

A historical literature review of Australian publications in the field of Academic Language and Learning in the 1980s: Themes, schemes, and schisms: Part Two

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(Received 11 June 2010; Published online 29 April 2011)

In Australia, language and academic skills advisers have been responsible for designing and delivering programs to develop tertiary students' academic writing since the early 1980s. Thirty years on, the Association for Academic Language and Learning (AALL) has begun compiling a searchable database of Australian publications in this field. I am engaged in a historical review of this literature, with the aim of orienting readers to the philosophical, pedagogical and professional issues that have occupied academic language and learning (ALL) practitioners in our region. This article, in two parts, surveys the literature of the formative decade of the 1980s which shaped a distinctive Australian approach to ALL, with a focus on mediating the epistemologies, purposes, forms and conventions of the disciplines, as revealed in their texts.

Part One traces the development of ALL from its origins, often in counselling services, charged with mediating problems attributed to the expansion of Australian tertiary education by remediating its "non-traditional" students. Part Two looks at the position of ALL practitioners in the wider context of institutional approaches to teaching and learning. Generally, academic developers were tasked with working with lecturers, while ALL advisers worked with students. Differences in the way these groups conceptualised their problems and solutions had implications for both their practice and their position in the institution. ALL practitioners commonly learned from and with individual students and their texts, and drew upon linguistics to develop a specialised discourse about tertiary literacy in which mastery of disciplinary discourses was often seen as crucial. In comparison, the academic developers' more accessible and ostensibly universal theory of "deep" or "surface" learning, and the higher status associated with working with lecturers, cemented the influence of this group and arguably contributed to further marginalisation of the role of ALL practitioners.

Key Words: academic literacies, language and learning, Australian higher education, study skills, equity, non-traditional students

1. Introduction

In the first part of this study, I have outlined the context for a review of the literature of academic language and learning (ALL) in the nineteen-eighties¹. The profession was, at that time, very young, having evolved out of the provision of counselling to students from the mid nineteen-sixties. It was poised between a substantial growth in student numbers since the Second World War, and the “massification” that is conventionally traced to the amalgamation of universities with the lower, more vocational tier of Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs) mandated by the Dawkins reforms of 1988. While these institutions catered mainly for recently matriculated, middle-class anglo-Australian students, their student bodies did include international students, first and second generation migrant students, increasing numbers of mature aged students, and a very few Indigenous students (for details, see Part I of the study). Academic language and learning support was offered by “study skills counsellors” in classes or individual appointments, and efforts to improve the efficacy of teaching were made by staff in academic development roles, predominantly informed by the theorising on “deep” and “surface” learning coming out of Sweden via the UK at this time. As foreshadowed in Part I, this second section will be devoted to examining a divergence between skills counsellors and academic developers and its implications for the subsequent development of ALL.

In the 1980s, ALL practitioners and academic developers did not constitute separate professional communities, as the conference proceedings from that decade attest. These give us a window on a time before our role had become largely distinct from counselling and academic development, and when our professional community included a wider range of people. The conferences of both the Higher Education Research and Development Association of Australasia (HERDSA), and the “Study Skills” community who met roughly annually at conferences with varying titles, were attended by skills counsellors from the CAEs, librarians, and lecturers from the disciplines, as well as by academic developers and university ALL practitioners (see Marshall, 1990a; Meyer, 1984; Quintrell, 1985a; and the various conference proceedings’ tables of contents: Bock & Gassin, 1982; Chan, 1983; Dennis, 1989; Edwards & Barraclough, 1989; Jones & Horsburgh, 1986; Kratzing, 1990a; Marshall, 1990b; Meyer, 1984; Miller & Sachse-Akerlind, 1987; Mullins, 1989; Quintrell, 1985b; Ross, 1991). For much of the decade, there is only a little evidence that “skills” advisors were concerned about forging a professional identity (Beasley, 1983, p. 5; Quintrell, 1985a, no page). However, by its end, a core of like-minded colleagues at several institutions had laid a foundation for developments in the nineties, when larger numbers were able to communicate more coherently, and interact more cohesively, than the folk who talked, at times across one another, during that formative decade.

2. An early vision

A direction for ALL was set, in fact, in 1978 with Gordon Taylor’s article in *VESTES*, “Coming to terms with English expression in the university”. *VESTES* was the Journal of the Federation of Australian University Staff Associations, concerned with “institutional issues and staff issues”; and, situated in the Higher Education Advisory and Research Unit at Monash University, Taylor combined the functions of an academic developer and an ALL adviser. In this article, he argued that a return to basics, resorting to remedial teaching to address the

¹ I refer to this field as ALL, although the term was not in use in the eighties; there was no common term to designate the field at that time (“learning skills counsellors” was frequent, but not standard), but it is convenient to have one for the purposes of this review. This should not be taken, however, to suggest that there was a unity of views among members of this field, nor that they undertook collective actions as a professional group, as the Association for Academic Language and Learning (AALL) does today. The nature, structure and identity of academic skills development was both various and unstable over the period under review.

writing problems of university students, was misguided because “a writer’s poor English is often bound up very closely with his confusions about the content and rhetoric of his various disciplines” (Taylor, 1978, p. 34). For this reason, a “subject specialist” and “English specialist” should work together to pre-empt such confusions, and Taylor (1978) thought “It may be possible to improve markedly the mechanical quality of students’ writing by changing slightly the focus of some tutorials and lectures in a course so that the underlying issues are accentuated” (p. 36). For Taylor (1978), students’ errors are something we should try to “make sense” of; a study of errors should tell us something about students’ struggles to make meaning, and “no effective remedial or preventive action on a large scale can be expected without the understanding such study would hope to provide” (p. 36). Taylor’s other publications in this decade demonstrate how he did this, with close readings of passages from students’ essays in which they are having difficulty with particular types of phrasing (Taylor 1980, 1986b, 1988).

Given Taylor’s conviction that language and content are inseparable, and that problems of expression are essentially problems with the discourse of a discipline, it made sense that “English specialists” would take an active role in shaping disciplines’ curricula. The “job description” Taylor (1978) proposed included a focus on students’ writing and “assist[ing] students in the very real problems of reading and taking notes”, as he noted that “few people see plagiarism as the essentially linguistic problem it is” (p. 37). However, he went well beyond this into “many other advisory roles” such as workshops with staff examining the “setting of essay topics, the writing in and of textbooks and other teaching materials, the linguistic implications of alternative modes of assessment, the reliability of essay assessments, and the patterns of speech discourse in tutorials” (Taylor, 1978, p. 37).

Taylor (1978) went on to ask a question that has continued to be problematic: “how best to institutionalise [this kind of work] within the university” (p. 37). He noted that in Australia, nobody was responsible for “service English”, unlike North America with its “cumbersome, expensive paraphernalia of [remedial] ‘writing clinics’”; instead, “Each of the Australian universities who have appointed a member of staff to work on students’ English has adopted a different solution” (Taylor, 1978, p. 37). He did not think that this responsibility should rest with a particular department, like English, or with a

student services centre whose contact with academic staff is fitful. A faculty or school attachment may be suitable where the focus is on a narrower range of disciplines. Language centres ... may be a happy home. For those universities who have a “higher education” or “teaching and learning” unit ... this may be the most effective placement. The language dimension can thus be integrated with the other advisory and research concerns of such units, and an infrastructure such as the English specialist needs will already exist. In any setting he² requires three fundamental things: contact with staff, students to teach and learn from, and time to think. (Taylor, 1978, p. 37)

Readers today may feel a wistful regret for the last of those requirements.

3. Competing perspectives on students’ difficulties with learning

In the decade that followed, Taylor’s questions continued to be asked at each conference of ALL professionals: what are the reasons for students’ struggles with academic writing; and who should help them, where, and how? The answers to the second question depended upon the answers to the first. Broadly, it seems that there were three ways of conceiving the situation.

One perspective saw students as lacking generic skills that ought to have been supplied earlier – such skills as analysing an assignment, reading efficiently, selecting and noting relevant information, structuring an answer, editing, and referencing. In this view, the problem was not in the university, but not exactly in the students either. It was in their equipment – their

² Editor’s note: Although it is JALL policy to use gender inclusive language, the use of masculine pronouns to refer to both males and females was still common practice in the 1980s.

repertoire of strategies – and this could be supplied by an academic skills specialist teaching courses unconnected with those students' learning in the disciplines.

A second perspective saw the problem in the student's approach to learning: when students opt for a "surface" approach, seeking only to produce enough information to pass, rather than to understand their subject "deeply", the problem might be in the student, or it might be in the way s/he is taught. Further refinement located the problem in the *relation* between students and teaching; that is, students would adopt the learning approach they perceived their teachers to require, either surface or deep for any particular task. In this view, students with a personal preference for surface learning should be trained in metacognitive reflection that might lead them to go deeper; and/or, if the curriculum was designed to reward surface learning, it should be changed to encourage deep learning.

The third perspective saw the nature of academic discourses as problematic for students when they first encounter the cultures of enquiry within their various disciplines and the textual genres that belong to each of these. In this perspective, the problem is not a general one of equipment or approach, but a particular one of epistemology and convention. It cannot be solved without reference to the student's work in the disciplines.

4. An early emphasis on contexts and cultures

All three perspectives can be seen to inform the conference proceedings in the early eighties. Although a piece in the *ANU Reporter* titled, "Study skills acquiring increasing importance" (13/06/1980), attests that the first such conference was held in 1980 at the ANU, the first extant proceedings are from 1982. This volume (Bock & Gassin, 1982) displays a small group of university professionals trying to tease out the nature of students' problems with writing, while also deliberating on Taylor's question of how best to institutionalise assistance; and here, the third perspective was clearly dominant.

We can only envy the context of insightful, well-informed support for this effort evinced by the keynote speaker, Elizabeth Dines of the Commonwealth Department of Education. A linguist herself, Dines (1982) identified the factors relevant to students' success in academic communications as "role relationships between participants, degree of mastery of language appropriate to the specific situation, and subcultural and inter-cultural differences in styles of argument and modes of discourse" (pp. 3-4). She recognised that these factors were not peculiar to overseas students, for rural students often came from homes "where verbal reticence is valued"; moreover,

the particular problem of students coming from homes where the communicative norms are very different from those operating in tertiary institutions is shared to some degree by all students as they come to grips with the modes of thinking and styles of discourse of the various academic disciplines. The difficulties are exacerbated for migrant and overseas students from other cultures. (Dines, 1982, p. 8)

Dines (1982, p. 9) observed that local NESB students need continuing support, and urged universities to develop policies "covering the assessment of language needs on enrolment [and] the provision of support services" as they did for overseas students; in this, she was identifying a problem that is still unresolved twenty-eight years later, and has recently been the focus of a national project under the auspices of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) (2008). Dines' (1982) vision of the role of ALL advisers in this regard was gratifying, if unlikely:

Student advisers have an important role to play here in sensitising the whole staff to their responsibility in supporting ESL students and in training them to recognise language problems [This] may not be easy [but] The alternative is to collapse under the burden of an impossible case load. (p. 10)

The next presenter, nevertheless, judged the caseload at the Australian National University to be about right: John Clanchy (1982) had just returned from a study tour of support services in North America, the UK and Ireland, which confirmed his view that “The model we have evolved of a small advisory unit, working co-operatively with both students and academic staff, offering highly individualised tuition and seeking to develop students’ cognitive, writing and study skills within disciplinary contexts, is effective, practicable and relatively inexpensive” (p. 26). In the U.S., he had been unimpressed by the vast size, resources, and range of services characteristic of student learning centres with their staffs of paid peer tutors addressing mechanical “surface” errors, or by freshman composition classes where “vast numbers of ‘press-ganged’ students [are] engaged in writing exercises that bear little or no relation to the actual writing they are doing in their discipline studies and in which their intellectual energies are genuinely engaged” (Clanchy, 1982, p. 25). In the UK and Ireland, by contrast, he found a “relative paucity” of support services for students and staff. Most universities had someone working with students and one or more people working with staff, in “an atmosphere of isolation” where universities did not “believe it is a university’s function to teach students to write well” (Clanchy, 1982, pp. 23-24). However, he found their methods much closer to his own, and he was particularly interested

(and surprised) to find that some of the most interesting insights into methods of learning were being developed by English as Second Language teachers, a group of people sometimes regarded as uninspiring linguistic technicians. ... Dissatisfied with current aims and methodologies, they have gone back to fundamental questions: what is the purpose for which students are learning English? What is/are the context(s) in which they will be using it? What intellectual and cultural (rather than simply ‘social’) adjustments will they be required to make in studying within a Western intellectual tradition, etc? (Clanchy, 1982, p. 25)

Zuber-Skerritt (1982) was less sanguine about the state of academic skills support in Australia. She expressed surprise at learning, from a survey of all Australian universities and other tertiary institutions, “how little systematic and integrated work has been done in this area” (p. 32). While counselling services offered a few “voluntary, added-on workshops; and many useful handouts or booklets on the various study skills” (Zuber-Skerritt, 1982, p. 33), the approach taken in Zuber-Skerritt’s School of Modern Asian Studies (MAS) at Griffith University was apparently unique. Her Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching (CALT) worked with MAS to integrate academic skills into its Foundation Course. Although their booklet for students covered generic skills – “time management, self organisation,” “taking notes,” “reading skills,” “writing essays and assignments”, the tasks in their workshops used course material, for example “to find books and journal articles for tutorial topics as part of a library exercise” and “to take notes from an actual lecture and from a book chapter” (Zuber-Skerritt, 1982, p. 33, p. 32).

In a table contrasting the common approach to teaching skills with hers, Zuber-Skerritt (1982) postulates that study skills sessions should not be add-ons but integrated; “should not be restricted to discussing skills and techniques but should use course material as the basis and content of discussion” ; and should not

be taught by outside specialists who are not involved in teaching the rest of the course (e.g., CALT faculty) but should be conducted by faculty staff who can follow up and further develop the skills throughout the course, but who need some training and advice in conducting these workshops, especially in group dynamics, learning processes etc. (pp. 39-40)

Zuber-Skerritt (1982) did not see the role of ALL professionals as “outside experts who teach study skills in general rather than subject-related, but, like CALT in this case study, [as people who] work together with teaching staff in and throughout their first-year course” (p. 41), providing advice based on research literature, giving workshops on teaching, and participating in study skills sessions with students “as observation sessions for staff” (i.e. modelling). In these ways, ALL staff would be “a member of the teaching team in designing, conducting and

reviewing study skills workshops for the first year of operation [and] ... compile a manual for faculty staff who will conduct these workshops independently (i.e., without CALT) in subsequent years” (Zuber-Skerritt, 1982, p. 41). I have quoted extensively from this paper because the ideas – and the practices described – not only were revolutionary at the time, but remain so. They testify to the advantages Taylor suggested might accrue from working in an academic development unit, but the actual collaboration in teaching goes beyond the opportunities such units commonly offer for working with students as well as staff.

5. A vision stalled

The chief question for this study, then, is why this kind of collaboration stalled as the decade progressed, and has developed so fitfully since then despite a growing consensus that location in the disciplines is indispensable to effective development of academic language and learning (see, for example, Percy & Stirling, 2005). Baik and Greig (2009) found, as recently as 2009, that “the most common approach to LAS [language and academic skills] development is still a generic study skills model typically consisting of extra-curricula short courses and workshops on various academic skills” – although all respondents to a benchmarking survey “acknowledge[d] that discipline-specific forms of support are better attended, more relevant for students and therefore more motivating” (pp. 402-403). According to Emerson and Clerehan (2009, p. 170), “Writing has been theorised by ALL researchers not so much as a tool for arguing, discussing, and expressing opinion [as in the US] – but as a means of ‘learning, navigating, and inhabiting or transforming the specific disciplines of academia’ (Skillen & Purser, 2003, p. 5)”. For this reason, “The consistent emphasis ... for practitioners in Australia has been on integrating the understanding and teaching of writing within the context of the particular discipline” (Emerson & Clerehan, 2009, p. 169). Similarly, Moore and Hough (2005) have characterised the idea that skills cannot be learnt apart from content as perhaps “the closest thing we have to a core belief in the field”. If, as we see from the Proceedings of the 1982 conference, this is not a recent but a foundational belief, why has it had to struggle so hard to be institutionalised?

As usual, the answer is complex, but it unfolds around a disconnection between the views of some discourse-focussed university ALL practitioners and learning-focussed academic developers on the question of how best to encourage students’ learning. (In focussing on this divergence, I do not mean to suggest that either group was univocal, nor that other approaches did not exist in either professional community. When I refer to either group in what follows, it should be understood that I am focussing on some members of that community, rather than setting up “camps”. For a more finely-grained account of the early history of academic development, readers may be interested in a study by Grant et al., 2009.) This disconnection is the more surprising because they seem to have had much in common. Both groups had members who believed that generic study skills, delivered outside of disciplines, were of very little use. Both attributed a good deal of students’ difficulties with their subjects to the ways those subjects were taught. Both believed that the key to planning effective interventions lay in understanding what students made of the material they were studying. Both believed, moreover, that the way to find out about this was to listen to students talking about how they experienced their subjects and, in particular, their assessment tasks. However, academic developers and ALL practitioners were “hearing” some very different kinds of things in these accounts.

To some extent, they were probably inclined to hear different things because the disparate theories that framed their practice had developed in very different geographical places and intellectual spaces. To understand the differences between these ways of thinking, we need to look at where each of them came from – both in the literal sense of place and discipline, and in the sense of who their reference groups were. By whom were they informed? Who were they concerned to refute or replace? And whom did they hope to converse with or to influence? Broadly, ALL practitioners were situated in a discourse about literacy, while academic developers were situated in a discourse about learning. The one was more specific and more specialised, and more marginal; the other, more general, more accessible, and considered more central to the main concerns of education and of institutions.

6. ALL's remit framed by student "illiteracy"

As we have seen in Part I, ALL services were established to remediate deficiencies in students' preparation for tertiary study, and operated in a context of institutional anxiety regarding students' "galloping illiteracy" about which both lecturers and employers complained (Ljungdahl, 1991, p. 99; cf. Brock, 1987; Nightingale, 1983; Taylor, 1980). When in 1978 "[a] national survey of academics in Australian universities and colleges ... asked teaching staff whether they saw change in the quality of students over the last decade", 45% of respondents thought that "cognitive skills" had "deteriorated", while 66% said the same about "written communication skills" (Frederick et al., 1981, p. 33). Writing in *Higher Education Research and Development* in 1986, Hewitson (p. 71) reported staff concerns about deficiencies in up to 70% of entering students at Canberra CAE, and similar worries about students' expression at seven institutions in Western Australia (comprising two universities, four colleges of education, and one institute of technology). The reality did not evidently match the anxiety. Taylor and Nightingale (1990), tasked with comparing the kinds and numbers of errors made by first year History students in 1974 and 1984, found that the later group made fewer errors. They also found that "the most statistically significant elements in error-prone writing are those concerned not so much with the formal mechanics of writing but with the constitution of meaning" (Taylor & Nightingale, 1990, p. 161), suggesting that difficulty with understanding ideas, rather than ignorance of grammar, was the cause. This study did not, however, put paid to the common perception of a "higher illiteracy" (Taylor, 1980, p. 55; for the persistence of this anxiety into recent years, see Star & Hammer, 2008, p. 239).

A paper by Bate in the Proceedings of the Australasian Fifth Annual Study Skills Conference in 1984 gives us a window onto the context of thinking about academic skills within which ALL was situated at that time, and we may reflect on how little has changed in thirty years. Bate surveyed 100 academics and 370 first year students at La Trobe University, and 38 business or government organisations, eliciting their views on students' literacy skills. Academic staff identified "grammar-syntax-punctuation" as the main deficiency in students' writing (69%), followed by "spelling, range and precision of vocabulary, style appropriate to subject, and verbosity" (Bate, 1984, 1st section, p. 2). Problems in essays included logical organisation within and between paragraphs; "coherent argument supported by evidence and examples"; planning; comprehension and use of reading (extracting main arguments, "explain[ing] and discuss[ing] alternative viewpoints"; integrating own voice with paraphrase); and sustaining focus (Bate, 1984, 1st section, p. 2). Lecturers attributed these problems to inadequate schooling; low entry standards to university, and a failure by the university to teach skills; backgrounds in which the first language was not English, or the family had a low appreciation of language skills; cultural factors (television; indifference to good literature); and/or students' attitudes or understanding (slackness, undervaluing of language; "conceptual confusion" leading to poor writing) (Bate, 1984, 1st section, pp. 3-5).

Students also blamed themselves – more, in fact, than their lecturers blamed them. When asked whether they found their expression and writing skills adequate, whether they could benefit from instruction, and what they thought were the nature and causes of their difficulties, "51% of native speakers and 65% of non-native believe they could benefit from direct instruction" (Bate, 1984, 2nd section, p. 2). They most frequently located the causes of their problems within the self (abilities, attitudes, skills) followed by staff/course factors, non-academic problems or pressures, and lastly, their pre-tertiary schooling. Finally, employers cited oral expression as the most important skill for graduates entering business and government, followed by written expression, then interpersonal communication, report and letter writing, and effective listening, and most commonly blamed deficiencies on employees' pre-tertiary education.

Overall, Bate found a commonly shared view that literacy deficiencies were caused by poor values and training in the backgrounds from which students came, and there is no evidence that his respondents were aware of a culture of enquiry peculiar to university. Clearly, this was not going to be fertile ground for the ideas of ALL advisers who thought it crucial to consider the cultures and epistemologies of the disciplines and believed that the university had a

responsibility to interpret its culture(s) to its students. It was against this context that such practitioners were struggling to establish their own counter-narrative, and this is quite explicit in the key text from this era, *Literacy by degrees*, where Nightingale (1988) tells us that, “This book attempts a redefinition of literacy in higher education, one that moves far past statements about surface level correctness to statements about the ability to satisfy the intellectual demands of communication in varied subject disciplines” (p. 66). Language is used broadly to “include the processes or modes of analysis and argument appropriate to the subject, because the content and the language of a subject are inseparable” (Nightingale, 1988, p. 81). The book’s title is a pun on the gradual, incremental development of tertiary literacy, and the fact that it can only be developed within the degree itself.

Academic skills practitioners, then, were concerned with academic literacy from a perspective of linguistic and cultural diversity, and sought to correct the ambient view that students’ general competence in expressing themselves was slipping from bad to worse. Their thinking was informed by theory from linguistics and by experience of conversations with students which focussed intensively on those students’ written work for their disciplines. Their research method was, for the most part, to analyse the discourses in these texts and extrapolate the causes of error, drawing on what they knew about students’ prior learning and their efforts to make sense of the discourses they encountered in their subjects. When we return to the work of academic developers and look at the context from which the theory of deep vs. surface learning emerged, we can begin to see why it could be difficult to bring the approaches of ALL advisers and academic developers together.

7. Academic development framed by theory of “approach to learning”

The body of theory on “approaches to learning” sought to identify qualitative differences in the ways that students approach their learning; to relate these to differences in their academic achievement; and to suggest how teaching could influence the learner’s approach. It originated at the University of Goteborg in Sweden, a place much more culturally homogeneous than Australia, which may partially explain why culture was not among the factors it considered. A further reason may be that it came out of the discipline of psychology with its universalising tendencies. This theory did eschew such tendencies explicitly by rejecting the idea of context-free generalisations about learning. However, the context it focused on was the discipline subject, which was analysed in terms of subject matter, teaching, and assessment, but not explicitly conceived as belonging to a culture of enquiry; and the question of students embodying various culture(s) was never considered.

The theory of deep vs. surface approaches to learning developed in reaction against studies designed to find out *how much* students had learned, and sought instead to discover *what* they had learned, and to get at the nature of, and the reasons for, qualitative differences in understanding (Gibbs, Morgan, & Taylor, 1982). It also rejected the method of psychology that set out to test a *researcher’s* construction of reality. Instead, the Goteborg group wanted to know how *students* perceived the context of study and their own learning process, which they could only discover by asking them. This line of questioning they called phenomenography (and this term for the method soon came to stand for the theory as well). “Phenomenographic research,” in Laurillard’s (1986) words, “is a research methodology that derives context-dependent categorisations of the learning process from students’ own descriptions of their experiences with learning” (p. 167). These descriptions ranged from “Learning as the increase of knowledge” to “Learning as an interpretive process aimed at the understanding of reality” (Gibbs, Morgan, & Taylor, 1982, p. 134). The latter was what the Goteborg group came to describe as a “deep” approach to study. As Ramsden (1987a) put it,

A deep-holistic approach consists of the intention to discover or impose meaning and a focus on the whole task. A surface-atomistic approach consists of attending to the superficial features of the task (such as the need to memorise information) and a focus on the discrete parts of the task. (p. 142)

Variations on the terminology proliferated for a while, but stabilised around Biggs' (1989) three approaches to learning: an extrinsically motivated "surface" approach, in which the learner seeks to reproduce details; an intrinsically motivated "deep" approach, in which the learner seeks to maximise understanding; and an "achieving" approach motivated by the desire for high grades, in which the learner seeks to "optimise organisation of time and effort ('study skills')" (p. 12). It follows that "good teaching should minimise those factors that lead to surface learning, and ... maximise those leading to deep and achieving"; more problematic, in Biggs' view, was the achieving approach which "is handled by directly teaching learning and study skills to students across subject areas. Teaching study skills is a beguiling concept, as it promises to improve learning independently of changes in teaching departments" (Biggs, 1989, pp. 15-16). However, phenomenographers were concerned to show that this "beguiling concept" would not work. They reported instances of attempts to improve students' learning by presenting them with a repertoire of skills to employ, in which it was found that the students focussed on the skills rather than the object of learning – a mechanical turn that phenomenographers called a "technification" of learning (Biggs, 1989; Landbeck, 1987; Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle, 1984; Martin & Ramsden, 1986; Marton & Saljo, 1976; Ramsden, 1987; Ramsden, Beswick & Bowden, 1986).

The effect of defining study skills in this way – as general recipes for studying any kind of content more efficiently – was that the work of ALL practitioners (assumed to be of this kind, regardless of the evidence to the contrary in many of their publications) appeared irrelevant at best. According to Gibbs, Morgan, and Taylor (1982), "[t]echnical or 'study skill' approaches to improving student learning ... are usually ineffective and sometimes harmful" (p. 142). Ramsden (1987a) concurred, explaining that "attempts to foster general learning skills ... have tried to separate the learning of particular content from the processes by which it is learned" (p. 143). The problem with this is that

There are no content- and context-free skills in educational settings. Learning in these settings always refers to the requirements of teachers and is always the learning of something The object of improving learning should be to improve learning *something*, not to improve *how* we learn something. (Ramsden, 1987, p. 148)

The implications seemed obvious. "The key to improving learning in higher education is not the provision of skills," Ramsden (1987a) wrote,

but the provision of teaching and assessment that will permit able students to realise their demonstrated potential. By studying how and what students learn, academics can improve their teaching, maximising the chances of students engaging with content in the ways they wish them to engage with it, and identifying misconceptions that require special attention. (p. 151)

An example of such a study from the literature of the eighties is Hegarty-Hazel's (1986) HERDSA conference paper, "A light on photosynthesis: Students' understanding of an important biological science concept".

With discipline lecturers shouldering the responsibility for facilitating deep learning (e.g. Eizenberg, 1986, 1990; McGregor, 1990; Scriven & Andresen, 1990), study skills counsellors would no longer be needed; however, academic developers did see an ongoing role for academic developers. Ramsden (1987a) believed that

It will usually be necessary for educational experts to work cooperatively with subject teachers in order that the latter can apply the methodologies for discovering students' approaches and conceptions successfully These kinds of activities can be introduced quite easily by teachers in higher education. No special training is needed. But the exploration of students' conceptions and approaches in order to design courses is not so simple. This needs support and methodological expertise. Technical skills that few teachers will have the time or energy to master are required. No-one becomes an expert in phenomenographic methodology overnight, and no

institution can expect to see sudden institution-wide improvements to the efficiency of learning through this method (or any other, for that matter). (pp. 149, 151)

If attention to language and culture had been considered important, the same arguments could have been made for utilising the expertise of ALL practitioners; but the literature that argued for an end to study skills was not concerned with ALL practitioners' work in those areas, but only with "attempts to foster general learning skills" (Ramsden, 1987a, p. 143).

8. Evidence for generic teaching of study skills?

Where did this characterisation of study skills teaching come from, which allowed it to be so readily dismissed? Were most "learning skills counsellors" running generic courses at a distance from the disciplines, teaching time management and formulaic routines for reading, note-taking, and essay writing? Or was Harper (1990) right when he suggested that the attack on study skills advice was "behaviour which occurs following the formation of opposing camps", noting that "[t]he examples picked certainly do not reflect the best available study skills course" (p. 185)?

At this remove, it is impossible to say how common such courses were, but papers in the proceedings of the study skills conferences, after 1983, do give evidence of some (e.g. Brown-Parker & Brown-Parker, 1985; Elms, 1985; Hetherington, 1983; Quintrell, 1984). In a paper about "Analysis and synthesis: Developing report writing skills in tertiary students", McEvedy (1984) found the "most common shortcomings" in students' texts to be "in structure and content [M]astery of the subject is not demonstrated because the question has not been interpreted correctly and, thus, has been answered obliquely" (p. 2). Despite this finding, she designed a generic course with elaborate procedures for teaching writing. Students were to be taught to analyse questions by isolating key words, understanding relationships between the topic and the task words, drawing a diagram of these relationships, outlining a plan for their text, working through drafts and revisions, marking up, editing, and attending to presentation. McEvedy (1984) acknowledged that

such an approach to teaching report writing is mechanistic. But for many students, struggling with a different learning style and linear logic, the procedures are a source of confidence to them when they are faced with a blank sheet of paper and 2,000 words to write on an unappealing topic. Getting the structure right can, in fact, help improve the content. (p. 17; cf. McEvedy, 1985)

The teachers of many generic courses reported in the literature, however, would have preferred to be teaching them in the context of the disciplines their students were studying. They often reported that efforts to separate skills from their disciplinary contexts were not very effective, as Imrie (1983) found in organising an orientation for science students. He concluded that it should, rather, be a Faculty responsibility to raise "student awareness of study skills ... as part of the 'naturally occurring setting' of the course of study" (p. 15). Librarians faced similar frustrations, as McLeod (1990) attests:

The reader education sessions taught by librarians are often based on the sources used to find information, not on a conceptual framework of the production, structure and organisation of knowledge in a discipline [but] [T]he most effective programs are those which are conducted at the specific subject level where the academic concerned is committed to incorporating the development of library skills into the content of the subject. (pp. 121-122)

Andresen (1983), in fact, came to the view that lecturers ought to take responsibility for teaching students how to use information in their subjects, rather than leaving it divided between librarians (who taught search skills) and study skills counsellors (who separately taught the skills of selection and evaluation that need to be brought to bear on students' use of information). He drew on McInnis' (1978) idea of "the *structure of a discipline*, which refers

both to the key concepts or ideas of the subject and to the relationships between and among them” (Andresen, 1983, p. 6) – knowledge that belongs to the discipline, not to the world of skills counsellors. It takes a tangible form in the discipline’s “*bibliographic structure*, a network of references and citations into which each new contribution situates itself while at the same time extending it in a particular direction” (Andresen, 1983, p. 7). Students eventually come to share their teachers’ awareness of this structure, but Andresen (1983) would have preferred to see information skills “integrated into subject matter ... [as] an effective, motivating approach which students perceive as legitimating the whole exercise” (p. 10).

Many study skills counsellors and librarians agreed with the phenomenographers about the importance of context (Brock, 1987; Bruce, 1990; Hessami, Sillitoe, & Webb, 1990; Inglis & Neumann, 1990; Jackson & Wolanowski, 1990; Kinny & Parr, 1990; Landbeck, 1987; Marshall, 1982; Parry, 1989; Radloff & Samson, 1991; Unsworth, 1983). For the rare ALL adviser employed in a discipline, there were opportunities to help students “to develop a conceptual framework” for the subject matter, as Jackson (1990), working in a medical school, did by “cast[ing] students in the role of teacher explaining concepts to us” (p. 144). “Our role”, wrote Jackson (1990), “is to encourage students ... to consciously and actively seek for links which are not obvious, ... by asking pertinent questions, how, why, what if, what about, where does this fit in, must it be so, what does this mean, how applicable is that, types of questions” (p. 155). The problem for most ALL practitioners, however, was that they were not given entrée to discipline subjects, and had to be content with simulation. Beasley (1983), for example, thought that “academic skills are best taught as part of an academic course of study by those responsible for that teaching”³; however, he accepted that “[i]n practice this may not be possible but those designing and implementing study skills programmes will need to find ways of approximating this situation” (p. 3). Similarly, Hancock (1985) of the South Australian CAE would have preferred to see writing taught in discipline courses where the purpose, models, and audience for students’ writing would be authentic, but as the discipline lecturers lacked the necessary expertise to teach about writing, her team devised a course to teach “spelling, punctuation, apostrophes, sentence structure, discourse structure, agreement of number and tense [and] word usage” (p. 56).

Not only was the relevant expertise scarce in the disciplines, but where joint projects were initiated, it could be difficult to inspire or to sustain the enthusiasm of academics, as Inglis and Neumann (1990) at Brisbane CAE discovered. An education lecturer and a counsellor, with a group of academics and Resource Centre staff, initiated a project to get all departments to develop “an inventory of learning skills specific to teaching units and which did not fit into the general skills basket” (p. 162), and, conferring with all involved, take on responsibility for teaching these in their regular subjects. While the initiating group were enthusiastic, they were overloaded and could not get many faculty staff interested. It is not surprising, therefore, that ALL practitioners often had to settle for a marginal position, and offer what they could from there.

Under these conditions, the hardest “skill” to teach seems to have been the ability to understand questions asked within the disciplines. For example, in evaluating the course she offered, McEvedy (1985) found that while 89% of her students felt “better able to control English”, and 86% felt “more confident about assignment writing”, the skill that the smallest proportion of students (11%) thought they had learned was being “better able to analyse questions” (p. 83). Ljungdahl (1991) noted that “[l]ack of knowledge of the expectations of a lecturer or the conventions of a particular academic discourse are the major areas of difficulty for students” and that they need to learn how to “explain how the question/topic fits into the curricula” (p. 101). Even when Meyer (1990) set out to argue that critical thinking should be learned “untrammelled by disciplinary considerations” (p. 34) by marshalling “points in favour” and “points against”, whatever the question, she found that critical judgements had to be made “in

³ Though he would change his mind two years later, concerned that socialisation into the disciplines posed a risk to students’ critical capacities (Beasley, 1985).

terms of the ‘goods’ and ‘bads’ of the discipline Confronted with ‘should’, the student needs to think what ‘ought to’ be attained, in terms of the discipline being studied” (Meyer, 1990, p. 37). It was on account of the importance of context that Ballard, Clanchy, and Taffe (1984) refused to accede to students’ feedback asking for an essay assignment to be added to the course they ran each year to introduce some ideas about note-taking, reading strategies, and essay structure. “While recognising students’ anxiety about this matter,” they saw no useful purpose in “an essay written without an academic context, without genuine research or content, without the need to follow disciplinary conventions of analysis, argument, or even presentation” (Ballard, Clanchy, & Taffe, 1984, p. 7). (Even the maths teaching they included proved to be unhelpful until they decided to offer different maths options designed for different course contexts; cf. Chapman & Willis, 1990.)

Those who were able to work more closely with their students’ disciplines in fact had scant regard for teaching that focussed on form without its content. Bock (1983) saw the essay as a form designed to manage the “tension between the ‘professional doubt[ing]’” (p. 2) that drives academic enquiry and the need to regulate this process so that it can be productive. “The function of essays is to give a voice to all this inquiry; its form serves to impose order on the uncertainty, make it intelligible” (p. 3). But the separation of these “two elements into one bundle of content matter and one bundle of purely mechanical ‘skills’, served out at two different counters” (Bock, 1983, p.5), meant that study skills counsellors were reduced to teaching students to analyse their assignments by extracting key words and instruction words, instead of relating them to the discipline subject that “lends them their specific meaning” (Bock, 1983, p. 10). Parry (1990), too, dismissed the “key words” strategy; what she thought was needed, rather, was to identify “a concept ... about which questions can be raised” (p. 52) within the “Gestalt” of the discipline which provides the “framework, relevance, context and meaning” (p. 55) within which the question is a question. In another paper (Parry, 1989), she showed how this was done in an integrated workshop for accountancy students who analysed a question in terms of its relationship to the subject as a whole.

“We ... will never fully support [our students’] learning efforts”, wrote Bock (1983), “as long as we keep splitting off the ‘how to’ from the ‘what’.

These two aspects ultimately determine each other to such an extent that study skills without context are a language without meaning ...; while on the other hand, content without methods and skills is a bewildering shapeless and undifferentiated mass. And this is how at present a very large proportion of our first-year students experience both. (Bock, pp. 10-11)

In this respect, at least, phenomenographers and ALL practitioners were on the same page. Taylor (1990) saw the phenomenographers’ recommendation that teachers should work at “combining successfully the what and the how” of learning as “hardly earthshattering” after “fifteen years of phenomenographic research” (p. 63). If universities had not separated “knowing that” (the discipline lecturer’s realm) from “knowing how” (the realm of learning skills advisers), such advice would not even be needed. Taylor (1990) was, indeed, bemused by Ramsden’s “argu[ing] vigorously and well for a proposition that some of us at [the 1985] conference, perhaps naively, deemed self-evident and hardly requiring such thorough-going analysis: we should get away from a conception of study skills and study skills courses as they had come to be widely practised”. To many ALL practitioners it was apparent that discipline academics should take on the responsibility of developing students’ writing, either with advice from (Zuber-Skerritt, 1986), or in collaboration with, an ALL practitioner (Hessami, Sillilitoe, & Webb, 1990). Zuber-Skerritt (1986, p. 129), Nightingale (1988, pp. 66-67), and Taylor and Nightingale (1990) all agreed with Ljungdahl (1991) that “[w]hilst special centres sometimes exist in universities to teach writing skills they cannot replace the responsibility and expertise of the academic[s] knowledgeable in the discipline” (p. 100), who, in Taylor and Nightingale’s (1990) words, “are most familiar with the particular relationships the students are trying to articulate” (p. 171). Importantly, however, those academics were not being encouraged by their institutions to focus on writing skills, but on students’ conceptions of learning; it was the purposes of academic developers inspired by phenomenography that would drive efforts to

improve students' learning in the disciplines by changing how the subject matter was taught, rather than by making explicit the culture and language of enquiry.

An interesting illustration of how perspective could frame and limit research findings is afforded by Martin and Ramsden's (1986) chapter titled, "Do learning skills courses improve student learning?" They compared a "study skills" program in a history department, offering a repertoire of generic skills, with a "learning skills" program that focused on sample essays from the students' history subject. The students saw no relevance in the first program, but did appreciate the second. One said, "I've got insights rather than skills I suppose if it's skills I want I can always go and get one of those books on how to study from the library. Insights are not so easy to come by, unless you're guided in the way that we have been in this course" (Martin & Ramsden, 1986, p. 158). When the researchers administered a post-intervention "inventory", however, they found that the program had done little to move students from a surface to a deep approach; but the students *had* written better history essays. In other words (mine, not the researchers'), the course had made students better at the thing it focussed on, that is, the discourse of the discipline. However, the researchers did not conclude from this that it was important to focus on the discourse of the discipline; their conclusion was that teaching learning skills as such was unlikely to be effective at shifting students from a surface approach to learning to a deep approach to learning.

9. Implications for the role of ALL

A common institutional response to the rise of deep versus surface learning theory was to invest academic developers with responsibility for training discipline staff to adopt teaching practices that would induce deep learning in their students. At the University of Melbourne, the promotion of its Learning Skills Project entailed a move "from the [Student Counselling Service to] ... the Centre for the Study of Higher Education [because] doubt had been raised by some [Academic] Board members about academic activities going on in a services area" (Hancock & Bowden, 1983, p. 1). Its staff were to work "with academics within faculties rather than directly with students" to develop "[c]urriculum, presentation and assessment procedures which reward deep rather than surface learning" (Hancock & Bowden, 1983, pp. 1-2).

What began as a program of individual counselling by professional officers soon included assistance to teaching staff to enable them to take over much of that role. Then there was a further shift towards a view that all intervention should be in context, that process and content should be addressed simultaneously. More recently, doubts about explicit focus on process have resulted in a research based project aimed at developing better curricula, teaching and assessment to provide students with the opportunity to learn in preferred ways. (Bowden, 1987, p. 174)

To make it palatable to academics, this was framed as a remedial measure to help students – rather than teachers – who lacked skills (Bowden, 1987, p. 175).

Bowden (1987), indeed, saw study skills programs as a stage in the evolution towards academic development programs, "part of the historical development in the institution without which no advance will be made" (p. 176). ALL did not, as we know, disappear as this seems to have presaged; but it did become subordinate to academic development, in status and often in institutional structures as well. It would be wrong to suppose that discipline lecturers flocked to academic developers for advice on improving their teaching. In a very funny paper for the HERDSA conference in 1986, Ernest Roe reflected that "academic development is not only the art of the possible and the art of the soluble: it is the art of the saleable" (p. 23), and that academic developers "must expect to be often unappreciated and unacknowledged" (p. 24). He thought "a suitable logo for any academic development might be ... 'Doing a good job around here is like wetting your pants in a dark suit – it gives *you* a warm feeling but nobody notices'" (Roe, 1986, p. 24; for a very recent study of the constraints on academic development centres influencing their institutions, see Challis, Holt, & Palmer, 2009).

However, the man in the dark suit was often a professor, earning twice what an ALL adviser earned, and he probably had tenure. Such a person was more plausible as an adviser to lecturers than study skills advisers who “frequently”, as Wilson (1990) put it, “are perceived as the poor relations of academic teachers and counsellors [and] often struggle for recognition” (p. 57). Andresen (1982) concurred, rather mysteriously, that “there are known factors which inhibit study skills counsellors from being accepted as legitimate teachers or sources of knowledge pertinent to the learning of academic subjects” (p. 11), though he did not say what those were. Some, perhaps, may be inferred from the findings of Samuelowicz’s (1990) survey of 57 “learning skills counsellors” in 33 institutions across Australia, from which she was able to generalise that such a person was “likely to be a woman, aged 30 to 39, holder of Graduate Diploma (more often in teaching than in [any] other field), with between one and five years work experience in the current position [with] no opportunities for promotion” (pp. 99-100). Of her forty-three female and fourteen male respondents, two had PhDs, nineteen Master’s degrees, and twenty-two Graduate Diplomas (Samuelowicz, 1990, p. 100).

It is, indeed, unclear, in the literature of the eighties, what role institutions saw for their ALL practitioners as responsibility for students’ learning was optimistically re-assigned to their teachers. Eizenberg (1990) thought “learning skills personnel” could work with teachers in “monitoring and devising interventions to improve the curriculum, teaching and assessment”, in showing students “examples of applying general learning skills to the content areas”, and “when problems arise in dealing with subject matter”, they could support teachers’ efforts “by raising the level of awareness of approaches employed and by enabling students to make more appropriate choices in their study activities” (pp. 132-133). Andresen (1982) deplored the failure of lecturers to take advantage of the knowledge of “that army of persons engaged in activities ancillary to and supportive of the academics and students” (p. 1), including study skills counsellors, librarians, educational researchers etc., and suggests a “joint responsibility” for teaching information skills, but does not go on to elaborate the form this might take.

Biggs (1986b) thought that skills counsellors might help students to answer generic questions such as “What do I want? What will it look like ... what do I need ... what resources have I got to use? What constraints must I contend with? What am I capable of doing? Well then. How do I go about it?” (Biggs, 1986b, p. 143). Bain (1990), meanwhile, saw a need for learning skills staff “to act as an informed interpreter between academic staff and students”, helping academics to identify and articulate their implicit knowledge and “to convey difficult concepts more effectively” (p. 125). They might also offer learning instruction “centred on a specific discipline and ... conducted with the assistance of academic staff in that discipline. My guess is that these sorts of interventions will come to have a ‘Trojan horse’ role, that is as ways of helping academics see what they should be doing themselves” (Bain, 1990, p. 125).

West (1990), delivering the keynote speech to the 1987 conference of the Study Skills community, “Research on student learning: Down which path is it leading us?”, was not ready to write ALL practitioners out of the picture. He saw a role for them in two kinds of “application” of the “‘constructivist’ and ‘phenomenographic’ conceptions of learning”:

[O]ne, called meta-learning, bypasses the teacher and concentrates on making the student aware of the nature of their own learning processes. Sounds like study skills? Its assumption is that all students need this, it is not just a remedial strategy. The second is the action research, teacher-researcher approach, in which the teacher is involved in investigating the learning (and knowing) of her own students, with a consequent impact on her teaching. Surely there is a vital role for a study skills advisor in this approach?” (West, 1990, p. 7)

West (1990) even suggested that “[p]erhaps these approaches are not new ideas and may simply be formalisations of common knowledge among study skills people. If they are, then we have some fruitful convergences that we can explore”(p. 7).

10. A limited convergence

Certainly, as we have seen, the idea that students could best learn – and learn about – unfamiliar discourses in context was not new to ALL practitioners. However, West's "fruitful convergences" did not readily occur. What happened, instead, was that some ALL practitioners adopted the terminology and sometimes the purposes and methods of the theorists of deep/surface learning, while others largely ignored them and continued to build a body of thought focussed on language. Let's look at these responses in turn.

We see the influence of phenomenography in a number of conference papers, in various ways. Evans (1983), for example, identified the "Tasks for discussion" as "1) mapping the cognitive process by which people come to perform as they do in particular tasks and 2) establishing the relationships between task, learner, and teaching characteristics" (p. 2). Biggs (1979, 1986a), Imrie (1983) and Hetherington (1983) were using self-rating "inventories" to "[focus] students' attention on their own learning" (Imrie, 1983, p. 13). Unsworth (1983) wrote of the need for skills courses to "stimulate metacognitive awareness" (p. 2) of CAE students. Zuber-Skerritt (1986) added a "learning-to-learn" component to the Foundation Course in the School of Modern Asian Studies at Griffith; similar components were introduced by Johnston (1989) at the South Australian College of Advanced Education and by Elphinstone (1990) at RMIT. Samuelowicz (1989) recommended concept-mapping as a way of combating passive, atomistic learning. Rowland (1985) reflected on how "industrialised" distance learning packages could encourage a surface approach to learning. Kratzing (1990b) introduced metalearning activities to groups of Biology students (but found that students who had shown higher metacognitive levels on a questionnaire "were not better able to apply their learning to a novel situation outside their text than students with lower metalearning ability" (p. 179)).

While it was increasingly rare to find publications that did not adopt at least the language of phenomenography, this approach was not taken up by the core group who insisted upon the importance of culture at the 1982 conference and of language with the publication of *Literacy by Degrees* in 1988. Mostly, their work proceeded along quite different paths, but on one occasion, in the middle of the decade, some ALL practitioners were brought together with phenomenographers and discipline lecturers at a symposium organised by John Bowden of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne to explore "the interface between the work of educational researchers and the activities of learning skills advisers and others who assist tertiary students to improve their learning" (Bowden, 1986a, p. 3). Prominent phenomenographers were invited to write papers for this event, as were Hanne Bock, Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, and some lecturers from Medicine. All were asked to re-read a key text in phenomenographical investigation, *The experience of learning* (Marton, Hounsell, & Entwistle (Eds.), 1986), and to comment on its relevance for them. We may note that the organisers expected teaching to be informed by research, but not the other way round: as Bowden (1987) said later, "Researchers should be aware of the needs of teachers and teachers ought to be aware of what researchers have discovered about learning" (p. 169).

Bock was civil, but saw little of value in the phenomenographical approach. She did agree on the futility of teaching skills out of context, saying that experience had led her to see "the development of tertiary literacy skills and skills in analysis and argument ... as inextricably linked, and linked, moreover, to the discipline in which they are exercised" (Bock, 1986, p. 96). However, phenomenography fell short, in her estimation, in several ways. First, it did not recognise the importance of students' "educational, social, cultural and religious backgrounds" in "influenc[ing] the formation of paradigms for learning" (Bock, 1986, p. 96) which could clash with those of their subjects (which, in turn, could clash with one another). Further, phenomenographers failed to recognise that the construction of knowledge in universities is also a cultural enterprise; they saw knowledge as an unproblematic given, which students must be led to understand. "[T]o define learning as the integration of complex wholes leading to a personal change in the student's conception of reality excludes a large proportion of tertiary learning" (p. 99), wrote Bock (1986), because "reality" is established by interpretation and contestation structured as argument, and students are learning about this process, not simply its

(often temporary) conclusions. The phenomenographers' definition, therefore, "leaves little space for exploring the process through which a student learns to reject, knowingly, in total or part, the conception of reality offered by a particular writer" (Bock, 1986, p. 99). And their efforts to change students' conceptions of learning made no use of ALL practitioners' experience that "many structural problems in reading and writing tasks are resolved far more thoroughly and effectively through linguistic analysis and language tuition of the kind reported by Swales (1985) than through group discussions on the nature of learning and knowledge" (Bock, 1986, p. 100). It was important to teach "text structures, the interaction and interdependence of types of information" (Bock, 1986, p. 111), not as an end in itself, but as a means to understanding how knowledge is constructed.

Bock's approach to the cultures of the disciplines through explication of their discourses was shared with Taylor (1990), who deplored the "almost total failure [of phenomenography] to admit issues of language to disciplined consideration" (p. 56). He speculated that

The reason for this lack of interest in language is probably quite trivial: most of those who write in this tradition are scientists or professional educationalists. The consequences, on the other hand, are significant – an apparent acceptance of a naive realism summed up in the constant trotting out of Saljo's (1979) characterisation of "deep learning" as "an interpretative process aimed at understanding reality". (Taylor, 1990, p. 56)

I think that Taylor's insight here is worth highlighting, for it is remarkable how many academic developers, like phenomenographers, have come from science backgrounds (Roe, 1986, p. 26), while ALL advisers are more likely to have come from Arts. This may go some way to explain why academic developers saw students as needing to understand reality, while ALL advisers saw them as needing to understand how scholars construct accounts of reality. From the first perspective, students learn about nature as revealed by the efforts of their disciplines; from the second, they learn about the epistemology and discourse of each discipline, and they attempt interpretations within the genres that embody these.

Like Bock, Taylor (1990) thought that "most academic learning has less to do with understanding the realities of life than with understanding the language of the discipline" (p. 57). "[A]cting in the variable situations that a student and scholar need continually expose themselves to [is not confined to] the application of a structure, method or skill to achieving a predefined corpus of propositional knowledge" (p. 69), Taylor (1990) argued; as well as the "how to" and the "what", there is a third kind of knowledge that students require, which Taylor called "knowing what to do". Here, he drew upon Halliday's (1985) analysis of the functions of language. To participate in the construction of knowledge, students need to attend to the interpersonal function of language, to the "thoughts and writing of others who have addressed themselves to the issues. So we do not simply have a relation between the learner and the material, but rather an interrelation between the learner and what others have written and said on the subject under scrutiny" (p. 69; cf. Taylor, 1988, p. 61). The role of ALL advisers in helping students to understand this construction of knowledge by a discipline community was

as embodiments of that practical knowledge I have attempted to explain – provided always that we are prepared to engage seriously with the same problems of understanding the subject matter faced by our students. This view of ourselves might not at present be a fashionable or apparently politic one to adopt in a higher education "industry" that peddles goals, throughput, quantifiable productivity and demonstrations of skill as measures of achievement. But it is the only view of learning worth holding (Taylor, 1990, pp. 70-71).

11. ALL modes of teaching and presenting expertise: Strengths and weaknesses

This way of working – to "engage seriously", along with our students, in the problems of the disciplines – is at once the great strength of ALL, in terms of what it can do for students, and a

weakness in terms of influencing wider institutional policies and practices. Unlike the changes to curricula which academic developers could suggest – measures intended to improve the learning of whole cohorts in replicable and, importantly, in measurable ways – the work of ALL advisers was unquantifiable, ostensibly expensive, and largely invisible to all but the advisers and students concerned. It was characterised succinctly by Brigid Ballard (1984) who, with her colleagues in the Study Skills Unit at the ANU, spent 70% of their time working with individuals (though they “also [ran] short courses and work[ed] in various ways with academic staff) (p. 46).

In each case we are assisting the student to understand the adjustments that must be made in his thinking, his study habits and his writing, to meet the expectations of the course lecturer and demands of the discipline In each case also we treat the particular problem which brings the student to us as a point of entry to the integrated process of producing an essay; reading, analysing, planning, organising, writing and editing are all inter-related and cannot effectively be worked on in isolation from each other or from the context, content and purpose of the actual course assignment. (Ballard, 1984, p. 46)

An observer of these sessions, had there been any, might have seen how their success was shaped by a wealth of specialised knowledge, both about disciplinary cultures and about the uses of language within them. ALL practice was informed by the work of Bazerman (1980) and of Becher (1981) who has been influential in describing disciplines as “cultural phenomena: they are embodied in collections of like-minded people, each with their own codes of conduct, sets of values and distinctive intellectual tasks” (p. 109). Commenting on Bazerman’s (1980) comparison of the discourses of English, Sociology, and Physics, Becher (1987) finds that they

display fundamental differences not only between types of evidence and procedures for proof, but also in the ways in which others’ work is evaluated and in the modes in which arguments are generated, developed, expressed and reported. All these have implications for the underlying knowledge structure, indicating whether it is dense or diffused, atomistic or holistic, stable or volatile, universal or particular. (p. 273)

ALL practitioners like Taylor, Bock, Ballard and Clanchy knew, therefore, that specific characteristics of a discipline culture were crucial to the kinds of questions it would pose and the kinds of answers it would entertain, as Becher (1994) has observed of two which differ widely: “Most historians subscribe to the view that everything is more complicated than it seems; ... in contrast, physicists take the view that in the end the natural world is understandable in straightforward and parsimonious terms” (p. 111).

However, ALL practitioners were not working in the disciplines their students wrote for, so they had to take another path to discover what they needed to know about these. They did this via a close reading of the texts available to each student: the subject guides, set readings, and assignment rubrics produced by the lecturers; the students’ drafts, with all their revealing strategies and stumbles; and the lecturers’ marking comments (which frequently revealed more to the ALL adviser than to the students whose work they addressed – often with “exasperation and indignation” (Ballard & Clanchy, 1988, p. 11)). What they found was that “most student ‘illiteracy’ is the result of a misunderstanding of the culture, a failure to observe the appropriate styles of cognitive or linguistic behaviours” (Ballard & Clanchy, 1988, p. 8). Indeed, Ballard and Clanchy (1988) thought it would be possible to “eliminate most of the surface errors from [students’] writing and yet leave other vital aspects of the literacy problem virtually untouched” (p. 8).

Meyer (1988) pointed out that even at the level of shared academic culture, before drilling into the cultures of the disciplines, students founder because they do not understand that crucial terms “mean one thing off the campus and another on it” – terms such as “reason”, “argument”, “critical”, and “opinion” (p. 80; cf. Jones, Gollin, Drury, & Economou, 1989, pp. 262-263); and Nightingale (1988) focussed on the difficulties caused for students by the common metaphorical

identification of argument with war, in contrast to its academic meaning of reasoned demonstration (p. 65). But it was at the level of disciplinary culture that many of Ballard and Clanchy's (1988) "vital aspects of the literacy problem" were to be found.

One such aspect had to do with the purpose of questions, which varies between disciplines in ways that students may not recognise; nor, as Ballard and Clanchy (1988) found, did lecturers recognise essays that got this wrong as indicating "an unsteady transition between cultures" (p. 13). They gave the example of a student whose writing for anthropology earned a distinction, but whose English essay suffered from the "intrusion, into what should be a literary critical analysis, of anthropological concerns and perspectives", when the student identified the gravedigger in *Hamlet* as a "non-aligned source of objective social criticism" (p. 16). When the student redrafted her essay to focus on the dramatic function of the gravedigger's scene in the play, she did well. We may reflect on how distant this problem is from the focus of phenomenographers on whether students read to reproduce or with the intention to understand; this student was *interested in understanding* the gravedigger's social role, but she was *supposed* to be commenting on dramatic structure.

Another "element of culture" that could generate problems of expression in students' writing was ideology constraining what might be said. For example, the "New Criticism" in English literary studies prohibited scholars – and students – from guessing at an author's intention. Ballard and Clanchy (1988) gave the example that to say, "In this passage Lawrence meant to convey ...' constituted an illiteracy" (pp. 18-19), and they suggested that theories such as neoclassical economics, Marxist sociology, and feminism would exercise "comparable constraints" (p. 19). Nor were the sciences free of such problems of expression falling foul of discipline values. For example, the belief that knowledge "exists independently of the researcher" shapes the characteristic use of passive verbs and "impersonal modes of expression", and leads students into making errors such as dangling modifiers in their struggles to avoid saying "I" (Ballard & Clanchy, 1988, p. 19). Also, the establishment of evolutionary theory entailed a taboo in scientific writing on teleological "statements which impute purpose to lower organisms or inanimate objects" (Robbins, 1990, p. 336). One may not say, for example, "wings are for flight": "[s]uch statements are grammatical, but they are also teleological. ... They do not participate in the possible meanings of the discipline" (Ballard & Clanchy, 1988, p. 18).

The articles of Ballard and Clanchy, Bock, and Taylor abound in examples of students whose "illiterate" writing could better be described as culturally inappropriate, and who proved quite able to produce the requisite genre once this was explained. These stories show ALL advisers doing just the kind of research that phenomenographers thought needed to be done, in that they were discovering how students experienced their encounters with their subjects, and what was needed for them to engage successfully. However, they were doing it one student at a time, and relying on the resonance, rather than the quantity, of their examples, with the result that their evidence was always "anecdotal" – a problem that remains with us today, as the time we need for writing up what we learn from students is consumed while we learn more – by teaching the next student, and the next.

The most serious obstacle to ALL advisers sharing the insights thus gained, however, was probably the specialised way in which they interpreted the evidence upon which these were based. Ballard and Clanchy (1988) were convinced that "[t]he key to improving standards of student literacy lies ... in exploring [the] fundamental relationship between the culture of knowledge and the language by which it is maintained and expressed" (p. 7), and they, like Taylor, explored this sometimes at a level of detail where only readers with linguistic expertise could follow. It was the inconsistencies in students' errors that particularly interested Taylor and his colleagues. Taylor (1988) found, for example, that "it is rare for a student to get a particular structure wrong consistently"; that "[t]he student who can write well in his or her first year may begin to show linguistic signs of strain in succeeding years"; that "some students will find it much harder to write grammatically in one discipline than in another"; and "a careful analysis of the writing will sometimes show that the grammatical categories in which errors are made vary significantly between the two" (Taylor, 1988, pp. 58-59). Why, asked Taylor (1988),

“should a student omit verbs from sentences or dangle his modifiers from time to time when writing in one [discipline] and have great trouble with prepositions or punctuating in another?” (p. 62).

The answers were often in terms of some confusion about what is capable of doing what to what, as in an example from history, “Documentary evidence unearths the reasons behind events in searching for better historical explanations” (Taylor, 1988, p. 62). Similarly, in this sentence from a pharmacology essay, we have a finding supporting an effect, where it ought to be supporting a theory about an effect: “This finding lends more support to the direct effect of ethyl alcohol rather than from some unmeasured characteristic” (Taylor, 1988, p. 62). The flavour is academic, but slippage has occurred in the meaning, and Taylor (1988) attributes this to uncertainty about the rules of explanation, rather than to ignorance of grammar: “much poor syntax arises because some students do not know, or only dimly know, what they are talking about [or] what their lecturers and tutors want them to *do*” (p. 58).

ALL advisers fervently wished that lecturers would tell students what they wanted them to do. As Ballard and Clanchy (1988) reasoned, “Becoming literate involves becoming acculturated: learning to read and write the culture. For academics wishing to hasten this process, the key to success lies in developing practical ways of making their own understanding of the university culture explicit and accessible to their students” (p. 19). They acknowledged that this would not be easy, for “[m]aking cultural values explicit means objectifying our own cultures, making a deliberate act of imaginative and intellectual engagement” (p. 13). Indeed, Webb (1990) found, in a survey of teaching departments’ guidelines for students at the University of Sydney, that they offered “a lot of advice but not much help” (p. 323). The “area least adequately covered ... was an introduction to the whole context of the discipline and to the business of writing within the discipline”. Lecturers did commonly demand analytical, critical writing but did not explain how analysis differs from description, much less show models from which students might infer the difference; “[t]his lack of modelling is ... [a] major inadequacy of the guidelines analysed, and was most apparent in the dearth of useful descriptions of generic structures” (Webb, 1990, p. 326). Lecturers commonly advised that texts should have a beginning, a middle, and an end, but “there seemed to be little appreciation of how facile a description this is” (Webb, 1990, p. 327). Advice on citation focussed on conventions rather than purpose, and advice on style was based on personal prejudice. A long and convoluted sentence was used to urge students to keep their writing simple. “Overall”, thought Webb (1990), “most of the guidelines analysed were written from the perspective of those setting and marking assignments and had little apparent empathy with the students in confronting new and complex tasks” (p. 328).

Oddly – in view of the above – while Drury and Webb (1989) found that lecturers could not say precisely what characterised writing in their field, they were nonetheless optimistic that they could help by outlining

a theory of language structure (broadly based on the linguistic theories of Halliday (1985: A and B) and Martin (1985) as it relates to writing at university level. This theoretical framework provides a more precise way to talk about language and could be of particular interest to academics who wish to become more articulate about the written work of their students. (p. 92)

The analytical tools they offered included “parameters that influence language choices appropriate for a particular writing task: field, mode, and tenor”, as well as elements of cohesion and grammar – demonstrating, for example, the abstract effect produced by nominalisation in a successful essay, as compared with the more congruent effect of saying “who did what” in a failing one. Both sample essays were grammatically correct, but only one achieved appropriate formality and distance, and Drury and Webb wished discipline teachers to provide explicit instruction to help students make the language choices that would ensure their writing was valued.

But if ALL advisers found lecturers incapable of articulating the cultures of their disciplines, how feasible was it to expect them to identify the fine details of their linguistic practices? The

terminology of Systemic Functional Linguistics, the theory informing Drury and Webb's teaching, is highly technical with its field, tenor, mode, participants and processes, lexical density and grammatical metaphor, and different from any grammatical metalanguage that discipline lecturers or their students might already have. While the ideas in the following passage from Jones, Gollin, Drury, and Economou (1989) are very helpful to ALL practitioners, an act of translation would be required to communicate them to non-linguists: "The use of grammatical metaphor to express cause appears to be the hallmark of an abstract discourse. The student has to learn to manipulate both congruent and incongruent realisations of reasoning according to the degree of abstraction required" (p. 277). Even when more conventional terminology was used, the discourse of ALL advisers could be very demanding for non-specialists, as, for example, when Taylor (1986) teased out the reasons for a student's errors in writing about Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness*:

Underlying many of this student's errors in vocabulary choice, lexical collocation, tense, aspect and, perhaps, number concord are issues of literary criticism. These include confusions about the relationships between author, narrator, characters, and reader; an imprecise grasp of the problems of narrative structure, its relation to time and to the events that 'actually' took place; and the general status of a novel with regard to notions of agency and determinism in human action. In similar vein, we should expect the epistemological problems of other academic disciplines to be made manifest in particular syntactic and lexical ways. (p. 160)

In their close and specialised studies of what language reveals about thought, such ALL practitioners could only be addressing one another; and this has been a weakness for our field. Ideas about deep or surface learning can be easily conveyed in professional development sessions, but knowledge of linguistics cannot.

Certainly, these advisers' institutions did not seem to regard them as academics on a par with staff in the disciplines. Summarising a nation-wide survey of study skills counsellors at the end of the decade, Samuelowicz (1990) found respondents frustrated by the workload (with staff-student ratios ranging from 1/700 to 1/20,000), low-to-middling pay, "lack of opportunities for promotion and professional development", isolation, and a "lack of definition and real acceptance of the role in the wider academic community" (p. 108). She thought they could consider "forming an association or a society" and publishing a bulletin once or twice a year (Samuelowicz, 1990, p. 109), echoing Beasley's (1983) suggestion that

some kind of organised association of Language and Learning Advisers be formed. If this were to occur, if members were willing to research some aspect of their own practices and to document this, we could have the basis for some very exciting shared learning. We could consider a modest publication in which such writings could appear (p. 5).

While "shared learning" continued unabated, it was to be more than twenty years before Beasley's vision of an association came to fruition, with the founding of the Association for Academic Language and Learning in 2005-6.

12. Conclusion

This historical review of the literature of ALL in the eighties has highlighted the formation of some foundational ideas in our field, as well as problems we have yet to solve. ALL advisers were employed to remediate deficiencies in growing cohorts of tertiary students, and to mediate the problems of non-traditional students in particular. However, many soon reframed their role to provide "initiation, not remediation", as Beasley (1988, p. 50) put it. They saw themselves as interpreters between the cultures of their students and the cultures of their institutions, and they accumulated knowledge about both of these through "close reading" of student writers and their texts. They were led to a very different conception of tertiary learning from that of academic developers influenced by the theory emerging from phenomenography. Phenomenographers wanted to know how knowledge about reality is cognitively constructed in the mind, while ALL practitioners wanted to know how knowledge about interpretation is rhetorically constructed on

the page. The theory of phenomenography was straightforward and accessible, and spoke to the purposes of managers who wanted to improve students' learning economically and demonstrably, on an institutional scale. It continues to inform the movement toward "constructive alignment" (Biggs, 1996, 1999) in Australian universities, a welcome improvement over unexamined curriculum design. It does not, however, address the complexity that ALL practitioners recognised in students' encounters with academic cultures.

ALL advisers in the eighties met with mixed fortunes in their efforts to influence teaching and learning, as we still do. In 2009, Emerson and Clerehan characterised

our professional practice – with our capacity to move across disciplines, our 'content' knowledge of teaching English to speakers of other languages, and our insights into cultural matters – [as] ... profoundly student centred. They arise from close-up engagement with individual students' tussles with their writing and thinking about their disciplinary areas. (p. 173)

And, like our predecessors in the eighties, Emerson and Clerehan (2009) believe that

One of the most powerful insights we gain in our work resides in our privileged understanding of the ways in which the generic and the discipline-specific relate to one another via institutional practices; in the discursive processes observed within each subject context; and in the textual structures elicited from the students. (p. 172)

They are hopeful that "[t]his knowledge makes us valuable and positions us well to have a positive impact on teaching and learning in the new millennium if our institutions are able to accept that opportunity" (p. 172).

It is ironic, in this context, that both ALL practitioners and our colleagues in academic development roles are now caught up in the search for transferable graduate skills, which is currently the only game in town. There is broad consensus that these skills must be developed in their discipline contexts. However, it is not yet clear that the push to integrate skills development will prevail over the hope that it is possible to assess them by some context-free instrument that would enable comparisons between cohorts and between individual students' early and later performances (to measure "value-added"), and would allow the universities to assure employers that students' skills will be transferable. Whatever the disagreements that divided these groups in the nineteen-eighties, they were united in their conviction that there was no such thing as a context-free skill. Now, however, if any of us hopes to have "a positive impact on teaching and learning", we must negotiate an environment of public opinion, and public policy that has not changed noticeably since Bate's survey in 1984, when academic skills were seen as basic and generic, rather than as "tertiary literacies". Our literature has proliferated in the meantime, and we can now base our practice on a vast exchange of models and experience; but how that will help very much remains to be seen.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to La Trobe University for granting me a semester's leave to carry out this study; to Judy Maxwell and Scott McDonald of RMIT for offering affiliation with the larger AALL database project; and to the following people for advice, encouragement, and help with locating sources: Brigid Ballard, Annie Bartlett, Rosemary Clerehan, Bev Kokkin, Lorraine Marshall, Alisa Percy, Katherine Samuelowicz, and Gordon Taylor.

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