

Embedding and integrating language and academic skills: An innovative approach

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A growing body of research into the provision of learning support suggests that good practice is exemplified by the integration of language and academic skills (LAS) into specifically targeted core discipline units. There are many reasons offered: that contextualised support picks up weaker students who commonly fail to self-select for voluntary workshops; that students favour contextualised workshops over general workshops, often perceiving the latter to have little relevance to them; that the number of students in Australian universities with English as an additional language (EAL) has increased markedly over the past decade; and that in some units the delivery of contextualised support serves to “up-skill” academic staff. The authors of this paper argue that integrated learning support makes good use of limited resources for all stakeholders: discipline academics, learning advisors and students. The paper explores the experiences of these stakeholders in a core management unit of the MBA at Edith Cowan University over a period of three semesters. It outlines the various tasks involved in this innovative embedding project both in terms of team meetings for the discipline staff and learning advisor, and class time allocated to LAS development. It also evaluates the benefits through student feedback and interviews with members of the embedding team. The authors conclude that the approach taken in this project was effective in supporting incremental, discipline-specific LAS development for students and in raising awareness among discipline teaching staff of the importance of LAS development.

Key Words: English language proficiency, integrated and embedded learning support, EAL students.

1. Background

Over the past decade Australian higher education providers have faced a rapidly changing student demographic: a marked growth in numbers of students with English as an additional language (EAL); a steady increase in the number of school leavers who are the first in their family to participate in higher education; and a more socio-economically diverse intake, resulting from recommendations in the Bradley Review (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008). International students have brought in much needed revenue but universities have had to respond to scathing criticism that many who graduate lack the basic skills required for employment in Australia (Barthel, 2007; Birrell, 2006a; Elson-Green, 2007; Ewart, 2007;

Johnson, 2008), criticism based on their perceived lack of English language competency (Birrell, 2006a; Birrell, 2006b; Birrell, Hawthorne, & Richardson, 2006). This concern has been addressed through DEEWR's Good Practice Principles for English Language Proficiency (GPPs) for International Students (Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), 2009), principles that are expected to be endorsed as standards for all students (Trounson, 2010; AUQA, 2010).

The issuing of the GPPs has prompted a great deal of discussion about what English language proficiency actually means. Dunworth reflects that there is little common understanding of the term, not just at an institutional level, but also within disciplines and, as a result, there is little consensus about what constitutes sufficient levels of proficiency for "any year of tertiary study" (2010, p. 6). Recently, opinion seems to favour a broad definition of English language provision which incorporates academic literacies, and even professional literacies (see, for example, Harper, Prentice, & Wilson, 2011, p. 45), rather than a narrow language-specific interpretation (Murray, 2010). The definition of English language proficiency that is adopted within a university can have considerable impact on the support which is provided for students, both in terms of what is offered and to whom. The definition provided in the Good Practice Principles report, and cited below, clearly implies that opportunities to enhance English language proficiency need to be made available to all students. This is the definition guiding current decisions at Edith Cowan University (ECU):

"English language proficiency" has been defined as the ability of students to use the English language to make and communicate meaning in spoken and written contexts while completing their university studies. Such uses may range from a simple task such as discussing work with fellow students, to complex tasks such as writing an academic paper or delivering a speech to a professional audience. This view of proficiency as the ability to organise language to carry out a variety of communication tasks distinguishes the use of "English language proficiency" from a narrow focus on language as a formal system concerned only with correct use of grammar and sentence structure. (AUQA, 2009, p. 1)

Language and academic skills (LAS) support has traditionally been offered through university-wide workshops and individual consultations, typically coordinated through a centralised service (see, for example, O'Regan, 2005), an approach challenged in the 1990s by some Learning Advisors (LAs) who advocated a more integrated model. The University of Wollongong devised the IDEALL approach, recognising the need for "discipline-specific contexts" (Skillen, Merten, Trivett, & Percy, 1998, p. 1). The University of Sydney developed collaborative models, working closely with accounting students (English, Bonanno, Ihnatko, Webb, & Jones, 1999) and the Faculty of Pharmacy (Jones, Bonanno, & Scouller, 2001). Described as a "paradigm shift" by Skillen, Percy, Trivett, and James (2001), these new "partnerships" (p. 1) were analysed at the 2001 National Language and Academic Skills Conference, held at the University of Wollongong (see Craswell & Bartlett, 2001; Stevenson & Kokkinn, 2007).

Despite the changing student demographic and the spotlight on integration, many institutions, including ECU, continued to encourage international, 'first in family' and mature age students to complete preparation courses and generic workshops and to seek individual assistance from LAs housed in centralised services. The generic skills courses and workshops were often poorly attended (see Arkoudis & Starfield, 2007) and content in such settings was invariably regarded as irrelevant (see, for example, Wingate, 2006). At the National Language and Academic Skills Conference in 2005, case studies of successful collaborations between unit coordinators, learning advisors and librarians were again reported (see Ambery, Manners, & Smith, 2005; Crosling & Wilson, 2005). In this same period, a proliferation of literature around first year education (FYE) appeared. This literature called for fresh approaches, where "academic, administrative and support programs are ... integrated into the curriculum as much as possible" (Kift & Nelson, 2005, p. 226).

Contextualisation of LAS has increasingly been advocated and trialled, to the point where, in 2010, Bronwyn James, President of the Australian Association for Academic Language and Learning (AALL), asserted that “the language and communication practices that define the discipline need to be taught alongside and integrated within the context of a course” (James, 2010). However, in 2010, at ECU a centralised service offering an extremely limited scope for the adoption of an integrated model remained in place. As a result, the Faculty of Business and Law established its own Academic Skills Centre which opened in February 2010. Despite employing only two LAs, the decision was taken to trial a number of integrated approaches. This paper analyses current trends in learning support to show why this model was adopted; illustrates how embedding in a core unit can generate change on a number of levels; and demonstrates how an integrated model can extend through a discipline.

2. Integrated learning support: The literature

In language and learning research a contextualised approach is often discussed in terms of providing embedded support while FYE material tends to speak of integration. Put simply, it is “integrating contextualised skills development within specific disciplines” (van der Meer & Scott, 2008, no page number). Jones, Bonanno and Scouller (2001) explored the nature of partnerships between faculty staff and LAs and represented the strength of such partnerships on a continuum. In brief:

1. Adjunct (weak) – learning support provided by LA outside the timetabled unit.
2. Adjunct (strong) – discipline-based support provided by LA outside the timetabled unit.
3. Integrated – workshops and lectures presented in the unit by the LA. Discipline staff may not be present.
4. Embedded – LA and discipline staff work collaboratively but LA does not teach in unit; ideally leads to LAS embedded in assessment practices and curriculum.

Despite their differentiation between “integration” and “embedding”, the two terms tend to be used interchangeably in the wider literature.

In 2002, a project was initiated at Macquarie University that linked the Masters in Accounting (CPA Extension) course with its English language centre, integrating LAS (Evans, Tindale, Cable, & Hamil Mead, 2009; Macquarie University, 2009; see also Dale, Cable, & Day, 2006). There are three distinct elements to this project. Firstly, English language specialists integrate LAS in 10 of 13 units (Evans et al., 2009, pp. 600-2; Dale et al., 2006). To advance to this position, and to ensure sustainability, staff from the English language centre have adopted a “bottom-up approach” (Evans et al., p. 600), ensuring discipline staff are active partners in the project. However, some lecturers do leave the room while language specialists run the workshop. This can lead to responsibility for the development of LAS falling solely onto LAs. Secondly, an adjunct program of voluntary workshops is offered outside of class time. Thirdly, language specialists see students who require or request individual support (Evans et al., p. 602). This integration of LAS is clearly resource intensive but the processes could lead to the ‘embedding’ described in the continuum above where language specialists are involved in collaboration but not delivery.

Other methods to incorporate LAS are less resource intensive. One such method is streaming which is not listed on the continuum, but would fit between adjunct (context specific—strong) and integrated. Streaming involves assessing the English language proficiency of students early in a unit or course and streaming tutorials according to results. The University of Technology Sydney ran a project beginning in 2005 that integrated LAS through streamed tutorials and targeted workshops (University of Technology Sydney, ELLSA Centre, 2009). At the NSW/ACT AALL gathering in 2010, Roslyn Appleby from UTS indicated that streaming “stigmatises the lower streams” and that the ELLSA Centre was evaluating this approach (AALL, 2010). The Business faculty at Curtin University introduced a unit entitled “Communication in Business” in the mid-2000s. Students completed a writing task in the first week and, if assessed as requiring support, attended the full four hours allocated to the unit, while those who passed attended the first three hours only (Curtin University, 2009). A number

of universities are developing discipline-specific communication units (see, for example, Macquarie University, 2011) and, while not a new initiative, it is currently a favoured approach to ensure that all students are introduced to a range of LAS deemed necessary for their study.

Another common approach to LAS support is the provision of voluntary workshops, often described as “adjunct” (Jones, et al., 2001) or “bolt-on” (Wingate, 2006). At the University of Western Australia, engineering students were offered English language assistance via extra tutorial sessions facilitated by a LA (Stappenbelt & Barrett-Lennard, 2008). In a similar initiative, the University of Canberra offered reading skills workshops for selected students in a program entitled Unit Support Programme (Kennelly, Maldoni, & Davies, 2010; Maldoni, Kennelly & Davies, 2009). Workshops, “designed to run parallel” (Kennelly et al., 2010, p. 65) to a core unit, were held for targeted students identified through diagnostic testing and other means. Activities were directly related to assessment tasks and unit content but “students who were identified as most at risk ... did not attend” (Kennelly et al., 2010, p. 67). Similarly, when the University of Queensland offered pharmacy students extension courses in oral communications skills, the weaker students failed to attend (McKauge, et al., 2009, pp. 290-1). Case studies support these critical findings—those who most need language and academic support do not attend voluntary sessions (see also, Baik & Grieg, 2009, pp. 408 & 410; Song, 2006, p. 425). The University of Canberra study suggests voluntary workshops can increase in popularity with both staff and students if given time to develop (Kennelly, et al., p. 64). This option may well suit many institutions where there are fewer learning advisors and larger class sizes. Further trials may show continued growth as staff and students speak of the benefits.

There are many ways of integrating LAS. Those featured share the commonality of ALL specialists working closely with discipline teaching staff.

3. Integrated learning support: Our experience

In 2009, ECU had a Learning Centre that was predominantly centralised. Learning Advisors (LAs) spent most of their time conducting general workshops and assisting students on an individual basis. While some LAs had “Account Manager” responsibility for a specific faculty, the time allocation to service the faculty was extremely limited. In the Faculty of Business and Law, the designated LA had around 10 hours per semester in which to make connections with academic staff and contribute to class activities. As a result, there were few opportunities to establish meaningful staff interactions, and visits to classes usually amounted to a few minutes advertising the centralised Learning Centre.

In the weeks prior to the start of the second semester in 2009, staff from a Management unit of the MBA course approached the designated Faculty of Business and Law LA to request help with LAS that they felt were beyond their area of expertise. The cohort was an international one. The major assessment in this unit comprised an annotated bibliography and essay, in both of which there was evidence of a high rate of plagiarism and low levels of English language proficiency. The unit had a high failure rate and was unpopular with students, who complained in unit feedback that it was too difficult. In particular, they complained about the assessment tasks, claiming that many aspects of these assessments were unfamiliar to them. After some initial discussion, it was agreed that the unit would be made mandatory for all students in the first semester of their course and that the LA would work with academic staff to embed LAS within the unit, to make the skills requirement explicit to students and to scaffold the assessment tasks. The LA met regularly with the three academics involved in the unit, observed their classes, discussed tasks and processes, and team taught in their classes. The observation of classes in the early weeks of the project allowed the LA to shape learning activities that met the needs of this particular cohort and progressed LAS development in an incremental and highly discipline-specific way. Results show that academic honesty increased and the overall failure rate was reduced (Walker, Redmond, Morris, Ashton, & Millstead, 2009). In addition, international students rated the unit more highly and indicated that they felt more supported in their assessments than was previously reported.

Following on from this, a faculty-based Academic Skills Centre was established early in 2010 and a decision was taken to integrate LAS wherever possible (Harris, 2010). The embedding project within the MBA was deemed a priority as it was viewed as a way of making contact with, and providing assistance to, at least 100 newly enrolled students, the vast majority of whom had EAL. This decision was well supported by the available literature. Analysing the transition of international students into an English speaking university, Andrade (2006, pp. 135; 146-7) concluded that adjustment problems for international students focussed mainly on language issues. Not surprisingly, the principal difficulties were in understanding lecturers in the initial semesters. Providing embedded LAS support to these students made sense as an effective transition strategy.

3.1. The embedding process

The project described here evolved over three semesters. It initially involved three classes of a core unit of the MBA International at ECU. In the second semester, due to timetabling constraints, the embedding project was expanded to include a small number of the domestic MBA cohort. These domestic students were positive about the support that they received and, as a result, the project was further expanded in the third semester to accommodate six classes, two of which were off-campus. The decision to expand the project in the third semester to include more domestic MBA students was largely the result of increased knowledge and understanding of LAS among the discipline teaching staff who had been involved in this project. Greater appreciation of LAS and increased confidence in teaching it led to staff seeing its relevance for all students. As Wingate, Andon, and Cogo observed, embedded support can “have benefits for the teacher as well” (2011, p. 77).

In this project the embedding process took the following form. The LA embedded LAS into the scheduled lecture and linked those skills directly to assessment tasks (see Appendices 1 and 2). The workshops were best received when they were incorporated into the start or the middle of the three-hour seminar time, rather than at the end. The use of the word ‘embedding’ is deliberate. Both the lecturer and LA were actively involved, each supporting the other to deliver language and academic skills development that was highly contextualised and relevant to the students in that unit. Emphasis was placed on a team approach, which ensured a degree of consistency and signalled to students that LAS were an integral part of the learning. The team teaching was described by one lecturer who was involved in all three semesters as “the unit’s major strength”. She added, “We meet up to three times a week and constantly evaluate new assessment tasks”.

The LA met regularly with the academics involved in teaching the unit, attended up to four different classes per week, set and marked work, and met with students outside of class time if necessary. In the second and third semesters, changes were often made at late notice due to staff transition. Preparation time for the LA was considerable. The LA needed time to build content knowledge by reading the textbook, accessing lecture notes on Blackboard and talking to academic staff. Time was also required to prepare materials for each session. An example of the work involved follows. At the beginning of Semester 2, 2010, a late decision was made to change the unit’s major assignment from an annotated bibliography and essay to a literature review. In order to demonstrate and scaffold the research process required for the literature review, the LA worked independently to select a management topic and research it. She identified ten relevant journal articles which she used to develop a concept map. On the map she recorded key words, brief quotations and page numbers. The concept map was used to demonstrate how a thesis is developed. It was also used to show that the research process is an iterative one, with the researcher continuing to search even when the writing phase may have commenced. The LA also employed a section of the concept map to demonstrate paragraph development and in-text referencing techniques.

In the example given above, the LA guided the students through the process of research and the preparation of a concept map. Skills included reading and research, streamlining a broad focus, and effective use of the Library’s database. English language skills were developed by working through a paragraph: identifying the topic sentence, noting how the literature is incorporated to

develop the main idea of the paragraph, examining the formatting of in-text references and observing the use of connectors. All this was completed using contextualised materials. The LA prepared the class materials as if she were a student and stressed to students that the content was new to her as well. One lecturer commented that this way of both preparing and presenting material “shows the students that what I’m asking them to do is actually quite reasonable and do-able!” Both the LA and the discipline teaching staff used the concept map when talking to students, with the former able to focus more on the LAS components of the task and the latter on the content side. The concept map proved to be a very useful tool in communicating with students about their progress on the literature review. Although some students were reluctant to use a concept map in the first instance, by the end of the semester 93% of students reported finding it a very useful tool to guide their research and clarify their thoughts. The degree to which the concept mapping was contextualised and was used by both the LA and teaching staff demonstrates the embedded and integrated nature of the third iteration of this project.

3.2. Student response to the embedding project

Unit evaluations completed at the conclusion of Semester 1, 2010 were overwhelmingly positive about the embedding of skills, with 98% of the students ‘strongly agreeing’ that the additional assistance was useful. In Semester 2, 2010, 93% responded positively (strongly agree) to the LA’s presence and approach in the class. Overall, the reputation of the unit was substantially improved by the embedding project, with students recommending it to new, incoming students due to the embedded support.

Learning support provided within the classroom does not guarantee results for all students as there are always those who, although physically present, may be disengaged. However, it does provide opportunities for all students, and in particular for weaker students who are unlikely to self-select for voluntary workshops. The fact that the LA was in the class and students knew her by name also resulted in requests for further assistance in the form of individual appointments. Darroch and Rainsbury (2009, p. 565) found that students offered support (in their case mathematical assistance) were more likely to visit an academic skills centre when they knew the staff.

Integrated support is regarded as resource intensive, so the fact that it also generates demand for individual appointments may be viewed as problematic. Language specialists associated with the Macquarie model (Evans et al., 2009, p. 602) continue to provide one-to-one opportunities, but the inclusion of individual consultations is a contentious issue. While many universities are limiting attendance or curtailing individual appointments completely, there continues to be support for the significant role that individual consultations play in students’ learning (Chanock, 2007; for overview, see Stevenson & Kokkinn, 2009). In this project, the LA made time to see students individually, observing that those students who seek individual assistance as a result of involvement in the embedding project are more likely to be prepared for the appointment and take responsibility for their work than those who are not receiving integrated support. Their motivation for attending is different, as are the outcomes.

3.3. Lessons learned

Relationship building has been critical both in and beyond the embedding program. When the faculty’s Academic Skills Centre opened in 2010, the faculty was fortunate to secure the services of the LA who had been involved in the initial phase of this project in Semester 2, 2009. In this initial MBA trial, she developed an excellent relationship with the unit’s academics. Once in the faculty, she took on a liaison role with the School of Management. In 2010, as she met more teaching staff through attendance at school meetings, orientation sessions for new staff and sharing office space, she was asked to participate in other units. Relationship building played an important role. “Part of the success is due to the LA’s personal characteristics; her focus, her commitment, her flexibility, and part of it is her capacity to meld with the lecturer”, one colleague stressed. Another lecturer, who has been involved throughout the three semesters, stressed the importance of the LA’s “adaptability and her preparedness to

come to grips [with new material] and do whatever fits the group". Adaptability has been crucial.

Huijser, Kimmins, and Galligan point to the "positioning of learning advisors 'on the margins' of universities" (2008, p. A-23) as a main barrier to embedding academic skills. In the Faculty of Business and Law, the Academic Skills Centre is positioned in the middle of teaching areas, so there is potential for constant communication with students and academic staff. As working relationships with teaching staff developed, the LA's opinions were sought on a range of issues including the appropriateness of assessment tasks and how best to scaffold them, as well as how to address language-specific problems and reduce plagiarism. The bottom-up approach, noted by the Macquarie University team as being crucial to its success (Evans et al., 2009, p. 602), occurred naturally as academics sought assistance, listened to colleagues discussing the embedding project, and invited the LA into their classes. There was a significant rise in the number of requests for in-class LAS support—from two to twelve in just one semester—but more importantly, requests showed increasing appreciation of how LAS can be more effectively included within class activities.

In 2010, invitations in first semester were invariably for short sessions highlighting an academic skill, such as referencing. By second semester, instead of being viewed as someone who can 'fix' language or issues of academic integrity in 15 minutes, the LA was being asked to address specific LAS in context. Academics began to offer the LA up to 90 minutes of in-class time to work with students. For example, in Employment Relations (another MBA unit), the LA was invited to work with students on an assessment which involved critiquing a workplace document. The LA negotiated with the lecturer and suggested two visits to the class. In Week 3, she spent 20 minutes in class talking about the research phase of the assessment task and introducing some contextualised reading materials that she had designed to assist students in understanding and evaluating the content of academic journal articles. The materials were self-guided and were an optional activity for students. The resources were available to students via Blackboard and were strongly promoted by the lecturer. In Week 6, the LA returned to the class for a 90-minute session in which she used concept mapping to demonstrate how she would critique the University's grievance policy. She gave a handout of the concept map to students as an exemplar. The students had been asked to bring to class a workplace document and a minimum of three references. The session involved participative activities to engage students with specific aspects of the assessment task. The LA stayed for the remainder of the seminar and worked with the lecturer to answer questions and assist students in developing their concept maps. Such an approach acknowledges the degree to which LAS and disciplinary content are inextricably linked.

While in one semester the nature of requests from staff had moved from generic to highly contextualised, the Academic Skills Centre continued to offer an adjunct (weak) program of workshops that concentrated on academic skills for business students in a generic manner, addressing competencies such as referencing, reading and presentation skills. The Academic Skills Centre also conducted English language workshops. Despite positive feedback from the students who participated, fewer than fifty students attended at least one workshop and most workshops comprised only five to ten students. In addition, a series of bolt-on or adjunct (strong) sessions were conducted for students enrolled in a large first year core unit. Despite the LAS support being directly related to an assessment task, only 22 students [of a possible 220] attended. Similar to the findings noted earlier, analysis of the course averages of students attending these adjunct sessions indicated that 81% were 'competent' students. Those students regarded as most at risk of failing did not attend these voluntary sessions, even when strongly encouraged by lecturers and LAs. During the same period, over 200 students received 10-15 hours of support in their core MBA/I unit and at least 600 students received 60-90 minutes of integrated support. Staff time allocated to the adjunct sessions was equivalent to the time spent by the LA who was embedding skills in the MBA and MBAI courses.

The Macquarie model, the initiative at the University of Canberra and similar undertakings prove what can be accomplished if a program is given both time to develop and ongoing resources. The Faculty of Business and Law embedding program demonstrates what can be

achieved, even in a relatively short period of time. Data from 2009 indicated improvement in academic honesty and associated skills (see Walker, et al., 2009) and, in 2010, staff involved noted improvement in academic writing skills. A decision was made not to pre-test students, so data is limited and further studies are needed to evaluate overall academic improvement.

3.4. Exemplifying good practice

Embedding within a unit clearly targets the greatest number of students. In Wingate's view, the embedded approach "is regarded as highly effective in developing student learning for university and beyond" (2006, p. 467). She suggests that academic staff should be encouraged to develop and integrate such skills into their lectures. This embedding project has made inroads, with several academics commenting that they have reviewed assessment tasks and processes as a result of working with the LA. Even in units where the contextualised workshops were only offered once or twice during the semester, some lecturers changed their assessment tasks or the instructions for their tasks after working with the Learning Advisor. One lecturer who worked closely with the LA in another MBAI unit critiqued her entire unit as a result.

I set about redesigning my MBAI unit. The first thing I did was eliminate exams ... [so I could] steer students into a more strategic, analytical and enquiry approach to learning. I have based the discussions around case studies and short, sharp questions for debate. The exams have been replaced by in-class assessments based on a case study they get a week prior to the assessment. The other assessment piece is a group assignment.

In the example provided above, despite being unavailable to integrate LAS due to time constraints, the LA continued to supply contextualised materials to this lecturer, who in turn made them available to her students.

In adopting embedded learning support, Huijser, Kimmins and Galligan (2008) question whether it could lead to "doing away with learning advisors" (p. A-25). If academics are skilled in these processes, such that LAS are seamlessly included in units, this would surely be a positive outcome. In reality, such an outcome—that all academics address LAS development of their students—seems improbable. Some academic staff members are confident in this area and already take responsibility for addressing LAS of their students. Others are keen but lack the requisite skills, while another group see themselves as content specialists who should not be held responsible for this area of student learning. "Raised awareness amongst faculty based academics of the nature of discourse and learning to write within the discipline" (Purser, Skillen, Deane, Donohue, & Peake, 2008, p. 6) is regarded as a measure of success. On this measure, the embedding and subsequent in-class work have to be regarded as successful. While concluding that this approach is highly effective, Wingate added that "its implementation is difficult" (2006, p. 467). The experiences here, albeit on a far smaller scale, refute that assertion.

On the continuum introduced earlier, Jones et al. (2001) noted four aspects of faculty collaboration: adjunct (context specific – weak), bolt-on or adjunct (also context specific – strong), integrated and embedded. Each of these is featured within this study, and another is added (see Figure 1).

The additional aspect – embedded and integrated – includes LAS support delivered by the LA in-class with the lecturer taking an active role. Between classes and during semester breaks, the LA works with discipline teaching staff on curriculum design and she has been instrumental in making assessment tasks more accessible for students. In this sense, the embedded and integrated project has been both successful and innovative.

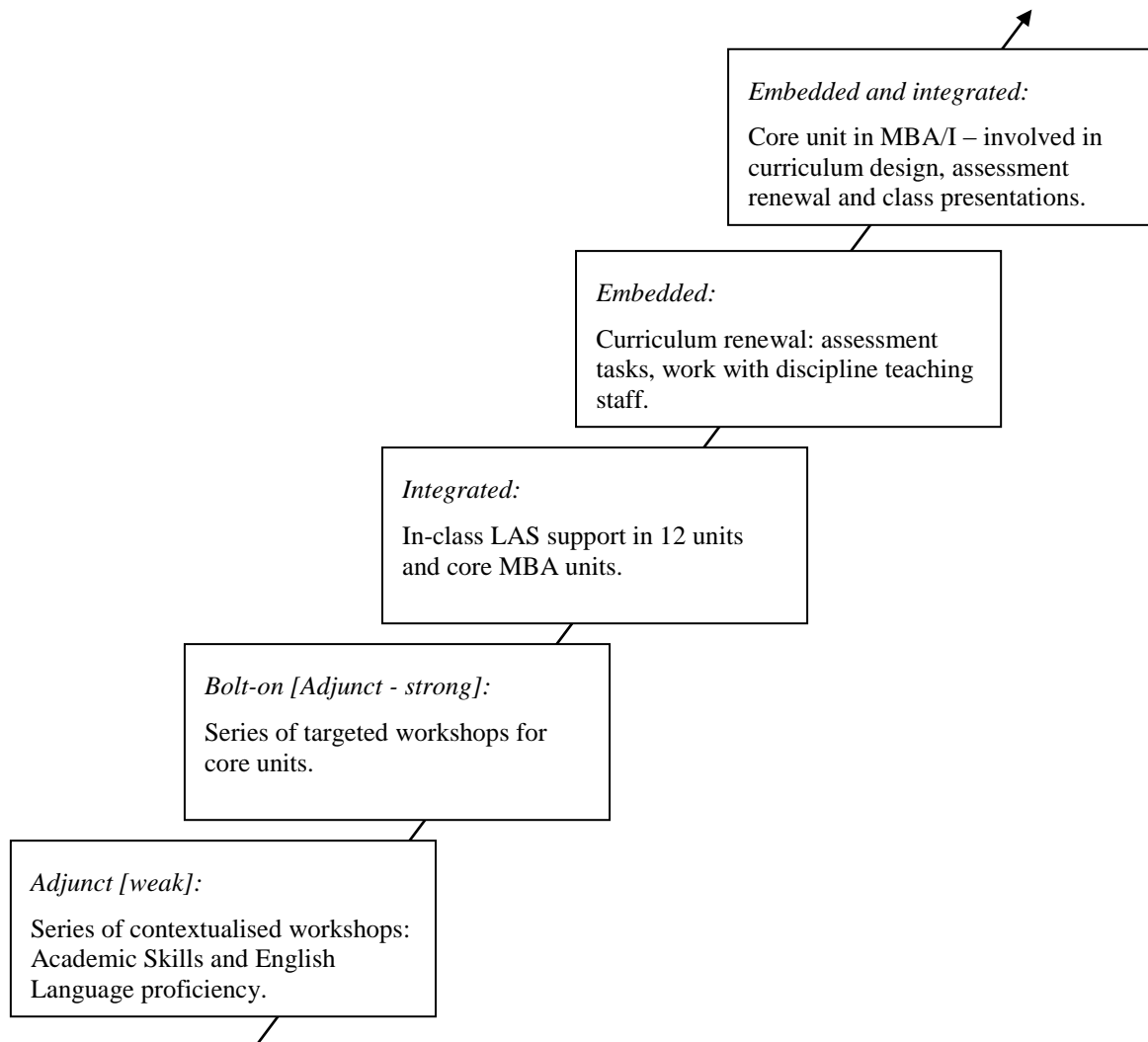


Figure 1: Approaches to integration and embedding of LAS within the faculty (see Jones, et al. 2001)

4. Conclusion

A growing body of research suggests that the integration of LAS into specifically targeted units exemplifies good practice in learning support. There are many reasons offered: a move towards contextualised learning support to address lack of, or perceived lack of, relevance of general workshops; limited attendance at adjunct (voluntary) sessions, even when material is contextualised; increasing numbers of EAL students in universities; and the up-skilling of academic staff throughout the embedding process. The work of one LA outlined here indicates how much can be achieved. Embedding in the core MBAI unit in 2009 provided the initial stimulus. According to academics engaged in the various integrated and embedded approaches, the development of further initiatives across the School resulted from a number of crucial factors related to the learning advisor: her command of the content in a wide range of units; her capacity to build and sustain relationships; her resourcefulness and flexibility; and her ability to work with diverse student cohorts. Of equal importance is the support of discipline teaching staff who have embraced the approach and are also prepared to be flexible and work as part of a team.

This innovative approach to embedding and integrating LAS in core units has been the Academic Skills Centre's most successful project, with the LA involved receiving a Dean's award for Innovation in Teaching and Learning in 2010. That award, combined with staff and student feedback, has attracted interest from other teaching staff. An additional LA position was

funded by the faculty early in 2011, allowing integrated LAS support to be extended to other core units. Data will be collected from these initiatives which will allow further evaluation and will inform future directions.

Appendix 1: Embedded and integrated project—progression

	Semester 1 (2009)	Semester 2 (2010)	Semester 3 (2010)
Course	International: MBAI	International and some domestic: MBAI and 6 domestic MBA students	International and domestic: MBAI and MBA
Assessments	Annotated bibliography Essay Quizzes Exam Grammar exercise	Annotated bibliography Essay Quizzes Exam Grammar exercise	<i>Literature Review</i> Quizzes Exam Grammar exercise
Adjunct	2 journal article summaries submitted for feedback from the LA	2 journal article summaries submitted for feedback from the LA Extra 1 hour reading group session before or after class.	Group drop-in sessions to discuss reading and concept map
Classes	3 on-campus classes = 90 students	3 on-campus classes = 81 students	4 on-campus classes 2 off-campus classes = 140 students

Appendix 2: Embedded and integrated project: Overview of LAS support

Week	Time	Embedded LAS	Outline of content	Adjunct
1	30 mins	Introduction to the embedding process.	Introduction to the embedding program in MBA/I unit.	
2	40-60 mins	Introduction to literature reviews.	Literature review—getting started.	
3	45 mins	Reading skills and concept mapping.	Skimming and scanning. Choosing relevant journal articles - The 4 Rs: recent, reputable, relevant and readable. End- text referencing.	
4	3 hours	Research skills.	Library or computer lab: Library home page, use of databases.	
5	30 mins	Exploring chosen topic: Using a concept map.	Students bring to class a minimum of three journal articles relevant to their chosen topic. Directing and shaping future research.	LA available for discussion of concept map and literature review: 1 hour / class.
6		No input in class.	Submit concept map, abstracts of 6 articles and background section of the literature review.	As above.
Mid-Sem Break		Individual consultation with LA and/or lecturer.	Drop-in or by appointment. Optional activity.	
7	40 mins	Writing 1: In-text referencing.	Writing effective paragraphs: ~Develop a topic sentence. ~Incorporate the literature. ~Use connectors.	As above.
8	40 mins	Writing 2: Introductions and conclusions; Editing.	Use of concept map to shape introduction and conclusion. Editing work for content and language.	As above.
9	3 hours	Writing 3: Peer review.	Draft literature review—peer feedback.	
10		No input in class.	Literature reviews submitted.	
11		No input in class.		
12	30 mins	Exam revision.	Exam revision techniques.	
13		No input in class.		

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