this feedback had been eagerly accepted by students. However when feedback is given in the context of assessment, it may be that many students are so focussed on the summative aspects of the assessment that they are unable to respond to feedback as part of a formative process. This will be more so where subjects are perceived as quite separate and where requirements of different academics are seen as relatively inconsistent or unpredictable.

As we have seen, attitudes and requirements of teaching staff regarding NESB students vary enormously. This variation is to some degree inevitable, but can lead to serious confusion for NESB students if the subtleties of each academic's approach are left to be intuited rather than made explicit. Many staff interviewed were endeavouring to tackle the problems as they saw them, and some promising strategies were in use. However there is a lack of resolution of some central questions which seems to paralyse staff in their thinking; these questions include University policy on exit levels of English proficiency, the role of the mainstream subject teacher as a teacher of language, the student-centredness of curriculum and the implications for assessment of the variety of strengths and weaknesses with which students begin their university careers. There also appears to be a

lack of knowledge about how NESB students' literacy skills may best be developed, which is exacerbated by structural factors such as the prevalence of the single semester subject. All of these issues point to a need for the responsibility for NESB students' literacy development to be taken at the level of the whole University, faculty and department if it is to be consistent and sustained.

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<sup>1</sup>For a number of articles dealing with these issues refer to Cope and Kalantzis (1993) and Reid (1993).

<sup>2</sup>This section excludes comments by teaching staff delivering student support in non-accredited programs such as that offered by Language and Academic Skills Units.

# A Profile of the Novice Collaborative Research Experience

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Two constant themes which have emerged at this Tertiary Literacy Conference are:

- \* how to raise literacy awareness among the gatekeepers in disciplines not directly concerned with language education, and
- \* how to enable further investigation into the impact culture has on our students' performance, particularly that in the written mode.

A partial answer to these concerns may lie in an initiative implemented by Victoria University of Technology - the Collaborative Research Group Scheme. This aims to foster an active research culture at all levels and across all fields in the university's academics. This paper outlines the history and structure of the Scheme and examines one of the research groups to illustrate how this concept could address such issues.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed wide sweeping changes in the provision of post-secondary education. Institutes of Technology, Councils of Adult Education, Technical and Further Education Colleges and universities were consolidated, amalgamated, and in some instances, dismantled. The over-riding purpose was the provision of a more focused and coherent structure to address the changing needs of economic restructuring and the subsequent demands on educational institutions.

As part of government moves to reorganise these educational sectors, Footscray Institute of Technology was awarded university status in January, 1992. This new tertiary institution had a distinct profile. Situated in the Western suburbs of Melbourne it catered for a diverse cultural mix and those generally grouped in the lower socio-economic class. In response to this the university adopted as one of its cornerstones, the policy of *special access* for many normally excluded from post secondary education because of low results in their Victorian Certificate of Education. This was to have an impact on the future literacy demands placed on lecturers in all disciplines.

One of the other implications of this change in status was the need for the university to foster a research culture for staff already employed, and for those entering into this expanding educational sector. It was for this purpose that the Collaborative Research Group (CRG) Scheme was devised.

### COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH GROUP (CRG) SCHEME

An allocation of \$185,000 from the Commonwealth Staff Development Fund enabled implementation of the Research Scheme in 1994. The basic concept of the program involved the establishment of small groups of academic staff, either relatively or totally inexperienced in research, to work under the guidance of a mentor who could encourage discussion and the exploration of alternative research methods. Individual grants to each group covered the replacement costs of the mentor for the routine meetings, the employment of a research assistant if required, and the delivery of workshops/lectures pertinent to particular skill enhancement. These funds, within stipulated guidelines, could therefore enabled the pursuit of emerging interests in each group as expenditure was at their own discretion.

Table 1 illustrates the position of the CRG Scheme in the overall research strategy of the university and demonstrates its three main thrusts. The first was the formation of the initial interest groups of relatively inexperienced researchers under the guidance of mentors. The second was that Mentor meetings provided a forum for their members to acquire higher order research and management skills. The third was centrally delivered generic skills programs open to members of any CRG group, other academics and post-graduate students (CRGS 1995: 4).

The success of the Scheme and the enthusiasm it engendered in 1994, resulted in additional monies being allocated by the Commonwealth Staff Development Fund. 1995 saw a further \$200,000 being expended on the continuation of existing groups and the establishment of eight new ones. From the initial 120 academic staff involved in 1994, the Scheme expanded to incorporate 243 in 1995, a rather impressive growth in participation rates (CRG 1995:1). It also demonstrated a critical feature which often determines the eventual success of such programs: that those involved assume a personal stake in its ownership, not just react to top-down imposed plans.

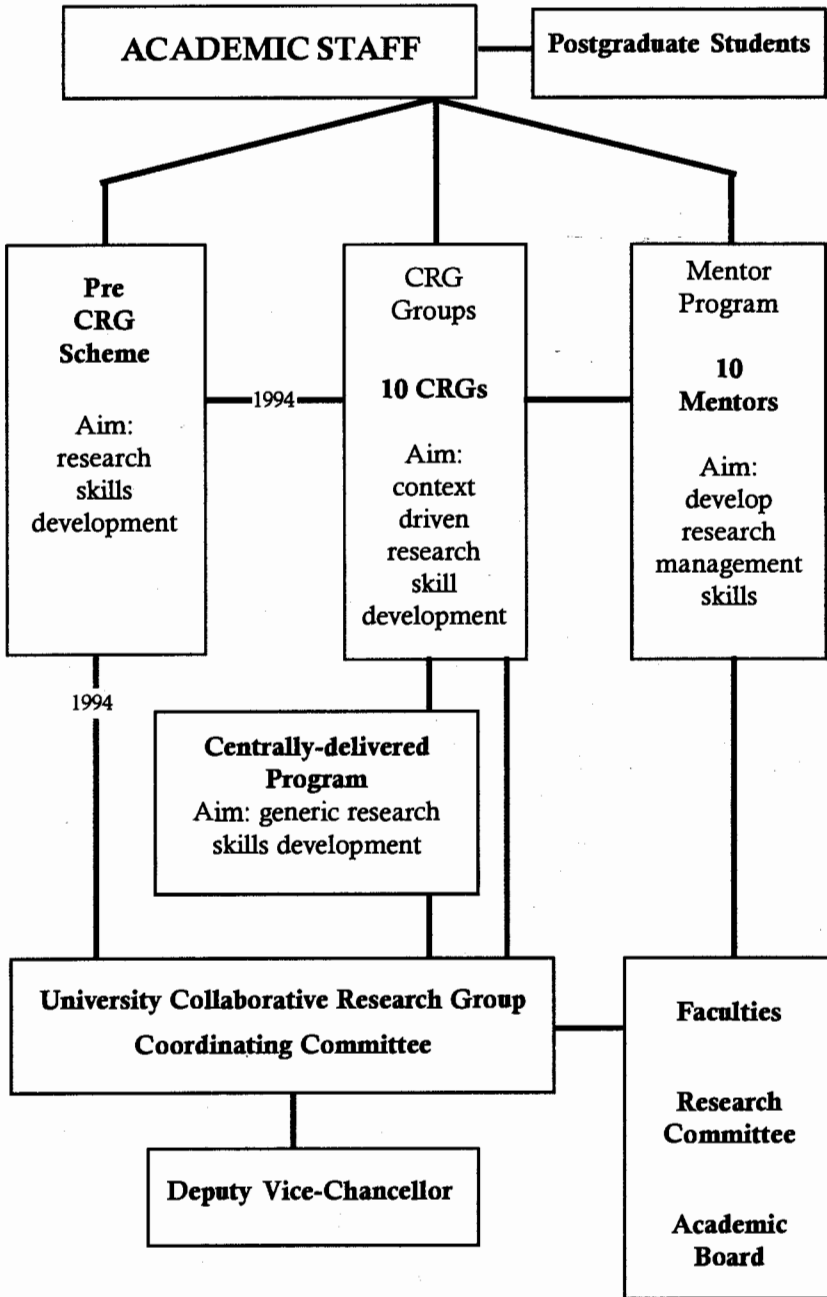
In the commencement phase of the Scheme there was a concentration on *processes*, that is on skill and knowledge enhancement. In the subsequent period the objective was on *product*, e.g. the publication of articles in journals or presentations at conferences. This was a very important aspect of the whole program because it enabled time and energy for skills acquisition without the additional burden on members of being required to generate immediate demonstrable outcomes, though of course this was never discouraged.

TABLE 2: COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH GROUPS

1994	1995
10 CRGs	18 CRGs (8 new, 10 continuing)
7 -1 Mentor, up to 10 participants	17 -1 Mentor (all new CRGs single Mentor)
2 -2 Mentors, up to 14 participants	1-1 Co-Mentor (continuing CRG)
1 -3 Mentors, up to 17 participants	

TABLE 1: COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH GROUP SCHEME 1994-95

ORGANISATIONAL FLOW CHART



The expansion and size of the individual groups over the 1994-1995 period is summarised in Table 2. An examination of actual membership within each indicates that of the 18 CRGs operating in 1995, 14 were comprised of academics from two or more departments/faculties, and often from other campuses. An invaluable vehicle was therefore created for dissemination and discussion across all sectors of the university.

Table 3 outlines the activities of the Mentor Leadership Program. Again the information sharing and review sessions provided the opportunity to highlight common interests and share resources between groups, but in this instance across a different level of university personnel.

**TABLE 3: MENTOR LEADERSHIP PROGRAM**

1994	1995
4 meetings (2 information sharing, 2 training in team building/roles/issues). 60% participation rate. Group workshop format.	6 meetings-luncheon lecture format. Open to Mentors and other research managers/leaders in the University.
1 review session (all day at end of year). 100% participation rate.	1 review session, scheduled for end of year (open to a wide group).

Table 4 briefly delineates some of the activities of the centrally delivered skills program. Open to a wide audience this function of the Scheme promoted both inter- and intra- discipline discussion, and emphasised common concerns across faculties.

**TABLE 4: CENTRALLY DELIVERED PROGRAM (PRE-CRG 1994)**

1994	1995
2 programs - June, September	5 programs - February, April, June, September, November
Pre-CRG scheme absorbed into programs offered.	Combination of skills training for the "process" and "product" ends of research. Rolling program offers participants opportunities to repeat sessions if necessary.
Emphasis on generic research skills training, necessary for getting research started.	Open to large cross-section of groups (staff, P/G students).
Introductory sessions only.	

It can be seen that these three components of the CRG Scheme - the individual groups, the Mentor program and the centrally delivered sessions - stimulated discussion and skill acquisition across all sectors and between various levels of the institution. This is of particular significance in light of the concern expressed

at this conference regarding the need to raise literacy awareness amongst the gatekeepers in disciplines not directly involved in language education. This Scheme holds the potential of addressing this issue, particularly when the topics selected by the various research groups are considered.

The areas of investigation undertaken within the program were very diverse, ranging from Fuzzy Logic, Laser and Fibre Technology to Urban Water Systems. Although only one group was directly involved in the study of students' writing, others incorporated aspects of cultural awareness, e.g. *Touch in Health Care* (in this instance that of non-English speaking background [NESB] renal patients), *Perspectives in Health Issues and the Needs of Refugees Seeking Asylum in Australia* and *Culture, Communication, Language and Learning*. These four projects have the potential of heightening the need to accommodate culture variables across the university especially through the annual presentations by all groups to their university colleagues.

### AN EXAMPLE OF A NOVICE RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

To illustrate how the CRG Scheme operates at this university I will briefly outline some of the salient features of the group with which I was involved. It began with a wide ranging brief, documenting a longitudinal study of the writing experiences of first year undergraduate students across a variety of faculties. This was subsequently narrowed to a much more manageable project of investigating *First Year International Female NESB Students' Experience of Academic Writing in One Faculty*.

The final determination of the research question probably evolved from the composition of the research group itself. This contained seven female academics (and one male mentor) who had similar interests in language and its development but were from a variety of departments, units and campuses. They believed that female perspectives were generally under-represented in research and academia and that this instance provided a valuable opportunity to partially redress this.

The identification of the faculty to be targeted was based on initial inquiries that indicated one which was likely to have the largest cohort of potential subjects who met our criteria (female, NESB, first year overseas students with little previous contact with the Australian education system).

Four focused areas of investigation were finally formulated, namely:

1. to document the range of writing tasks that these students were expected to undertake at Victoria University of Technology (VUT)
2. to describe the academic writing experiences of first-year international female NESB students in their previous educational environment and at VUT
3. to study the relationship between strategies employed for their writing tasks and academic success
4. to identify the specific needs of students who were undertaking academic writing tasks

It should be noted that the objective of the research was not to analyse the students' writing per se but rather the strategies and tasks they had previously experienced and those they were now required to perform within this Australian university.

After an extensive literature review of a range of research methods it was finally determined to adopt semi-structured interviews. We believed this approach would potentially provide the richest personal detail and that its semi-structured format would maintain continuity of data across all interviews.

One of the first tasks of our research was to document the range of writing demands students were expected to undertake across the different subject areas. This was extremely time consuming. Although the faculty concerned provided very positive support many of the actual lecturers were sessional and difficult to contact. Table 5 summarises the variety of type and length of assessment tasks required during the semester. An examination of this Table clearly demonstrates an uneven weighting of marks in some areas, a point for future discussion within the departments concerned.

**TABLE 5: RANGE OF STUDENT WRITING TASKS**

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Type of Assignment</b>	<b>Length</b>	<b>Graded/ Ungraded &amp; Mark</b>	<b>Date Due</b>
1	Report Tutorial Exercises	1200-1500 words	15% semester marks 10% semester marks but random selection	8 May Weekly
2	Essay	2000-2500 words		Week 11
3	Tutorial and sample exam questions Written component of spreadsheet assignment	A few lines	5% semester marks	Weekly
4	Short answer questions General questions Problem questions	A few lines	Ungraded	Weekly
5	Short answer questions for tutorials	A few lines	10% semester marks	Weekly
6	Case study	2000 words	25% semester marks	3 April
7	Case study	2500 words	30% semester marks	1 May

By the time first year enrolments were finalised, the original projected cohort of 38 had shrunk to 15 through a variety of reasons including alteration in plans or change of preferences. It was in making actual contact with these students that the group encountered several difficulties. University and Ethics Committee regulations prohibited our members from any direct initial contact. Rather we had to rely on a circuitous route of Student Administration transmitting the details of our study to those concerned. Absence of relevant student administrative personnel at crucial periods resulted in this contact being made as the examination period was about to commence. This problem with administrative support naturally elongated the whole process and was not assisted by the mobility of the student group itself. Recorded addresses were found to be inaccurate and several potential interviewees had to be excluded when it was discovered that they had inappropriately responded to enrolment questions and had resided in Australia from their early teens.

When we finally commenced interviews, we found that circumstances such as those outlined above, had further reduced our group of subjects. Still the data gathered from these was informative, particularly in regard to their previous experiences of writing in their native countries. The transcriptions of the interviews are currently being examined in detail, but emerging factors indicate that there needs to be a bridging program to prepare such students for the more intensive and culturally bound rhetorical styles demanded in their current courses.

Although this brief overview of our project must be regarded as *work in progress*, it still illustrates its scope to stimulate further investigation into the impact of culture on the written products of many of our students.

## CONCLUSION

The Collaborative Research Group Scheme represents a potential way to address the two concerns expressed at this *Tertiary Literacy Conference*. The various facets of this program provide avenues for raising cultural and literacy awareness throughout an institution and the means of conducting viable research into such areas.

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My thanks to the other members of the CRG: Teresa De Fazio, Marie Gerrard, Helen Murphy, Petre Santry, Janis Webb, Christobel Zhang and our mentor, Professor John Wilson. Their collaborative support and the generation of ideas, many of which are echoed in this paper, have provided an invaluable learning experience.

# Top-Level Structuring as a Basis for the Development of Tertiary Literacy

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Lecturers in tertiary institutions are constantly faced with the need to develop effective strategies for helping students to gain information from text and to summarise this information for use in their study. Over the past decade there has been considerable debate as to whether teaching students to identify the structure of text will assist them in reading, understanding and recalling information in text.

This paper presents an approach to reading and summarising factual text and planning and writing essays, at tertiary level at two universities: La Trobe University, Bendigo and Yunnan Normal University, China. The research underlying the approach was derived from the seminal work of Bonnie Meyer in the 1970's and 1980's. Academics at La Trobe University, Bendigo, have furthered the research by developing procedures which assist students to graphically organise materials according to the hierarchical structure of the text.

Lecturers at La Trobe University, Bendigo have been using these procedures to teach students how to identify and use the structures of factual text for several years. Student evaluation indicates that this is useful in providing a scaffold by which students can effectively structure their understanding and organisation of written text. Recently these procedures were used in another culture with students who were learning English as a Foreign Language. Lecturer and student evaluation indicates that the procedures were also successful in this environment as a scaffold assisting these students to understand the structure of factual English text.

## **INTRODUCTION**

**Summarizing skills are essential to academic progress and these skills are based on both comprehension of and attention to importance at the expense of trivia.**

**Good summarizing skills enable one**

- **to produce study summaries**
- **to complete tasks that incorporate source materials in academic papers and presentations of various kinds.**

Of particular interest to the presenters of this paper is research which examines an approach whereby Australian students in the first year of their academic studies can be taught to work recursively on information in such a manner as to render this information as succinctly as possible both for understanding and for use in essays and tutorials. A further area of interest in the current study is the extent to which procedures and strategies which had been developed in an Australian setting could be applied in a Foreign Language Department in a Chinese university.

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The studies reported in this paper are based on earlier research which showed that students can be taught the 'organizing principles' that are found in most factual material - the type of text which exposes factual information and which is typically used to communicate knowledge in content areas (Meyer, 1982; Bartlett, 1978, 1982; Cook & Mayer, 1983). This type of text is organized differently from narrative text in most cases. Factual text used in schools and universities is frequently organized according to a hierarchy of main ideas and supporting details. This hierarchical pattern of superordinate and subordinate information is text-specific and does not conform to a well defined conventional sequential structure as is the case for most narrative texts. Thus, students may initially experience difficulty in following a hierarchical organization of ideas in factual material. This may be particularly so in learning settings where English is not the mother tongue (Carrell, 1984;1987).

According to Meyer (1981) and Carrell (1984) there are five 'rhetorical relationships' which serve to organize the top-level structure of expository text. These are *collection*, *causal*, *response*, *comparison*, and *description*. In recent research projects and instructional programs it has become customary to help students search for the '**top-level**' **organizational patterns** in text which subsume the operation of important rhetorical relationships (Meyer & Freedle, 1984; Bartlett, 1982; Smith, 1989a).

Bartlett (1982) notes the following characteristics of rhetorical predicates:

- a) Rhetorical predicates bind together the components of discourse and provide an overall organization;
- b) They represent a structure which differentiates text from simple word lists and sentences;
- c) They tie together ideas from different clauses, sentences, paragraphs, chapters, or volumes of a book;
- d) They are relational. They show not only how ideas from different parts of a text are associated, but also how some ideas are more important than others.

The rhetorical predicate activates the appropriate rhetorical schema (or superstructure), for example, when the reader of a newspaper article encounters the phrase "*They come in peace, but tourists can also bring problems for an*

*area or culture*" in a recent article in the Travel section of the Weekend Australian, the rhetorical schema for 'argumentation' is activated. (*The Weekend Review; February 24-25, 1996*). Bartlett (1982) notes that it is the ordering of importance among ideas that makes rhetorical predicates so attractive to the researcher in prose learning. Application of an understanding of the rhetorical predicates acts as a sorting device enabling the reader (and the writer) to establish which among key ideas are most important, which come next and so on. The task for the writer of 'good' factual text material then is to ensure that the right 'schema' is triggered by the formal text structure, thereby enabling the reader to achieve an optimum organization of the information in the text (The 'content' schema), in line with the author's intentions (Meyer, Brandt & Bluth, 1980; Smith, 1989a).

### DEVELOPING AWARENESS OF TEXT STRUCTURE

In terms of the above discussion it is necessary for readers and writers to operate on the propositions of the text being read (or created) in order to produce a 'macrostructure' (Brown & Day, 1983) or a 'superordinate' representation (van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983) or a 'gist' (Meyer, 1984; Bartlett, 1982). Good readers appear to be able to 'disembed' main ideas of a text naturally without specific instruction (Brown & Day, 1983; Winograd, 1984; Smith, 1989a). Other readers require quite specific instructional strategies of a type which focus on the necessary 'strategic skills' for sorting out importance levels (Day, 1980; Winograd, 1984; Kurtz & Borkowski, 1985; Smith 1989a). In previous research carried out by one of the presenters (Smith 1989 a; 1989 b) a spatial learning technique involving graphic organizers was used. The principal behind the use of these models involves nodes which represent 'concepts' or 'main ideas' and links between them representing conceptual relations (Preece, 1978; Dansereau, 1978; Dansereau & Holley, 1982).

The various models are represented principally as 'networking', 'mapping', 'schematizing', or 'webbing' and provide a formal, easily learned flexible system for representing text material. Unlike most content-dependent techniques (e.g. flow-charting, matrixing) these systems can be used with a wide variety of text (Holley & Dansereau, 1984; Novak & Gowin, 1984).

An important quality of the map of a text is that the shape of the map closely represents an idealized organizational pattern of the ideas (Novak, 1981; Novak & Gowin, 1984; Armbruster & Anderson, 1984; Pines & Leith, 1981).

In work carried out by the presenters students were trained to graphically organize text material into a type of 'template' which represents the text's hierarchical format. Each node level in the hierarchy is represented by a different symbol (e.g. square, triangle, rectangle etc.) Information which is regarded as least important in the text (e.g. 'examples') is placed in dotted lines at the bottom of the graphic organizer (see appendix).

Research conducted using graphic organizers has shown them to be beneficial to student understanding and achievement. The research conducted by one of

the presenters with native English speaking Grade Six students demonstrated that while good readers failed to show any significant benefit from the strategy, less able students were able to perform almost on a par with the competent students in the training strategy (Smith 1989a).

The evidence for a facilitative effect in the writing (as distinct from reading) resulting from specific strategy training is also quite strong in the research carried out by the presenter (Smith, 1989a). It should be emphasized that students in the research worked in pairs throughout the instructional phase, co-operatively working to structure diagrams hierarchically. In addition to responding sensitively to the hierarchical cues supplied by their constructed diagrams, students provided much more 'rounded' responses in their writing compared to students who did not have the benefit of specific strategy training. Support for this position is provided by the writing research of Scardamalia and Bereiter (1986). In reviewing the research studies on intervention strategies in the writing process these studies point to the value of techniques which compensate for students' lack in heuristic search. If memory is seen to be arranged in hierarchical networks, then it appears what students normally do is recall high-level nodes and then stop. The process of urging students to continue on prompts them to work further down into subordinate nodes in order to elaborate their ideas. The approach used, whereby students create hierarchical diagrams to order their ideas, appears to significantly aid the process of utilising super-ordinate/subordinate content in writing. In a sense the hierarchical graphic organizers utilized in the program functioned as a type of 'heuristic device'.

### **USING TOP-LEVEL STRUCTURING WITH FIRST YEAR PRIMARY TEACHING STUDENTS AT LA TROBE UNIVERSITY, BENDIGO.**

Two scenarios you may all be familiar with:

One: a tutorial where students have been asked to read an article related to the topic.

Student: *I don't understand this reading. How does it relate to the topic?*

Lecturer: *Well what do you think was the main point of the article?*

Student: *I couldn't find it.*

Two: a student arrives at your office with the 'due date' for their assignment imminent.

Student: *I'm really stuck with this essay. I can't seem to get started.*

Lecturer: *Have you read any of the references I put on reserve?*

Student: *Yeah - didn't get much sense out of them though.* (Smith 1989b).

Teaching staff in the faculty of Education found that we were getting the same scenarios year after year. After much debate about "what were they being taught

at secondary school?”, and the “diminishing quality of our students”, it was realised that it was a problem for a variety of students regardless of their academic skills and capabilities. Part of the transition to university, teachers college, or college of advanced education involved a move into different theoretical concepts, and different writing styles than these students had been used to in secondary school, or at least writing styles that appeared to be different to the students. Current research such as Macdonald (1995) suggests that many secondary students may actually be “teacher dependent” and have little understanding of how to be independent learners. The move into university and the emphasis on learning from primary sources may therefore, be difficult for many students. Underlying both these scenarios is a “meaning problem” (Smith 1989b:1). The students are having difficulty making sense of the articles they are reading, and then relating what they have read to the topic they are studying or writing about.

Once we started talking to the students in our first year language classes we realised that many students were reading the words but not actually interacting with the written word. Reading may be seen as a process of constructing meaning through the interaction of the reader and their prior knowledge (non-visual information) with the print (visual information) (Smith 1978, Goodman 1976, Sloan and Whitehead 1986). This prior knowledge involves content knowledge and knowledge about text. Many of our students were having difficulty with text knowledge as well as content knowledge. They did not have the keys to unlock the text for themselves and gain meaning from what they were reading.

During 1987 lecturers in the Department of English Education decided to run a pilot study skills program for first year students using the combined top level structure and semantic network structure being used by Kevin Smith (1989a) in his research with students in their final year of primary school. This study skills program was to be embedded in the first six weeks of the first year language education unit. These first six weeks focused (and still do focus) on the theory of language acquisition. It was hoped that by embedding the study skills program within this, students would more thoroughly understand the theories and concepts of language acquisition, as well as learning valuable study skills.

Aims of the study skills program:

- a) To enable students to get to know a member of the English Education staff in the interactive atmosphere of a weekly workshop session.
- b) To assist students to read factual text for understanding by leading them to seek out the implicit superordinate structure and related ideas in text material in order that they might understand the author's message, i.e. provide a scaffold (Bruner, 1976).
- c) To assist students to “reason out” (map) their thinking in specific writing tasks (Meyer, 1982).
- d) To enable students to acquire the crucial goals of orientation and purpose in their preparation for assignment tasks (Smith, 1989b).

Format:

1. One master lecture, one reading, and one workshop per week. The workshop and reading related directly to the topic of the master lecture.
2. Ten workshop groups of 17 students.
3. Workshop sessions were formally structured and teacher directed. Previous research (Meyer, 1981, 1982) indicated that since this was a skill that competent readers tended to develop for themselves students who were having difficulty had not "picked up" these skills in the course of their regular schooling. Therefore they needed direct instruction in order to learn the procedure. Once they had learnt the procedure they would then be able to develop in their own direction.

We were providing a "scaffold" (Bruner, 1976) to enable these students to gain knowledge about the structure of text. Once they had gained these skills the formal scaffold could be gradually removed and the students could then develop these skills in directions of their own choosing.

4. Weekly structure

*Individual work*

Students first read the text individually, "highlighting" or taking brief notes from the article.

*Pairs*

They then worked in pairs. This allowed cautious negotiation in an "intimate audience setting. This interactive process helped establish a reasonably clear task orientation and enabled students to begin the process of developing a diagrammatic "network" highlighting the important ideas in the text" (Smith 1989b:6)

*Fours*

Each group of two joined with another group in order to introduce their ideas to a wider audience, and receive new ideas in return. Semantic networks were modified on the basis of this discussion.

*Plenary*

Each group of four reported back on their discussion and displayed their semantic network. Similarities and differences were noted and discussed.

Evaluation of the initial pilot study, indicated that although 44% of the students found the semantic networks difficult, 86% found them to be an effective way of learning (7% found them to be an ineffective way of learning) and 65% found them to be helpful in understanding and summarising information (14% found them to be unhelpful).

This model has become an integral part of the first year language education unit, with some refinements: The first week of lectures and tutorials gives an

overview of the course and an introduction to the concepts and procedure for using the top-level structure of text and semantic networks for summarising and planning, plus opportunities to practice this with short articles and 'getting to know each other' activities.

Tutorial sessions now include a formal share time where any questions students may have about the content of the master lecture or the readings is discussed, and another experiential activity to assist students with understanding the concepts involved in language acquisition, so that the structured working through of each article undertaken in the initial pilot study has become one part of the tutorial rather than taking up the entire time. Students are now asked to do the individual reading in their own time before the master lecture, and bring a semantic network summarising the article to the tutorial with them.

The articles used in the introduction to the procedure and concepts involved in top level structuring and semantic webbing have also changed. Originally the articles were unrelated to language acquisition and some students had expressed confusion as to why these were being used. In 1994 this was changed with short articles relating to each of the topics covered in the master lectures being used to introduce each of the four types of structure used in factual text.

Students are also required to prepare weekly tutorial readings using a semantic network, and to use a semantic network to organise and sift material gathered for their first assignment. The semantic network is included in the finished assignment, and used for consultation with lecturers during the drafting process.

Analysis of a 1996 survey of one hundred and forty two year two and three Bachelor of Teaching students who had been taught this procedure in their first year of tertiary study indicates that although students may not use semantic networks in exactly the same form that we taught them, 78% are using them for summarising (7% all the time, 71% in an adapted form or for some summarising), and 80% are using them for planning for writing assignments (9% all the time, 73% in an adapted form or for some planning).

I had already developed a type of semantic network for summarising but had not used it for planning. By learning different forms of networks I have been able to refine my system and apply it to wider situations.

51% of students found them very useful or useful for summarising, only 4% found them to be of no use at all. Most students (88%) found them to be useful in identifying the main idea, supporting idea and examples. 49% found them very useful or useful for planning. Again only 4% found them to be of no use at all.

.... it gives a good overview, particularly identifying links.

Interestingly, even those students who did not find the semantic networks to be useful for themselves would use this technique with students in the primary school classroom. They all saw it as a technique that may be useful for students

either learning how to find and summarise information from factual text, and planning for factual writing, or having difficulty doing these.

Personally, I don't really like semantic networks for my own use, but I would teach them to children simply because different methods suit different people.

Student and staff surveys indicate that using this procedure has the following advantages:

- a) enables students to sort out main ideas, supporting ideas and examples, and the relationship of these concepts in the context of the overall structure
- b) provides a scaffold for reading, summarising and planning, that assists students to negotiate new theoretical concepts
- c) 'forces' the student to think about how writing is structured, and how different structures may be used by the author for different purposes/structure
- d) is an active search and questioning process that enables lecturers to monitor students comprehension
- e) enables students to contribute more knowledgeably in tutorials because they have had to sort and process the information, rather than presenting undigested notes
- f) improves structure and organisation of assignments.

As with all study skills techniques there are some disadvantages:

- a) clear explanation needs to be given about the concepts of factual text structure, hierarchal text structure and semantic networks
- b) initially semantic networks take time to do
- c) semantic networks can get very cluttered, however this may mean that too much information is being included
- d) can become too structured and rigid.

## TOP-LEVEL STRUCTURING AND EFL WRITING

This section of the paper provides a brief summary of the application of Top-level structuring in an a Foreign Language Department of a provincial teachers university in South-Western China. The course unit in student writing involved two hours of contact time plus "between-session" writing assignments. Initially the aims for the unit were rather vague but as the unit developed the following instructional objectives were devised:

- a) To acquire an understanding of the broad organising principles in expository text;
- b) To explore the 'schematic' potential of Top-level Structuring for various types of writing tasks;
- c) To introduce and explore the usefulness of four 'top-level' rhetorical structures in content area writing;

- d) To explore the effectiveness of 'graphic organizers' as a means of providing structure and form to writing.

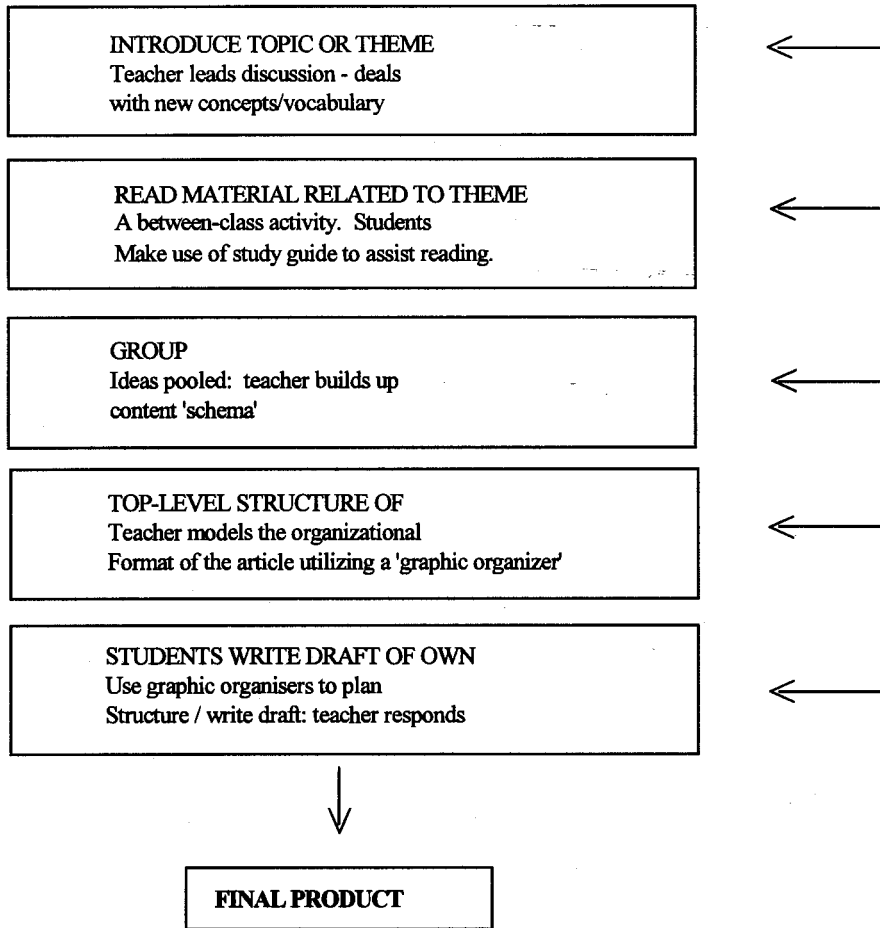
Underlying the effectiveness of the program were certain cognitive processing skills based on 'Top-level' structuring and related metacognitive thinking skills as outlined earlier in this paper. According to Kirkland and Saunders (1991) such skills relate to aspects of planning, assessment and repair in the process of writing. The model which was used in the work with the Chinese students was one derived from Kirkland and Saunders (1991) and subsequently modified to suit the writing needs of these EFL undergraduate students. The model is outlined below (Figure 1).

According to Kirkland and Saunders so called 'adept' writers are able to perform the metacognitive functions automatically, as part of their normal reading-writing-thinking strategy. However, many writers ("underprepared" writers) who are deficient in these skills can be empowered to perform them. Previous research by the presenters (refer earlier part of this paper) has demonstrated that undergraduate students can be taught effective strategies with metacognitive skills 'built in' to trigger important knowledge about the ordering of content within an appropriate 'structure schema'.

The current project with undergraduate EFL Chinese students was developed using similar guidelines. The process of using checklists and graphic organizers was particularly useful. In this model the concept of 'repair' was basic to shaping up a final product. Repair (as defined by Kirkland and Saunders, 1991) can occur at any point in the model. A student can repair his/her understanding of the concepts introduced initially in the topic or theme through group interaction and modelling by the teacher. The structure of the text can also go through phases of repair with the aid of graphic organizers and discussion. Clearly these metacognitive activities are not "tidy linear endeavours" (Kirkland & Saunders, 1991) but are very helpful as students grapple with the dual role of putting together content and structure during a writing task.

In the current project the second last segment of the modified Kirkland and Saunders model was an important phase of the process. At this point the students begin to bring together their cognitive and metacognitive 'experiences' which have been mediated through the modelling and interactive stages. The teacher's response to the draft is critical as a repair strategy at this stage. In general terms the teacher will respond to markers that signal the 'macro-structure' of the text - the rhetorical predicate format that shows that a text is organized hierarchically according to one or other of the main rhetorical forms outlined in this paper. In addition, the teacher will be on the lookout for 'signalling' words that assist in the processing of the text and help to keep it 'on track' in line with the chosen superordinate format. For instance, if the writer has chosen an argumentative rhetorical format such words or phrases as "on the one hand", "a further point to consider" etc. will be noted throughout the text.

FIGURE 1



(adapted from Kirkland & Saunders, 1991)

If students have understood the 'graphic organizer' procedure which has been the main focus of this paper then there will be little difficulty in organizing the text both hierarchically and in a linear form. Students in the project were generally successful writing well structured articles once they understood the mapping procedure.

### CONCLUSION

This paper has outlined theoretical and practical aspects of utilising 'Top-level' structuring in two tertiary institutions' literacy programs. Evidence for the effectiveness of such programs is presented along with suggested strategies for

utilizing graphics in the form of a 'semantic network' to enable students to map out the important ideas and hierarchical structure of content text material.

In the final analysis the impact and usefulness of any approach or set of strategies such as those outlined in this paper can only be effective provided that personnel are dedicated to carrying them out. The success of the programs described in the paper was due in no small part to the careful planning and hard work of a group of lecturers working in the Department of English Education over a number of years.

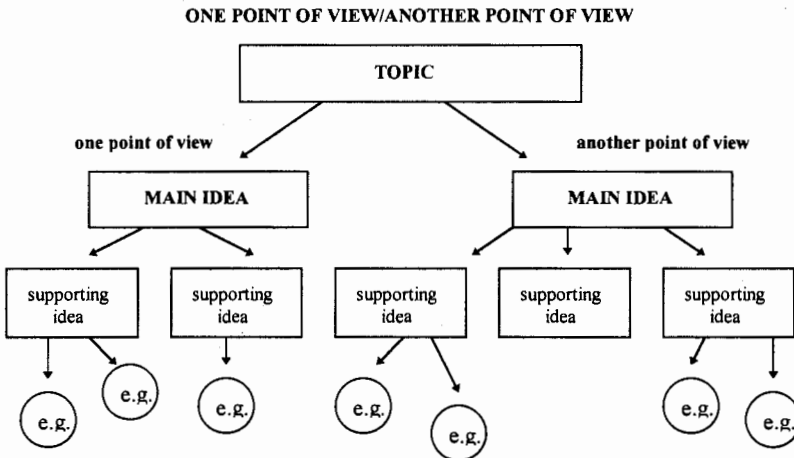
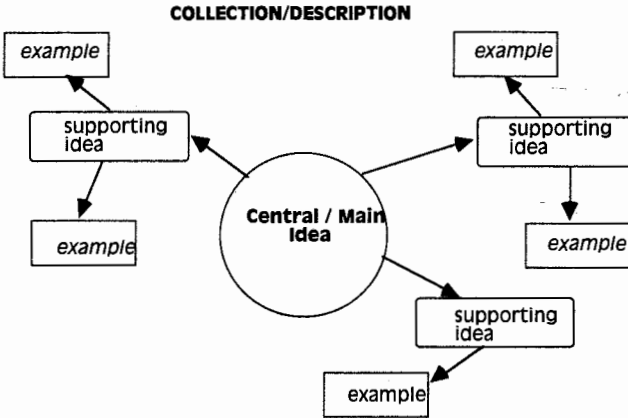
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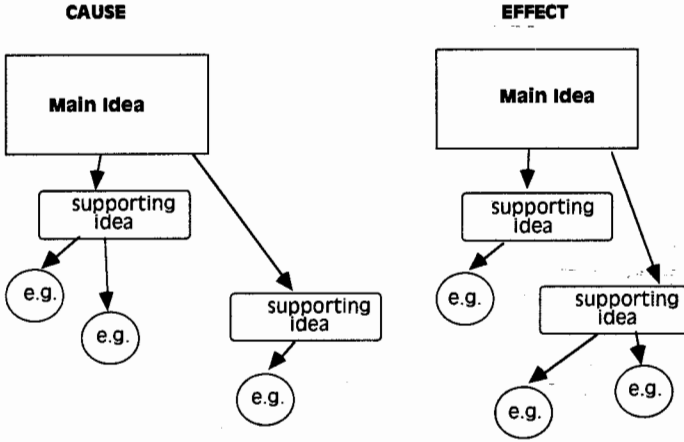
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APPENDIX

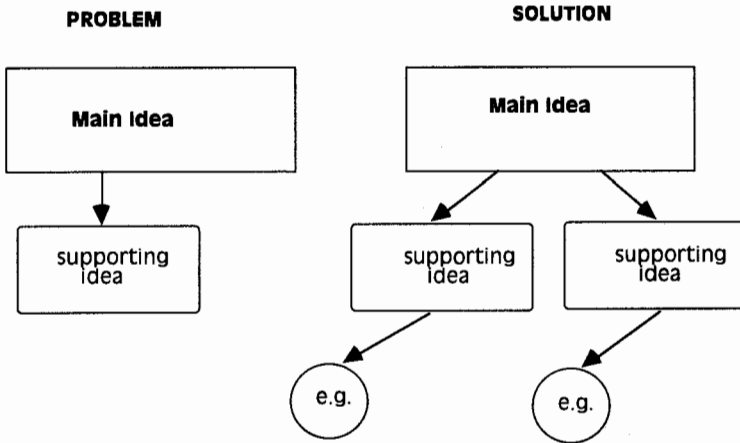


TOP-LEVEL STRUCTURING

**CAUSE AND EFFECT**



**PROBLEM / SOLUTION**



# Meeting the Challenge: Tertiary Literacy in a Non-Traditional Institution

**Jan Skillen**

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Much current research testifies to the need for tertiary literacy instruction in first year undergraduate courses. This need is especially apparent in non-traditional degree structures such as bachelors' degrees in agricultural colleges where students often enter with low TER's generally and with low English scores in particular. This poster will present the methods used in such a setting to advance the level of skills in tertiary literacy.

## **INTRODUCTION**

While current research testifies to the need for tertiary literacy instruction during university study, and particularly in the first year of study, this instruction may often be seen only as remedial. A more useful and sociolinguistically valid opinion, which was put forward by Beasley (1988), is that this instruction acts as an important and necessary initiation into the discourse of academia, and indeed into specific disciplines, rather than as a strategy which fulfils a remedial role. Such instruction or initiation strategies in non-traditional courses or for non-traditional students can be seen as especially valid because of the students' lack of exposure to academic discourse.

A project which is currently being undertaken by a non-traditional institution, Orange Agricultural College (a college of the University of Sydney), has as its central philosophy this initiatory view.

## **THE PROJECT**

The project has been designed to:

- identify and assess both the developmental (and remedial) needs of students in oral and written communication
- assist academic staff to integrate instruction in literacy skills into current course curricula
- develop systems and instructional materials suitable for the campus
- extend experience and knowledge in assessing and developing students' tertiary skills.

This range of outcomes, it is hoped, will be prescriptions for an improved literacy profile across the total student cohort, many of whom are non-traditional students.

### **LITERACY ASSESSMENT**

To achieve these outcomes, a number of strategies have been devised. The first and most central of these strategies is an assessment of the writing of all new students based on literacy criteria centred around the following areas:

- the accuracy and appropriateness of information retrieval and processing
- the clarity and generic appropriateness of the structure and development of the text to the task and its context
- the conformity of the text to appropriate patterns of academic English
- the conformity of the text to standard patterns of English grammar and syntax
- the accuracy and suitability of elements such as spelling and paragraphing.

These criteria are part of the MASUSS diagnostic procedure which was developed by the Learning Assistance Centre at the University of Sydney. This assessment tool was used because it enabled the College to construct a reliable tertiary literacy profile of the incoming student cohort which, in turn, would assist in pinpointing valid intervention or initiation strategies and content.

In the short term, one the most important and potentially the most effective of the strategies to be implemented will be the use of Independent Learning Packages, again produced by the Learning Assistance Centre. These provide instruction and exercises in tertiary literacy skills and consist of units in a number of different writing modules: essay writing, cohesive writing and grammar. Their provision to each student will be tailored to that student's diagnosed difficulties ensuring that there is a fit between what skills students still need to acquire and what instruction we offer. This is especially important in light of the current student cohort who have sometimes had little exposure to academic writing of any kind.

### **FURTHER STRATEGIES**

Further strategies already determined are:

- the provision of classes and workshops to all interested students, undergraduate and postgraduate, on general areas of need
- the provision of classes and workshops within course structures on specific areas of need
- the provision of materials and information about tertiary literacy to distance students via conventional and new technologies
- the adaptation of literacy instructional materials for those disciplines

represented on campus

- the commencement of work to integrate instruction in tertiary literacy into the curricula.

It is expected that the most important and long term strategy for the initiation of new students into the discourse of academia will be the curriculum development work of integrating literacy instruction into the curricula. This development work will be undertaken by integration teams consisting of the course or unit lecturer, a literacy specialist and an instructional designer.

Another long term strategy or goal will be the transfer of ownership of literacy issues from the literacy specialist to the content lecturers. When this is complete, all future new students will be initiated into both avenues of tertiary study, skills and content, at one and the same time.

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# Lecturers' Perceptions of Student Literacy: A Survey Conducted at the University of Newcastle

**Robyn Woodward-Kron  
Anita van der Wal**

*The Learning Skills Unit, The University of Newcastle*

Anecdotal evidence from lecturers and the media suggests that the standard of university students' writing is deteriorating. In order to assess the perceptions of university lecturers about undergraduate student writing, a survey (as part of a National Priority Reserve Fund grant) was conducted in November 1995 at the University of Newcastle. The survey consisted of 5 questions which sought information both on the type of texts students are required to write in a particular department, and on the type of errors lecturers perceive to be most prevalent at sentence and text level. Furthermore, lecturers were asked if they marked writing errors and if so, whether they took these errors into account when allocating marks. Surveys were sent to all 55 departments at the University of Newcastle with the request that the surveys be distributed to all teaching staff within the department.

From the twenty-five participating departments, Social Work had the widest range of genres. Spelling and grammatical errors were perceived as the most frequent errors at sentence level, while text organisation and paragraph organisation rated highly at text level errors. More than half of the respondents stated that they took writing errors into account when allocating marks for assignments. Approximately half of the respondents chose to add further comments which demonstrates the interest in the area of improving student literacy. This survey forms the starting point for the NPRF-funded project, which aims to develop a series of discipline specific literacy guides for university students and staff.

## **1. CONTEXT OF STUDENT LITERACY SURVEY**

The survey on lecturers' perceptions of student literacy was the first stage of the project *A Comprehensive Program for Literacy Support in the University Context*, funded by the NPRF grant. The purpose of the survey was to:

- survey lecturers' perceptions of student literacy
- inform lecturers across the university of the NPRF project
- seek lecturers' collaboration and co-operation for the NPRF project.

## 2. DISTRIBUTION OF SURVEY AND SURVEY DESIGN

Surveys were sent to all 55 Heads of Departments at the University of Newcastle with the request that the surveys be distributed to all teaching staff within the department. Sixty-two surveys were received from a range of departments. Participating departments and the number of participants per department have been included in Table 2.

The survey designers were keen to encourage a strong response; for this reason the survey did not include detailed descriptions for each question. Very detailed questions would have greatly increased the survey length requiring more of the respondents' time, which could have resulted in a decreased participation rate.

## 3. SURVEY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For this poster the most important findings of the survey have been summarised. The survey results are presented in the following format: i) survey question ii) results of the question iii) brief discussion of the results, and iv) lecturers' additional comments (where relevant).

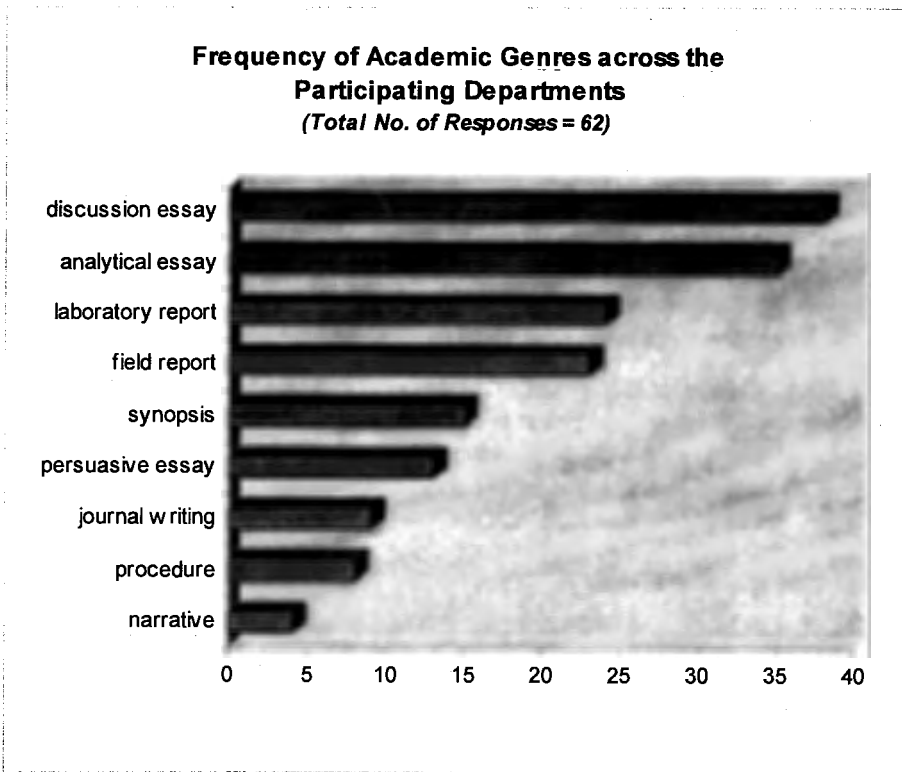
### 3.1 SURVEY QUESTION

Which of the following text types are undergraduate students required to write in your department?

- synopsis field report
- laboratory report
- analytical essay
- discussion essay
- persuasive essay (to persuade the reader to do something, or hold a particular opinion)
- journal writing
- narrative
- procedure

(The purpose of this question was to identify the academic genres students are required to produce for a specific Department. The information from this question allows the researchers to request samples of these genres from the relevant department for the NPRF project.)

The results for the type of texts required from undergraduate students in the participating departments are given in Table 1. Additional text types added by respondents are not included in this table. These are incorporated in Table 2.

**TABLE 1**

There was some perceived ambiguity about the distinction between the types of writing. For example, journal writing was interpreted in some responses as writing a journal article (some lecturers added in brackets 'scientific paper') rather than keeping a regular reflective record in the form of a personal journal. This ambiguity was certainly also present in the case of persuasive essays. Although a brief explanation of this genre was offered, the sense of arguing a thesis could also have been interpreted as a persuasive essay (hortatory exposition rather than analytical exposition, see Martin, 1985). This no doubt accounts for the considerable amount of responses that listed persuasive essays.

The results for the range of written genres required by participating departments are given in Table 2.

These results may or may not reflect respondents' familiarity with the writing requirements of other lecturers in the same Department. Furthermore, a related factor when evaluating the range of writing across the disciplines is the rate of departmental participation. For example, if only one response was received from a particular department, then this response may only reflect the type of writing

required by that lecturer in the discipline. As a result, Table 2 may give the impression that some participating departments do not require a range of written text types, whereas this may not be the case.

**Table 2: Range of Written Genres for Participating Departments**

	Social Work (4)*	Psychology (7)	Special Education (5)	Sociology and Anthropology (5)	Civil Engineering and Surveying (4)	Design (1)	Mechanical Engineering (5)	Commerce (4)	Geography (5)	Environmental & Occupational Health (1)	Occupational Therapy (1)	Nutrition & Dietetics (2)	Leisure and Tourism (1)	Architecture (1)	Modern Languages (2)	Fine Art (1)	Curriculum & Teaching (1)	Statistics (2)	Anatomy (1)	General Practice (1)	History (1)	Management (2)	Computer Science (2)	Physics (1)	Chemistry (1)	
Discussion Essay	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X			
Analytical Essay	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	
Laboratory Report		X			X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X						X	X	
Field Report	X	X	X		X				X		X	X	X									X				
Synopsis	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X					X											
Persuasive Essay	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X				X	X		X										
Journal Writing	X	X	X	X		X				X							X	X	X							
Procedure	X	X	X		X	X	X			X		X							X							
Narrative	X	X	X			X																				
<b>Other Genres</b>																										
Book Review				X																						
Submission for Funding	X																									
Research Report				X																						
Technical Report					X																					
Business Report								X																		
Project Report							X																			
Court Report	X																									
Short Answers to Questions				X																						
Seminar Diary				X																						
Professional Letter																					X					
Book Chapter																			X							
Case Study								X																		
Cognitive Map						X																				
<b>Totals</b>	10	9	8	7	7	7	6	5	5	5	5	5	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	1	

\* indicates the number of responses from department

### 3.2 SURVEY QUESTION

What type of errors do you frequently come across when marking undergraduate assignments? If possible please rank your responses.

at sentence level

- spelling
- punctuation: incorrect use of apostrophes, commas, colons, semi-colons
- grammatical errors

at text level

- texts are too 'spoken'
- incorrect use of linking words,
- text organisation: lack of cohesion between various parts of the essay
- poor paragraph organisation
- ignorance of quotation conventions
- students are unaware of the form of the text they should be writing

### Ranked Responses at Sentence Level

Twenty eight responses ranked the types of errors at sentence level. The results for the ranked responses are as follows:

TABLE 3: RANKED RESPONSES AT SENTENCE LEVEL

	spelling	punctuation	grammatical errors
Ranked 1	10 or 36%*	5 or 18%	13 or 46%
Ranked 2	9 or 32%	11 or 39%	8 or 29%
Ranked 3	9 or 32 %	12 or 43%	7 or 24%

(\* ) This percentage is of the total number of ranked responses (28)

### Other Responses at Sentence Level

Twenty-one of the other responses listed all three types of errors as being equally prevalent, whereas the remaining 11 respondents chose a combination of two options.

As can be seen in Table 3, spelling and grammatical errors tend to be the most prevalent type of error at sentence level, while in the other responses no clear option dominated.

### Lecturers' additional comments:

A number of responses in this section incorporated additional comments. Students' use of apostrophes was particularly commented upon (eg. *really dreadful; especially possessives; many students don't use apostrophes at all*), while the type of spelling error noted was incorrect use of homophones. Three respondents commented that spell check on computers had no doubt contributed to an acceptable standard of spelling.

### Ranked and Other Responses at Text Level

From the results shown in Table 4 it appears that both text organisation (lack of cohesion) and poor paragraph organisation emerge as the most frequent type of perceived errors at text level.

### Lecturers' additional comments:

Sample comments about the types of errors listed are given below:

- *texts are too 'spoken' i.e. the type of language chosen is more appropriate for speech 'no, too often it is not even close to speech!'*
- *text organisation 'I find students too often do a "cut and paste" from articles, texts etc which leads to problems with overall organisation'; 'often a good indication of plagiarism'*
- *poor paragraph organisation 'one sentence paragraphs'*
- *ignorance of quotation conventions 'very, very common problem'*

### 3.3 SURVEY QUESTION

Do you take marking errors into account when allocating marks? Yes/No

- definitely
- depends on the quality of the content
- if the meaning is obscured by the errors
- occasionally

The results for this question of consideration of writing errors when allocating marks are given in Table 5.

**TABLE 5: CONSIDERATION OF WRITING ERRORS WHEN ALLOCATING MARKS**

definitely	20 responses or 32%
depends on the quality of the content	15 responses or 24 %
if the meaning is obscured by errors	32 responses or 52%
occasionally	6 responses or 10%
did not deduct marks for writing errors	3 responses or 5%

NB. The sum of all results in Table 5 is larger than 100% as multiple nominations occurred.

Although more than half of the respondents replied that they deducted marks if the meaning was obscured by errors, the result of nearly one third of respondents stating that they definitely considered writing errors when allocating marks is of more significance for students. One respondent added the comment *but even when (the) meaning (is) not obscured, it must affect my marking, although not a 'conscious consideration'*. This suggests that the result of 1/3 of respondents definitely taking errors into account could be higher.

### 3.4 LECTURERS' FURTHER COMMENTS

The final survey question gave respondents the opportunity to add further comments. Thirty-five of the 62 respondents (56%) chose to include further comments. The type of comments fall into the following categories:

- proposed causes of perceived poor literacy standards amongst students
- expansion on type of errors that are prevalent
- proposed strategies for raising the standards of student literacy
- mechanisms in place at a departmental level to improve student literacy

#### 1) PROPOSED CAUSES OF PERCEIVED POOR LITERACY STANDARDS AMONGST STUDENTS

Several respondents offered reasons for the perceived low standard of tertiary literacy. One commented on spelling, *spelling is particularly bad since Australians are 'lazy' speakers*, while another felt the schools were partly responsible, *schools are definitely lax about this*. Another suggested that a general decline in reading for leisure may be a contributing factor.



## II) EXPANSION ON TYPE OF ERRORS THAT ARE PREVALENT AND LECTURERS' CONCERNS

Approximately twenty lecturers made comments that can be categorised under this heading. Lecturers were concerned about, for example, inclusion of slang in writing, inappropriate abbreviations, failure to proofread, plagiarism: *It is very distressing to find that it is only when students are using the words of authors that they manage to make sense*, circumlocution, syntax, and the inability of students to appreciate the importance of literacy. Lecturers' attitudes were evident in choice of lexis such as *appalling, amazed, annoyed, distressing*.

Several lecturers stated that it was not a lecturer's responsibility to address student literacy: *It should not be the responsibility of university staff to teach such basic skills and I imagine those sorts of things have been covered at an earlier age, while many gave their support to the project outlined in the covering letter accompanying the survey: There is a real need for your proposed course for students and A lot of the student difficulty relates to either poorly defined writing tasks or lack of demonstrated examples of 'how to' style. This needs to be taught within the subject to have credibility with the students.* Furthermore, three lecturers commented on literacy in the workplace: eg *We are getting feedback from field educators that students' standard of writing patient files is appalling.*

## III) PROPOSED STRATEGIES FOR RAISING THE STANDARDS OF STUDENT LITERACY

Three respondents included proposed strategies for raising the standards of literacy. One suggested the introduction of a 'college' writing course in the first year of study, while another wished to introduce entry tests and compulsory remediation classes. The third respondent suggested interactive computer programs to teach basic literacy skills.

## IV) MECHANISMS IN PLACE AT A DEPARTMENTAL LEVEL FOR IMPROVING STUDENT LITERACY

These responses described the importance the department and/or individual lecturer places on literacy and how this concern is reflected in, for example, assignment marking criteria, availability of model essays to students, and discussions with students about the importance of literacy. One respondent commented that students in his/her department were only required to 'fill in the blanks' in their laboratory manual, while in 2nd year *we teach them to write a decent scientific report (use of passive, proper introduction, topic sentence etc).*

## 4. CONCLUSION

This survey on staff perceptions of student literacy investigated the type of errors that lecturers found to be prevalent at sentence and text levels in students' writing. It is important for students that a significant number of lecturers from participating departments took these errors into consideration when allocating marks. Furthermore, over half of the respondents chose to include further comments. This demonstrates the interest in the area of improving student literacy.

## LECTURERS' PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT LITERACY

This survey formed the initial stage of the project *A Comprehensive Program for Literacy Support in the University Context*. The next stage of the project is to develop discipline specific writing guides in collaboration with departments which participated strongly in the survey.

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# Tertiary Literacy Conference Summary: What will Count as Tertiary Literacy in the Year 2000?

**Terry Threadgold**

*English Department and Arts Graduate School, Monash University*

**Doug Absalom**

*Faculty of Education, University of Newcastle*

**Zosia Golebiowski**

*Conference Convenor, Victoria University of Technology*

The concluding session of the conference consisted of a summary session presented by a number of the delegates who attempted to identify the major themes and directions of the conference papers. Specific trends included the pleasing cooperation between literacy specialists and academic subject specialists in a changing socio-academic context that placed pressures on both student and lecturer. Not so pleasing was the final point made by conference convenor, Zosia Golebiowski, that scholars with Non-English Speaking Backgrounds, are finding difficulty in having their work published, which indicates some pockets of resistance to the general realisation of literacy change among academic institutions.

## **SUMMARY OF TERRY THREADGOLD'S CLOSING COMMENTS**

My impression is that the greatest single problem we face at present is the disjunction between what 'Literacy Workers' and academics in the traditional disciplines actually know about literacy and practice as the teaching of literacy. The term 'Literacy Worker' is an unfortunate one - its refusal at this conference because it suggests workers and bosses is indicative - it does suggest that 'they', the workers, have the job of literacy training and 'we', the academics, do not. I think that the single biggest issue on the agenda for tertiary literacy at the moment is finding ways of enabling these two groups to speak and hear one another. It probably requires some re-training on both sides. The disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences are using discourses - poststructuralism, feminism, postcolonialism, etc., - which those working in literacy fields do not always know well. On the other hand, the discourses of linguistics and pedagogy with which the Literacy field operates are not understood very well at all in the academy. There is a crucial need for translation and for re-training on both sides, and this requires resources which, on the whole, the tertiary institutions do not have.

I was told a couple of anecdotes at the conference about the levels of incomprehension that actually exist. One was given to me by someone who works with postgraduate students trying to give them skills in thesis writing, etc., which the academics at her institution do not always provide. She told a funny story of the academic supervisor of one of her students asking the student, after a visit to the skills tutor, "Yes. but what does she tell you down there?" But in more general terms, there has always been this level of incomprehension and lack of recognition. Traditional academically trained personnel tend to regard the business of teaching literacy as 'remedial' instead of 'essential' - viz. the way the institutions which do this work tend to be located on the margins of the campuses or in another place altogether - and the attempts that have occurred in recent memory to have these people re-classified as non-academic staff. It is women's work and therefore not highly valued in the academy.

It's time this changed but under-funded tertiary institutions are not going to find the changes easy when there is no money for retraining at any level. At this conference, we have heard a number of interesting developments where academics are working together with staff trained to teach literacy - in Engineering, Nursing, Business and Economics - and this is having a re-training effect within the academy. It is not, it seems to me, happening nearly often enough in the traditional Humanities and Social Sciences where I believe that we have to acknowledge that our student clientele are no longer a homogeneous middle-class group. We have students from all social classes, NESB and overseas. We have to acknowledge our responsibility to make explicit to those students the reading and writing requirements of the disciplines in which we work. That means that we have to teach and think differently and we have to collaborate with the trained literacy providers in our institutions to do it. Translation and resources are actually urgently necessary at a national level and in every tertiary institution.

### **SOME CLOSING COMMENTS BY DOUG ABSALOM**

Almost all of the papers at this conference have highlighted the massive changes that have occurred in our society and the implications that these have had for our tertiary literacy environments. Changes have occurred (or in some cases have simply been recognised) in terms of multiculturalism, computerisation, organisational adjustment (eg. the subsuming of C.A.E.s into universities) and funding responsibilities, whereby universities are being required to become more self-sufficient, and thus more responsive to the needs of specific commercial clients. In relation to the nature of literacy, these changing contexts have done several things:-

1. They have created an awareness and a questioning of literacy practices, partially through the enforced contrasts of lecturers having to adjust to an increasing number of students who speak English as a second language, and partially through the growing realisation of the complexities of literacy. These complexities relate to the requirements of individual disciplines, to the success of alternative formats and the failure of some of our old simplistic rules to

account adequately for language variations. These types of complexity have been recurrent themes throughout a majority of the papers here.

2. This new awareness has led to a realisation of the specialised nature of literacy studies and this conference has provided a great deal of evidence of subject disciplines calling on the literacy expertise of our academic support units to help solve literacy and communication problems. Unfortunately, this recognition has not provided a corresponding increase in salary, power or tenure for literacy specialists so the discipline itself is still disadvantaged in relation to research funding and institutional change, but the recognition itself is evidence of progress. However, there are still many areas, paradoxically perhaps in Education and Arts faculties, where this awareness still needs to be brought home to pockets of stubborn resistance.

3. Possibly under the influence of systemic functionalism, the emphasis in the literacy papers at this conference has been placed very heavily on contexts and the process of framing, rather than on the traditionally inward looking analysis procedures, although there have been one or two papers retaining balance by looking at such areas. It is interesting to note that, as specialists appear to be moving away from such analytical emphasis, and as computers become more competent in providing such things as spell-check, gram-check and even punctuation checks, there seems to be a growing public demand for people to know more about the "inner workings" of language, as was illustrated in Gillian Ferguson's paper. Perhaps an ongoing need here is to illustrate to people the explanatory power of the wider contextual approach and to build confidence in people's ability to cope with changing contexts.

4. A possible danger in emphasizing contextual variation of literacy skills may be that of overspecialisation, wherein many of the principles discovered in any one area are seen as being specific to that area and not transferable to others. This tends to cause conference papers to appear to be more anecdotal than analytical at times, but at this conference we have seen some commendable balance, with descriptive, qualitative analysis standing comfortably beside the quantitative, data-based approach of such excellent papers as that from Griffith university, wherein ability analyses are being looked to as predictors of course success, as well as for the individual insights that can be provided from the analyses themselves.

5. As a physical corollary of this emphasis on context and framing, many papers at this conference have illustrated the situation of the literacy specialist working in direct collaboration with the subject specialist, so that literacy skills are being taught in realistic and applicable contexts, rather than in abstract isolation. The resultant cross-fertilization is benefiting and expanding both the concept of literacy itself and the specialisations that use its precepts. Thus we can feel very secure that our area of study is a very dynamic one and perhaps just a little chagrined that there remains a great deal of work still to be done.

### **CLOSING COMMENTS BY ZOSIA GOLEBIOWSKI**

The Conference has looked at Tertiary Literacy as a foundation for knowledge acquisition and dissemination. It has addressed the question of needs for tertiary literacy programs at all levels: from students in undergraduate and graduate courses to research students and academics wishing to publish their research and achieve visibility in relevant scientific communities. Ian Reid described literacy as a competency underlying and securing all major competencies and Lesley Parker talked of the ability to communicate in a variety of contexts as an essential outcome of university education.

The view of literacy emerged as a continuum relevant to every area of tertiary study. We seemed to agree that Tertiary Literacy should not be seen as a sole responsibility of literacy specialists but a responsibility of all involved in tertiary education. The aim of the conference was to reach all tertiary educators. To what degree has this aim been fulfilled? Among the 250 Conference participants and presenters, apart from tertiary literacy specialists, we have had representatives from a variety of disciplines, including accounting, applied linguistics, chemistry, communication, computer science, education, industry education, various branches of engineering, English literature, health sciences, history, information science, law, linguistics, mathematics, nursing, psychology, physiotherapy, social science, as well as research, learning, study skills and professional development centres and equity and social justice units. Conference delegates represented almost all Australian universities as well as many overseas tertiary institutions.

Many of the conference papers resulted from the applied linguist/specialist lecturer partnerships. What has arisen as a preferable situation is the combined ownership of literacy in a tertiary institution. I will not elaborate on this issue further as it has already been commented on by Doug Absalom. Doug has also talked about the transformation of context of tertiary literacy due to socio-cultural, informational and organisational changes within academia. The clientele of Australian universities is no longer homogeneous. Tertiary students and academics come from multiple social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The increasingly multicultural nature of Australian academia creates such specific demands as adaptation of curricula to encompass and satisfy diverse approaches to teaching and learning and introduction and delivery of language, communication and acculturation programs.

I would hope that in the year 2000 Australian academia will learn to make use of linguistic and cultural resources which enrich our universities and challenge attitudes to knowledge dissemination and acquisition which have long been uncontested. As has been mentioned by Tony Liddicoat, it should be our role to create and implement Tertiary Literacy policies aiming at inclusion rather than exclusion of culturally diverse discourse patterns, styles of scholarly communication and traditions of learning and teaching.

In terms of acceptance of diverse forms of academic communication, the picture has been rather bleak so far. Surveys of journals of international aspiration

publishing in English point to a large degree of exclusion of NESB scholars. Swales' survey (1985) of such journals revealed that in the field of health sciences, 72% of the authors were native English speakers, and in the field of economics, 88% were native English speakers. Richard Baldauf's study (1986) found that the majority of NESB writers for the *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* published articles with English speaking co-authors, came from or studied in English speaking countries. It seems that there is only one way for NESB scholars to maintain visibility in their scientific communities - they must not only be able to write in English, but also in a style accepted and recommended by publishers and editors who are the gate-keepers of Anglo-American rhetorical patterns. Hill et al (1982) note that the skill of reading and writing research articles in an acceptable organisational pattern is paramount for success in the world of science. Swales (1987) suggests the likelihood of an existence of 'a lost generation' of well trained but quasi-visible NNS scholars and researchers in many parts of the world and in many fields. I hope that the year 2000 will see changes in this respect and gatekeepers will not equate difference with inferiority.

The Conference has created a great deal of interest in the media. It has been reported in, and Conference participants have been interviewed by *The Age*, *The Australian*, *Campus Review* and *Herald Sun*, as well as various radio stations. The main question we have been asked was whether holding a Conference on Tertiary Literacy meant a sudden decline in literacy standards in higher education. And it seems that the answer in most cases was no, there has not been a sudden decline, but new contexts of Tertiary Literacy need to be addressed. There is an urgent need to redefine Tertiary Literacy due to the introduction of new electronic forms of discourse, new higher education clientele, and new workplace requirements.

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