

Increasing student participation and success: collaborating to embed academic literacies into the curriculum

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The recent changes to Australian higher education policy aimed at widening participation rates have implications for a changing demographic profile within the student cohort, and possibly the need for different kinds of academic support. One approach to providing such support is developing curricula which integrate academic literacies and content knowledge, and while this focus is not new, such curriculum development has been slow. The literature puts forward a number of interrelated factors to explain why this has been the case, but one factor is the need for a better understanding of the distinction between academic literacies development within disciplines, and the embedding of generic academic literacies which are transferable across subjects. This study evaluates a developing curriculum which embeds academic literacies in a core first year bachelor degree unit in the health sciences. Evaluation of the curriculum indicates that students' academic results improved with explicit embedding of academic literacies, and on-going collaboration between discipline specialists and Language and Learning Advisers facilitated a more dynamic approach to curriculum development. However, it also highlights the limitations of a piecemeal bottom-up approach to such curriculum development, and supports the argument that embedding academic literacies requires more systemic institutional support in order to achieve sustainable curricula renewal.

Key Words: curricula renewal, embedding academic literacies, widening participation.

1. Introduction

Responses within Australian universities to the Government's widening access policies reflect opposing positions. One response is angst at the prospect of having to "dumb down" curricula, and the other excitement at the prospect of curricular renewal based on new ways of conceptualising diversity. One question resounding in the passage-ways at my university is "How will we support under-prepared students?" One positive outcome of the Government's policies is that universities are engaging in discussion around the inclusion of students from diverse backgrounds, one group being those from a low socio-economic status (SES) background. While the discussion appears in the main to be driven by an economic imperative which links higher education funding to increased enrolment of students from a low SES background, there is a focus on changes to planning and policy frameworks. Although the increasing number of students from diverse backgrounds within Australian universities presents the challenge of policy change, it also offers the opportunity to address curricular renewal, and in this way to benefit all students. While a whole-curriculum renewal approach needs to be adopted, one change that could be incorporated is better integration or embedding of academic

literacies within courses. I will argue that the embedding of academic literacies in curricula of units/subjects is one component of curriculum renewal which will contribute to improved student participation.

One major challenge for students is the expectation that they will be able to employ different literacy practices, and switch to different ways of thinking and writing in different disciplines, and that they will somehow gain an understanding of how to do this by osmosis. Although more explicit teaching of academic literacies will assist students, there are a number of tensions present in curriculum renewal which aims to embed academic literacies. One such tension is what could be interpreted as two competing aims – embedding academic literacies in a seamless way so that students perceive them as an integral part of their developing knowledge and understanding, while also requiring students to develop a meta-cognitive approach to academic literacies development. The case study presented here describes a curriculum renewal process which demonstrates this tension. It is an evaluative case study, and although it presents the embedding of academic literacies in one unit of study some generalisations about curricular change can be made. The curriculum in this subject aimed to develop academic literacies, including written communication and research skills of all first year students enrolled in different health courses, and as such can inform broader policy around curricular renewal which seeks to support students from diverse backgrounds. Curricular change was a result of collaboration between discipline specialists and Language and Learning Advisers (LLAs). In this paper, I describe the processes involved in working collaboratively and highlight the limitations of a bottom-up approach to sustaining curriculum change. I also reflect on the acquisition of academic literacies as a developmental process, and the need to consider academic literacies development in the broader context of courses rather than single subjects. Finally I argue that such curricula renewal needs to be supported by institution wide policy.

2. Widening participation and curricular change

A Government review of Australian higher education, commonly referred to as ‘The Bradley Review’ (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2008) recommends an increase in Government funding in order to help increase the access rates to higher education for young people from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds. In addition, *Transforming Australia’s Higher Education* (2009), an Australian government policy document sets a target that by 2020, 20% of enrolments in undergraduate courses are to be students from a low SES background. While economic disadvantage and the need for financial assistance is a factor which impacts on participation rates, this document and other literature outline a number of challenges related to delivering higher education to such disadvantaged groups (Young, 2004; Coates & Krause, 2005; James, 2007; Priest, 2009). These include lower levels of previous education attainment, lack of perceived relevance and awareness of the benefits of higher education resulting in lower aspirations, lack of proximity to a higher education provider and a higher need for academic and personal support (James, 2002). While recognising that there are numerous barriers to access for this student cohort, this article will focus on the need for academic support after enrolment, and the embedding of academic literacies in course curricula as one way of providing this support.

Although there is some contention about the measurement of SES, there is general agreement that students from a low SES background are likely to be less well prepared for university than other students (James, 2007; Priest, 2009). Bourdieu’s (1986, 1989) theory of capital helps to explain this, and provides a reflective framework to consider how socio-economic status can affect success. He argues that an individual’s social position reduces his/her access to different types of capital – economic, cultural and social. He is concerned with inequality, the unequal distribution of power and the exclusion of certain groups from processes that allow them to acquire these forms of capital. In defining social capital, Bourdieu (1986) suggests that membership of certain groups “provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a credential which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word” (p. 249). He describes social capital as structural relations that lead to the production of knowledge, taste and ways of thinking and acting. Clearly all students who enter university do

not do so with the same stock of cultural and social capital, and are therefore not equal in their capacity to participate in academic discourse.

It should be recognised that in responding to the Government's economic incentives to widen access, higher education institutions have a responsibility to ensure that these students have opportunities which allow them to experience success. Kift, Nelson, and Clarke (2010) present both a social justice and an economic argument to support the need for an institutional response to the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. "In the face of increasing diversity, equal opportunity for success delivered through the curriculum is within our institutional control and quite simply is our legal and moral responsibility" (p. 12). The argument here is that all students, regardless of their backgrounds should have equitable access to supportive learning environments and "the transformative effects of higher education" (p. 13). Kift (2009) advocates a transition pedagogy consisting of a framework for the first year student experience as the basis of curricula and institutional reform. However, these responses need to recognise that such reform would benefit all students, not just those who may be seen as under-prepared for tertiary study, and that this reform needs to be adopted as a whole of institution approach.

3. Barriers to curricula development

There are a number of reasons put forward to explain why the embedding of academic literacies development into curricula has been slow (Sumsion & Goodfellow, 2004; Barrie, 2006; Jones, 2008; Einfalt, 2009). Jones (2008) suggests that there is a gap between the rhetoric around generic skills and literacies and their enactment in teaching practice. She contends that academics may not see teaching academic literacies as part of their role, and may consider them to be separate from disciplinary knowledge. Another barrier to developing course curricula which provide students with opportunities for generic academic literacies development is a movement towards horizontally structured degree programs. The lack of vertical structure particularly in business (Kirkpatrick & Mulligan, 2002) and the humanities often inhibits the systematic mapping of literacies and planning of literacies development (Green, Hammer, & Star, 2009). Another consideration is how constraints on resourcing and large classes have contributed to the limited success of this approach. In addition, an increase in student numbers has resulted in the development of cross-campus courses and the need to provide support and professional development for very large teaching teams (Green et al., 2009). There has also been debate about the transferable nature of generic skills and literacies across contexts, and whether or not the notion of skills is more relevant to vocational training (Leveson, 2000; Leggett et al., 2004; Sumsion & Goodfellow, 2004; Moore & Hough, 2005). Jones (2008) also highlights other barriers to curriculum development including the complexity of defining academic skills and literacies which are not necessarily observable or measurable, and the fact that academics may therefore not understand the nature of these literacies and may lack experience and confidence in teaching them.

Developing a shared vocabulary in the discussion around academic literacies development and some conceptual understanding of different pedagogical approaches are also important precursors to curricula development. Early definitions of generic skills development include Hattie, Biggs, and Purdie's (1996) study based on the need to identify students' learning needs and plan interventions for enhancing learners' cognitive, metacognitive and affective attributes. Lea and Street (2006) explain three different overlapping perspectives or ways of understanding student literacy in academic contexts which they suggest help define three different teaching and learning models. These include a study skills model, an academic socialization model, and an academic literacies model. The study skills approach could be described as a deficit model which focuses on surface features of language and the teaching of a suite of instrumental skills. The academic socialization model is concerned with the acculturation of students into academic discourse, and as such acknowledges the importance of the social context. Lea and Street (2000) suggest that this approach promotes students' acquisition of the literacy practices of different disciplines, but fails to acknowledge processes of change and issues of power and identity. The academic literacies model views the acquisition of effective literacies as more complex and involving "both epistemological issues and social processes, including power relations among

people, institutions and social identities” (Lea & Street, 2006, p. 369). This model recognises that social practices vary with context and culture. These models are not seen as exclusive or as describing a developmental or sequential process. Rather, the academic literacies approach encapsulates the other two models (Lea & Street 1998), and as such can help inform curricula development.

More recently there has been an emphasis on students’ acquisition of graduate attributes. Universities have sought to emphasise the importance of graduate attributes or graduate capabilities, and the list of particular attributes adopted by individual institutions is also increasingly being put forward as an important component of course curricula. A study by Barrie (2006) identifies that Australian academics both within and across disciplines have various understandings of what constitutes generic skills, academic literacies and graduate attributes. More importantly these various understandings are associated with particular beliefs about teaching and learning. Barrie’s study identifies beliefs which vary from a focus on precursor learning of foundation skills to be delivered as part of a remedial curriculum to an enabling conception of attributes which provide “a framework of on-going learning of new knowledge” (Barrie, 2004, p. 266). However while the study illustrates a continuum of views, it also emphasises the need for a staged development, with precursor strategies supporting higher level attributes. There does seem to be acknowledgment of the more narrow focus in the use of the term “skill” (Holmes, 2000; Lea & Street, 2006). Conversely “attributes” is used to refer to clusters of skills, knowledge, attitudes and understandings, which are transferable into a range of different contexts (Barrie, 2004), acquired during a course of study and demonstrated by graduates. Clearly a shared vocabulary will help to create an environment where academic literacies and graduate attributes are a valued addition to curricula, but it could be suggested that individual institutions will move towards better conceptual understandings through the provision of professional development programs and by adopting policy which encourages staff to be involved in curricula renewal processes.

4. Curricular responses to embedding academic literacies

While consensus on definitions of key terminology will be important for higher education policy development, developing curricula based on an understanding of the hierarchical nature of students’ acquisition of skills, literacies and attributes will help to clarify theory. This process should also contribute to clarifying the relationship between generic skills and discipline knowledge. Moore (2004) describes two contrasting ways of considering students’ acquisition of generic skills – one being the “generalist” view that skills can be learnt independently from discipline context and the “specifist” view that skills are always learnt within a disciplinary context. A third view seen as “relativism” is that generic skills after being learnt in a specific context can be applied in other contexts (Ballard & Clanchy, 1995, as cited in Moore, 2004). The case study being presented here is more closely aligned with this relativist view, being based on the notion of embedded curricula with knowledge and learning processes being linked. The approach is also supported by Chanock’s (2003) contention that while students develop an awareness of disciplinary norms, the challenge is to integrate academic literacies into the curriculum, but also consider how students may be able to transfer some of what they have learnt to other contexts. The case study presented here sought to illustrate firstly the development of an embedded academic literacies curriculum in a single unit of study, and also how this curriculum could enable students to participate in the “discourse” of their discipline.

The embedding of academic literacies in curricula can be seen as a developmental or staged process which needs to be planned at a course level. It would seem that projects within individual institutions which seek to “map” the academic literacies development of students from enrolment in a first year undergraduate course until graduation can help to inform curricula development (Willison & O’Regan, 2007). What academic literacies do students need to be successful in their study? What learning activities and student experiences are required in the course to facilitate the acquisition of “graduate attributes”? While these questions refer to a different set of student characteristics they are both relevant in the planning of course curricula. Clearly, however, the development of different lists of graduate attributes or the notion of

simply adding in some generic academic literacies to existing subjects is a somewhat simplistic approach to a complex teaching and learning challenge (Australian Learning and Teaching Council, 2009). So while the mapping of academic literacies development at a course level is a first step, other institutional systems need to be considered in order to bring about curricula renewal.

While curricula development has been somewhat limited, there are studies which identify different pedagogical approaches to the integration of academic literacies and examples of progress towards curricula renewal based on some of these approaches (Jolly, 2001; Kift, 2002; Barrie, 2007; Bamforth, 2010). Kift (2002) outlines changes to a law course based on a whole-of-course approach that seeks to embed generic academic literacies in an integrated and incremental way. The course aims to introduce skills and literacies as a staged acquisition process that focuses on authentic learning environments, appropriate learning objectives and assessment methods and a re-assessment of teaching and learning processes. The review framework consists of six capabilities of a law graduate and four generic and specific categories – attitudinal, cognitive, communication and relational – that are then divided into specific skills. These specific skills inform the course objectives and the demonstrated abilities of the graduate on course completion. Kift's description of theoretical understanding, application and transfer of the skills at three different levels emphasises the importance of planning for a staged acquisition of skilled behaviour at the course level.

In contrast to an institutional wide policy which supports the integration of academic literacies, the case study presented here describes curricular changes at the subject level driven by what could be described as a bottom-up approach. As such, it highlights the challenges of establishing a shared understanding of how to develop curricula which recognise the interrelated nature of discipline knowledge, discipline specific skills and holistic skills. It also illustrates some of the barriers, such as lack of institutional-wide practices and policies, which need to be overcome to achieve curricula renewal aimed at contributing to widening student participation.

5. Collaborating on curriculum change – A core first year unit in Health

This undergraduate first year unit – HBS107 “Understanding Health” – is available on all three Deakin University campuses (metropolitan and two regional campuses), as well as in off-campus mode, and is offered by the Faculty of Health. Students who enrol in the unit are interested in a variety of different health professions, such as nursing, social work, psychology and health promotion. The unit enables students to obtain fundamental knowledge and understanding of health concepts and issues. It is a compulsory unit, and as such has a very large enrolment (approx. 1,700 students in 2010), with input from four lecturers and approximately 20 sessional tutors. Students who enrolled in this unit came from very diverse backgrounds with more than 30% articulating through pathways other than immediate completion of secondary school. While there are no reliable measures of the social economic status of this student group, the University Planning Unit (2011) included this unit in the list of those with a high proportion on low SES students. In 2010, 16% of the students enrolled in the unit and 28% of those enrolled in off-campus mode were from a low SES background. The curriculum includes mixed mode or blended learning – face-to-face and online learning for both on-campus and off-campus students. Over a two year period the unit curriculum was evaluated and changed in order to include embedded academic literacies and to meet the challenges of multi-campus and off-campus delivery.

One of the first steps towards curriculum changes was that a number of Language and Learning Advisers (LLAs), each working on different campuses, began meeting with the discipline team who were responsible for the delivery of this unit. As the LLA located on one of the regional campuses, I initiated the first meeting with one lecturer in this unit, after discussing students' concerns about feedback on referencing in their first assignment. The students had complained to the LLA about being given conflicting feedback on their referencing. They were confused by what they perceived as a loss of marks, even though they had followed the referencing style as outlined in the University booklet “Guide to assignment writing and referencing” distributed to

all first year students. The initial contact ensured that the referencing style guide as presented in the unit outline was consistent with the university-wide style guide. I also suggested that the marking criteria for assessment tasks could include links to the resources on the academic skills website. This lecturer was surprised by the LLA's approach because he had never been contacted by an LLA while working on the larger metropolitan campus, but was keen to meet again to discuss possible support for students enrolled in this unit. After the initial meeting we agreed to form a working group involving four lecturers (representing each of the three campuses and off campus students), and three LLAs (representing each of the three campuses).

This working group met through voicepoint link ups over a two and a half year period. Over the first twelve months I generally "drove" this collaborative approach by planning meeting times, and writing meeting agendas and notes. However most members of the team contributed to the suggested "actions" from the meetings, and after the first twelve months period the discipline team members volunteered to take over the responsibility for meetings. This slow move towards joint responsibility illustrates the time required for relationship building, and also highlights how curriculum change is dependent on processes which facilitate shared understandings. Clearly this working group needed to agree on the value of embedded literacies, and the possible pedagogical approaches to implementing these changes. It should also be acknowledged that on a small regional campus relationship building is facilitated by face-to-face contact, and this was certainly my experience as the strength of the initial partnership between me and one lecturer helped to confirm the value of collaborating. The cross-university team initially re-wrote the assessment tasks and marking criteria. The LLAs then developed specific academic literacy resources and learning activities to support assessment tasks, and worked with discipline specialists to begin the process of making changes to the curriculum. So while this collaborative approach initially commenced with a campus-based meeting to discuss how first year students enrolled in this faculty might be supported in avoiding plagiarism, it developed into a University-wide action research project with a wider focus on curricula renewal.

The delivery model for this unit included weekly on-line narrated PowerPoint slides, seminars and tutorials. It was decided that academic literacies development would be included in the content of seminars and tutorials, which also included professional skill development and academic literacies development. Evaluation will focus on input into the curriculum from LLAs, which in the first instance included research, reading, academic writing and referencing. During the initial meetings LLAs and the discipline team discussed the first two assessment tasks in this unit. Assessment task 1, a reading review, was aimed at facilitating the students' development of academic literacy, and assessment task 2, a research assignment, built on the skills developed in assessment task 1. Data collected by the LLAs at all campuses during the previous year showed that a large number of students studying this unit accessed individual appointments with LLAs requesting assistance in interpreting the assessment question and planning a written response. In the first instance the team worked together to ensure that both the assessment tasks and the assessment criteria were worded in such a way that was clear, concise and accessible to the students.

The development of curricula to support these assessment tasks was based on a number of pedagogical principles. Learning outcomes clearly expressed the acquisition of both discipline knowledge and academic literacies. Initially there was a need to identify and agree on the key literacies needed to successfully complete both assessment tasks, and then scaffold the assessment tasks, by including learning activities which would contribute to students' successful completion of the assignments. Although a scaffolding approach may be interpreted differently, in this instance it involved breaking the content into manageable pieces and providing support for each of the smaller developmental tasks (McDevitt & Ormrod, 2002). The curriculum included the explicit teaching of the required academic literacies through "hurdle tasks" which included online and face-to-face workshopping of responses. The LLAs developed resources to support hurdle tasks, for both assessment tasks (Appendix A). In the first year of the project the learning activities or "hurdle tasks" were written and planned by the LLAs, but delivered by the tutors. However, the team concluded that tutors needed more support, so in the second year of

the project the LLAs attended the unit planning session held prior to the start of the trimester to explain the purpose of the learning activities, and how they might be implemented in tutorials. While this provided some professional development for tutors, it was felt that additional funding was needed so that sessional tutors could attend further professional development sessions during the teaching period.

In the second year of the project, students also attended two seminars (as part of a weekly seminar program) conducted by the LLAs on each campus, which explicitly addressed achievement of each of the assessment criteria for the two assignments. The “genre approach” was adopted in the seminars with students being provided with models of appropriate written responses relating to health issues, and being asked to discuss different types of academic writing. The objective was to engage students in thinking about not only how they would approach their writing, but also the language and discourse features of the discipline specific resources they were being asked to read. While the curriculum included objectives which related to the achievement of generic skills such as academic literacy, it also could be seen as contributing to the developmental process in which students move towards acquiring graduate attributes such as the ability to communicate in written form across a range of contexts. However, the curriculum did not include learning activities which asked the students to reflect explicitly on their skills and literacies development. This was a significant omission, and was an important consideration for future curriculum planning.

6. Evaluation

An evaluation of the curricular changes in this unit that were a result of collaboration with LLAs included:

- a comparison of results in two key assessment tasks over the two year period
- on-line survey completed by students after the first six weeks of the teaching period in 2010
- data from the “Student evaluation of teaching and units” (SETU) in 2010, and
- my reflective notes on the collaborative process.

Overall, the evaluations suggest that students benefited from the scaffolded approach to assessment tasks and demonstrated improved performance on assignments. However, while they appreciated the embedded skills content, they showed limited awareness of the larger picture of academic literacies development.

6.1. Academic results

A comparison of student results (Table 1) on the two assignments demonstrates an improved average mark over the two year period. For assignment 1, worth 15%, the average mark improved by 0.2%, and for assignment 2, worth 35%, the average mark improved by 1.52%. While the teaching staff and assessment tasks remained the same over the two years it needs to be acknowledged that other variables may have affected this result, and that the data would need to be collected over a longer period to confirm any impact of embedding of academic literacies.

Table 1. Academic results for Assessment Tasks 1 and 2 (2009, 2010).

| Year | | Assessment Task 1(15%) | Assessment Task 2 (35%) |
|------|------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2009 | Ave. | 10.56* | 23.21** |
| | SD | 2.210 | 5.718 |
| | N | 1351 | 1300 |
| 2010 | Ave. | 10.76* | 24.73** |
| | SD | 2.406 | 5.295 |
| | N | 1493 | 1230 |

The differences between the averages are statistically significant. * p<0.05, ** p<0.001.

6.2. On-line survey

This on-line survey asked students to rate the relevance of the seminars to their learning in this unit. The survey rating the first six seminars was completed by 257 students (approx 15% response rate). Although the response rate was low, the participant group was representative of all campuses and off-campus students. The results in Figure 1 represent student responses to three of the seminars, and show that in general the students rated the two seminars which scaffolded assignment one and developed their information literacy skills as being very relevant or relevant to their learning in this subject. Another seminar which was not delivered by LLAs focused on employability skills. “Employability skills” was the term used by the Careers Counsellors who delivered this seminar, and it is included in Figure 1 to provide comparison. Predictably students’ responses indicated that as first year students they saw a focus on academic and information literacies as being more relevant to their learning needs at this time in their study than employability skills. However, it could be suggested that a rationale that linked employability skills with graduate attributes, and learning activities which required reflection on literacy development, could have resulted in students perceiving employability skills as having more relevance. Clearly there was also a need to have students engage in metacognitive learning activities which would help them reflect on their learning in this particular unit of study.

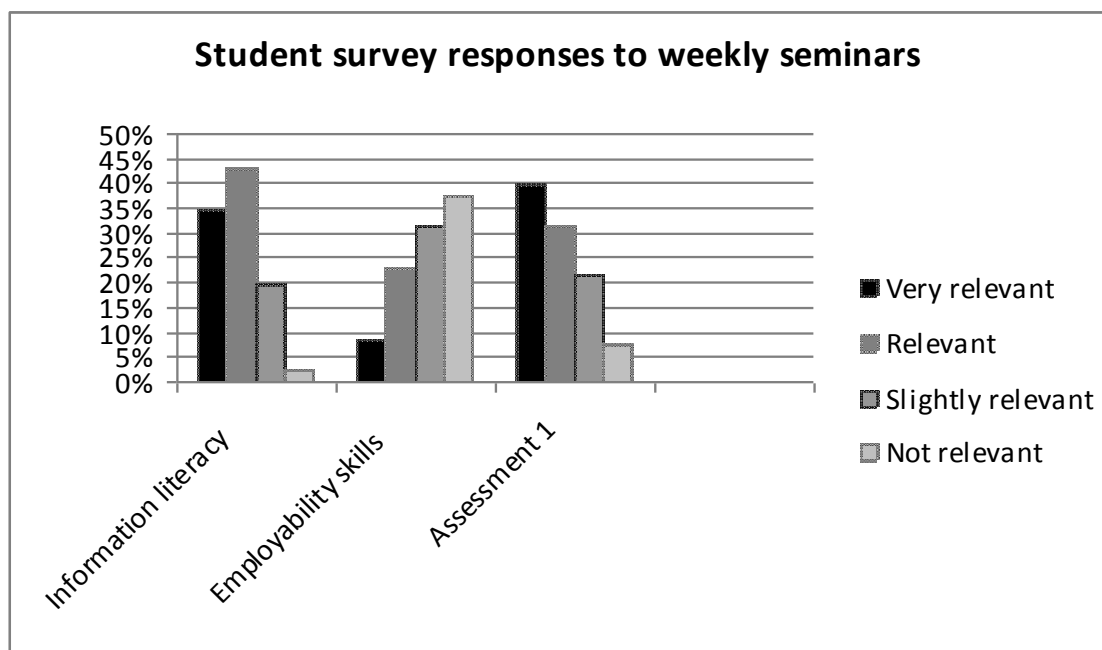


Figure 1. Student responses rating relevance of seminars to subject content.

6.3. Student evaluation

Table 2 compares students' responses to a statement about the clarity of requirements for completing assessment tasks, which appeared in the SETU.

Table 2. Question on completion of assessment tasks (SETU).

| Year | Requirements for completing the assessment tasks in this unit were clear | |
|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| 2009 | % agree | 73.7 |
| | Response rate | 55% |
| 2010 | % agree | 81.1 |
| | Response rate | 46% |

Although there was a difference in response rate across the two years, it could be suggested that seminars which supported the completion of assessment tasks contributed to the difference in the number of students who agreed with the statement regarding clarity of assessment tasks.

A number of student comments (Table 3) which relate to the scaffolded approach focused on transition to university, and in particular students' need for academic literacies development. There were no questions in the SETU that specifically related to the embedding of academic skills and literacies. However, students' additional comments in the 2010 SETU, such as "I wish the seminars were closer aligned to the course content that is examinable" suggested that for some students not all seminars were seen as relevant, and again that a reflection on skills development needed to be included.

Table 3. Students' response to general question on unit in 2010 (Seminars/scaffolded learning).

What were the best aspects of your unit?

I like that the unit also takes a responsibility for helping students adjust to Uni life using the seminars.

The seminars and helpful direction on how to complete assignments, especially considering we are first year students and university style writing is a new concept to many of us.

As an off campus student, I was very impressed with the unit content that was available online and supplemented with the eLive tutorials. The seminars with the Language and Learning Advisers were fantastic and supplied critical information that allowed an improved approach to the assignments.

The seminars that had the assessment criteria in them. That was very useful.

A lot of help was given for assignments, and this was a good introduction to uni writing.

6.4. Reflection on team meetings

During a two year period, all the cross-university meetings were carried out as voicepoint link ups between campuses, a method which is often less conducive to achieving "a sense of team" (Kerba & Buono, 2004). However, notes which I compiled to reflect on the meetings document an increasing understanding of shared objectives, developing trust and willingness to work collaboratively over this period of time. There was also a willingness to adopt a student-centred approach, respond to students' feedback and trial different pedagogies in an attempt to meet the challenges of delivering to a large cohort of students across three campuses and to off-campus students. For example, at the beginning of this project, LLAs were given access to Deakin Studies On Line (DSO), the on-line delivery site for this unit. This meant that they were able to access student discussions and respond to student questions regarding assignments. Although the data from this one case study cannot be generalised to other teams who seek to work across discipline and professional areas, the experiences of this team support the argument that sufficient time must be given to developing a productive working relationship.

7. Discussion

The aim of the curriculum development process for this unit was to have students actively engage in the development of academic literacies and the acquisition of discipline knowledge. While not all seminars were seen as highly relevant, those which included academic literacies were valued by most students. It seems that these first year students placed a high value on learning activities which supported completion of assessment tasks, and that these activities contributed to better results. The case study illustrates that a bottom-up approach which resulted in productive working relationships can support curricula renewal. However, this approach requires considerable expenditure of time, especially if working collaboratively is not supported by institutional policy. While the embedding of academic literacies is seen as a strategic direction for LLAs, there were no specific structures within the institution at this time which

facilitated this, and as such the curriculum change process described in this case study was born out of a single serendipitous passage-way conversation and enacted through the good will of the working group. Specific structures such as faculty liaison roles for LLAs, project funding which supports LLAs' input into course reviews or a university-wide project supported by equity funding would provide the impetus for a collaborative approach to curricula renewal.

Describing a curriculum review process in one unit could possibly be seen as simplifying the complexity of endeavouring to successfully embed academic literacies so that both knowledge content and literacies are seen as complementary rather than separate. The delivery in this health unit, which included seminars and hurdle tasks, had the effect of emphasizing learning outcomes which focused on academic literacies. While some students embraced this approach and also acknowledged in evaluation of the unit the transferable nature of the literacies they were acquiring, others did not. Again the challenge here is to ensure that students do not see the inclusion of academic literacies as something bolted on or separate from the curricula. Unfortunately, the delivery through narrated PowerPoint slides of what was seen by students as core content, and "other content" through seminars, tended to have this effect. A more effective and sustainable model would be for LLAs to contribute to curriculum development, and to provide professional development for tutors in the delivery of the learning activities which aim to embed literacies development. However, while it should be noted that the separation of skills and content should be avoided, at the same time students need to be allowed time to reflect on knowledge, understandings, values and literacies acquired, so that they can begin the process of explaining and recording their achievement. This needs to be planned at a course level with reflection being built into tutorial learning activities, and assessment tasks which require students to build a portfolio illustrating their achievements. If students are being asked to recognise the value of their course in facilitating the acquisition of certain academic skills, literacies and attributes, the development process needs to be given much more overt emphasis.

It cannot be assumed that students understand or value the acquisition of academic literacies. In this case study student opinion varied as to the relevance of the overall seminar program, with some students' comments reflecting an extremely narrow focus. These types of responses illustrate one of the challenges of ensuring student "buy in" to embedded literacies content. Such responses also suggest that curriculum which focuses on the development of academic literacies needs to be truly embedded so that students clearly see the links between the content and the literacies they are being challenged to acquire. This requires a curriculum framework that clearly articulates the literacies to be explicitly developed, and a rationale which includes their value relative to discipline knowledge. However, while unit outlines need to provide a rationale for the inclusion of learning objectives which focus on knowledge and academic literacies, the learning activities and assessment tasks must be planned and delivered in such a way that integrates these. That is, the learning activities need to encompass both types of objectives. While some attempts were made to incorporate these types of learning activities in tutorials for this unit, the team of tutors was not given sufficient support in delivery of these activities. Also this approach needs to be systemic across the institution. Requiring students to recognise their development towards being independent learners implies the inclusion of metacognitive processes that allow students to reflect on their learning. Clearly, if this process is left to the completion of on-line unit evaluations, students' responses may be negative.

One way to plan and evaluate models of integrated skills delivery is a collaborative approach between LLAs and discipline specialists. The model of collaboration which was adopted resulted in a number of positive curriculum changes. Involving LLAs in the initial planning and writing of assessment tasks and assessment criteria, and having LLAs respond to student queries on DSO ensured a sense of collegiality, and in some ways joint ownership of the unit. The learning activities planned by the LLAs gave tutors a framework for presenting embedded academic literacies development. In addition the team meetings facilitated a reflective approach to teaching and learning, as curriculum was continually being discussed, evaluated and sometimes changed in response to critique. The LLAs often provided an outsider's view. Crosling and Wilson (2005) describe this as the disciplinary staff being able to "identify and articulate the goals of the disciplinary community" while the learning adviser "has the resources

to interpret and therefore explain these as writing practices” (p. 7). While the Advisers’ involvement went beyond delivery of one-off seminars to inclusion in curriculum development, the process described here is only the start of curricula renewal aimed at embedded academic literacies. However, a presentation on this case study at a faculty planning day and University Teaching and Learning Conference promoted the exchange of ideas about collaborative teaching and learning practices, and resulted in the model being put forward as an exemplar for curriculum review in other units. One consideration for future planning is the time constraints for LLAs created by this level of involvement. One potential refinement of the model is to include LLAs in further professional development for tutors, including the explicit teaching of academic literacies. The literature provides little guidance to cross campus teaching of such large units, but certainly harnessing the knowledge and skills of professional staff on each campus of this university increased the face-to-face interaction with students, allowed for greater recognition of campus differences and reduced reliance on electronic delivery.

Given that most universities have developed some policy around the integration of generic attributes in courses, these policies have the potential to support curricula renewal which includes better embedding of academic literacies. However, institutions need to adopt a whole course approach, as outlined by Kift (2002), giving due consideration to the incremental integration of skills within subjects at different year levels. Also there is a need for a whole-of-institution approach, which supports professional development for course coordinators and academic staff who are expected to teach academic literacies, and for structures which encourage collaboration and the sharing of exemplar curricula. The curriculum development described here was very much a bottom up approach that grew out of a developing ‘partnership’ on one campus of the University. Although a bottom up approach tends to ensure staff commitment to the process, in this instance the project was not sustainable, as although it was supported by individual staff it lacked systemic support. Again, as this collaboration relied on the goodwill of the participants, continuity was easily threatened by staff changes. In fact after two years the Unit Chair changed, and the project was discontinued. (Ironically I was then approached by a new lecturer with a request to develop a referencing resource for students studying this health unit.) While this collaborative project was discontinued, the University has since commenced a curricula renewal process which includes integrated student support through the development of embedded literacies curricula in courses that enroll a high percentage of students from a low SES background.

8. Conclusion

Widening participation in higher education will mean that there will be an even greater variation in the stock of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that first year students possess when they commence university, and an increased continuum of individual needs. It should be acknowledged that these students will contribute different skills and knowledges to the university community, and that these different understandings should be valued and cultivated. However, with increasing student diversity there would appear to be an even greater imperative to provide more explicit teaching of academic literacies and for these to be embedded within course curricula. The suggested approach has the potential to support the learning of all students, not just those from a low SES background.

Australian universities are being challenged to develop and refine policy which aims to give all students, regardless of their backgrounds, the best opportunities for success in their chosen course of study. Curriculum renewal which includes embedded academic literacies will improve student success rates. However, while this approach to curricula development is recognised as best practice, the rhetoric does not match the reality. A number of barriers have meant that these policies do not necessarily translate into teaching practices and learning experiences for students. This case study demonstrates how integrating academic literacies, such as written communication, into the curriculum of a first year unit can improve all students’ academic performance. It also demonstrates that while curriculum changes driven by a bottom up process could help to inform wider institutional policy, in this instance the curriculum changes were not sustainable. The curriculum development process was enriched by collaboration between

discipline specialists and LLAs, but such collaborative curricula development must be supported by policy and formal structures which promote work across faculty, department and professional area boundaries. Enriching curricula in this way must also have top down support if curricula change is to be sustainable.

In order to be part of whole-of-institution projects which seek to enrich the learning experiences of all students including those from diverse backgrounds, LLAs need to be actively involved in budget submissions which focus on curricula renewal. In this way LLAs can scope and plan university-wide curricula renewal projects. LLAs have the capacity to help realise a shared conceptual understanding of an academic literacies approach. Through membership of academic course development teams LLAs can increase their own capacity and the capacity of other academic team members to help students gain an understanding of the social context not only of the university, but of their chosen discipline. The case study presented here confirms the need for students to perceive the academic literacy learning outcomes as important and relevant to them, and suggests that students need structured opportunities to reflect on their acquisition of these literacies. All universities will respond differently to increasing student diversity. However, it is beholden on LLAs to be part of a policy direction which promotes an institutional-wide holistic framework for embedded academic literacies. Curriculum renewal is one very positive response to the Government's widening access policy, and such a response is inclusive of all students.

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Appendix A. Hurdle Tasks

HBS107 "Understanding Health" — Hurdle tasks/Workshop exercises

Wilkinson, R & Marmot, M (eds.) 2003, *Social Determinants of Health, The Solid Facts* (2nd ed.), World Health Organization, Denmark.

Reading Workshop

To complete the first assessment task you need to read and understand the Wilkinson and Marmot report. When you're reading a paper or report of this length it's helpful to think about ways to make your reading more efficient and effective. The resource Effective Reading (www.deakin.edu.au/current-students/study-support/study-skills/handouts/reading.php) gives some helpful suggestions about how to cope with the large amount of reading you're expected to do for your course.

Getting started with the "Wilkinson and Marmot report"

Getting an Overview

This report is well set out and you can easily get an overview by looking at

- the title and date of publication
- the list of contents,
- the summary at the end of the report (p. 32)
- the graphics (photos and figures)
- main headings and sub headings

Being an active reader

One technique active readers use to start engaging with a piece of text before they read in detail, is to ask (and try to answer) questions about topics covered in the material they are about to read.

Look at how the first topic from the list of contents in the Wilkinson & Marmot report is examined below.

1. The social gradient

You might ask:

What is the social gradient?

And may answer:

SG is probably some sort of socio-economic scale.

You may also ask:

How might it impact on health?

And answer:

Probably, people low on this scale will have reduced access to health resources and therefore poorer health compared to people at the higher end.

The answers at this stage are ‘educated’ guesses, so when you later read for detail, you will be looking for the answers to these questions in the text.

Task 1

Now use the same approach with the rest of the topics in Wilkinson & Marmot. Remember, you don’t necessarily need to have answers to your questions, as this is about starting to focus on the reading you are about to do. Use the same approach when reading the headings and summary at the end of the report. After gaining an overview you should be able to write down some of the main ideas in the report.

Write 2-3 sentences in your own words outlining what this report is about

Intensive Reading

To better understand the social determinants and the policy implications of these determinants you now need to read the detail of report. Reading the report in one sitting is quite demanding, but if you break the reading into manageable segments it will be a lot less daunting. For example, you might choose to read the introduction and the first two sections on social determinants in one study session (pp. 7-13). Read with a pen in your hand.

Task 2

Underline key terms and make notes in the margin to help you summarise the content of each paragraph.

Underline any terms you need to define and look up the meaning when you’ve completed the reading session. Begin to compile a glossary of ‘new terms’ (Vocabulary list).

Writing Workshop

Using the words and ideas of others

A feature of academic writing is that it involves discussing the ideas and findings of other writers. There are a number of ways of doing this, and the skills of summarising, paraphrasing and quoting are outlined in a resource entitled ‘Using the ideas and words of others in your writing’. You can access this resource at:

www.deakin.edu.au/current-students/study-support/study-skills/handouts/ideas.php

or in the “Guide to assignment writing and referencing”.

In summarising one section of the Wilkinson and Marmot report you will make the most use of two of the skills outlined – paraphrasing and summarising.

Writing a paraphrase

A paraphrase is the rephrasing of a sentence or a short passage in about the same number of words as the original passage. When you paraphrase you need to provide an in-text citation which includes the author's name, the year of publication and the page.

The following is an example of a paraphrase of a sentence taken from the introductory section of the report

Direct quote

“Health policy was once thought to be about little more than the provision and funding of medical care: the social determinants of health were discussed only among academics” (Wilkinson and Marmot 2003, p. 7).

Paraphrase

Once the social determinants of health were the subject of academic discussion only, and funding and provision of medical care were the major considerations for health policy (Wilkinson and Marmot 2003, p. 7).

Task 1

Paraphrase the introductory sentence/s for one of the social determinants.

Writing a summary

A summary can be a condensed version of a passage, an article or a book. There is no correlation between the length of the original text and the summary. In task 2 you are being asked to summarise two pages in one paragraph. When summarising you need to include an in-text citation (name of author and year of publication).

Writing a paragraph

The following example paragraphs from the report show how the paragraphs are structured in order to develop the main idea being presented. The main idea is stated in the first sentences and then developed further throughout the paragraph.




The main idea in a paragraph can be expanded in a range of different ways, such as:

- providing definitions
- giving an example
- giving more detailed explanation
- supporting a point by referring to a particular source
- providing comparison or contrast
- citing a study or data

The final sentence of the paragraph should sum up or clarify the main point.

Paragraph analysis

| | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>What is known</p> <p>Poor social and economic circumstances affect health throughout life. People further down the social ladder usually run at least twice the risk of serious illness and premature death as those near the top. Nor are the effects confined to the poor: the social gradient in health runs right across society, so that even among middle-class office workers, lower ranking staff suffer much more disease and earlier death than higher ranking</p> | <p>← <i>topic sentence</i></p> <p>← <i>support sentence</i></p> <p>← <i>qualification</i></p> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| staff (Fig. 1). Both material and psychosocial causes contribute to these differences and their effects extend to most diseases and causes of death. |  <p>Conclusion: restating & clarifying main idea</p> |
| Disadvantage has many forms and may be absolute or relative. It can include having few family assets, having a poorer education during adolescence, having insecure employment, becoming stuck in a hazardous or dead-end job, living in poor housing, trying to bring up a family in difficult circumstances and living on an inadequate retirement pension. |  <p>topic sentence</p>  <p>support sentence giving examples</p> |

Task 2

Write a paragraph which summarises one social determinant of health and the policy implications of that determinant.

Note for tutors – Possible discussion points for the workshop

- Use of a direct quotes c/f paraphrase
- Use of page numbers for direct quotes, paraphrases and summaries
- Use of reporting verbs, e.g. “suggests”, “contends”
- Use of writer’s own words
- Need to retain technical terms
- Summary of studies and policy implications
- Bibliographic details included in the reference list.

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