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Embedded academic literacies curricula: The challenges of measuring success

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Australian higher education policy aimed at widening participation focuses on the inclusion of students from diverse backgrounds, including those from a low socioeconomic status background. While this policy has succeeded in widening access, other measures of policy success include retention and academic success of these students and their achievement of course learning outcomes. One inclusive approach to contributing to students' academic success is through a curriculum development process which includes the embedding of academic literacies in course curricula. The project presented here is based on a rationale that adopting an embedded academic literacies approach represents a movement away from a deficit model of academic support, and envisages the development of academic literacies in terms of disciplinary practices and shifting student identities. This paper presents two case studies from this project which illustrate different approaches to the development of embedded academic literacies curricula, and discusses the challenges of measuring the success of these approaches. The project evaluation confirms that this curriculum development contributes to students' awareness of their developing academic skills and literacies and that capacity building for staff should be presented in a variety of different ways. However, we argue that further interrogation of the "good and bad news stories" from this project will contribute to sustainable approaches to enriching curricula more broadly across the university. We also argue that while broad curriculum renewal depends on systemic university policy, success is also contingent on the engagement of all those who have responsibility for student learning.

Key Words: embedding academic literacies, inclusive approach, curriculum development, research evaluation.

1. Introduction

Australian universities have been challenged to respond to widening access and participation policy by increasing the rate of higher education for young people from low socioeconomic status (LSES) backgrounds (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2008; Australian Commonwealth Government, 2009). While economic disadvantage is one factor for this student cohort there are a number of other challenges in delivering higher education to more heterogeneous groups. It has been suggested that one of the

key challenges in addressing these students' needs is that they are likely to be the first in their family to attend university, and as such are also more likely to have a higher need for academic and personal support (James, 2002; Priest, 2009). Devlin, Kift, Nelson, Smith, and McKay (2012) explain further by building on Bourdieu's (1986) theory of individual and group variations in stocks of capital to suggest a "sociocultural incongruence" between the social and cultural capital of students from a LSES background and that of the institutions in which they study. In addition, these students are now more likely to enter university from less traditional pathways. Those who enter from a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) pathway need to negotiate a number of contrasting features of the university learning environment, including the need to develop greater independence as learners. While their experience of TAFE in terms of pedagogy and assessment foregrounds the development of ungraded, competency based vocational learning**,** university offers a broader based curriculum, albeit possibly aligned with professional needs, where graded assessment draws on both theoretical and practical knowledge (Smith & Blake, 2009; Whitington, Ebbeck, Diamond, & Yim, 2009). Students from a LSES background will bring different and varying skills and knowledge to the university community (Priest, 2009). Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that there may be a need to consider different responses to their learning needs.

Students' higher education learning experiences impact on their sense of themselves as learners, their engagement and their academic success. For some LSES students, formal teaching and learning and assessment practices may constitute their only university experience because their study mode, part time work and family commitments may mean that they have less time to participate in university life (Crosling, Heagney, & Thomas, 2009). Hinton-Smith (2012, p. 306) highlights the likelihood of these students requiring academic support possibly because of their "poor previous learner identity", and the likely impact of low confidence on their academic attainment. Devlin et al. (2012) suggest that these students are less likely to access additional services as they may not have the same sense of entitlement as their high SES peers. While Keevers and Abuodha (2012) advocate a much broader view of social inclusion, and a practice based approach that considers political, cultural, social and economic dimensions, they argue that these dimensions are important considerations in the design and enactment of curricula. In considering inclusion and participation, it would seem that a focus on all students' learning needs and their learning experiences represents a move away from what Gale and Parker (2013, p. 53) describe as "unfounded deficit views" of LSES students. All students can learn and benefit from curricula that clearly articulate the critical thinking, academic literacy and research practices of their discipline. We would argue that such curricula has the potential to contribute to all students' acquisition of key course learning outcomes. However, the success of innovative curriculum renewal and enactment is reliant on commitment and engagement at multiple levels within the university.

This paper introduces a project that set out to improve the academic attainment of students and build the capacity of staff to design and implement embedded academic literacies curricula. The project was funded through the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) (2011), and while the focus was on students from a LSES background, it was based on an inclusive approach aimed at supporting the learning of all students. Two case studies that illustrate different approaches to the development of embedded academic literacies curricula and to staff capacity building are presented here, along with an evaluation of these approaches. Finally, the challenges of measuring the success or otherwise of these approaches, and some of the hurdles to the achievement of curriculum change are discussed.

2. Embedded academic literacies project

The overall aim of this project was to develop embedded academic literacies curricula in a number of courses in order to increase student success rates. The project was coordinated by two Language and Learning Advisers (LLAs) who worked with course teams, and involved multiple strands including defining a theoretical basis, providing practical frameworks and the collaborative development of curricula, and project evaluation. The aim of using a collaborative approach was to increase the capacity of course teams and LLAs to implement models of best

practice in academic literacies development in courses and units where maximum impact could be achieved on LSES student cohorts. In the early stages of the project, considerable time was given to discussing what an embedded academic literacies curriculum might mean, and how LLAs and discipline specialists might work together. Developing a shared vocabulary around the nature of academic literacies is an important precursor to curriculum development (Thies, 2012, p. 3). Finally, an evaluation of the project was undertaken which aimed to produce an evidence-based approach to curriculum design and which included embedded academic literacies and models of practice in different discipline areas.

Much of the theoretical framework for the project was based on the notion of academic literacies as developed by Lea and Street (1998, 2006). This notion supports the development of academic literacies within the context of a discipline, and acknowledges that social practices vary with context and culture. Much of the literature suggests that the development of students' academic literacies is best achieved through the course curriculum, rather than through generic or "bolted on" workshops (Kift, 2002; Australian Universities Quality Agency, 2009; Wingate, 2006, Bamforth, 2010; Thies, 2012). It has also been argued that generic workshops focus only on surface skills (Lea & Street, 1998), that "writing cannot be divorced from subject content and knowledge" (Wingate & Dreiss, 2009, p. 15), and that writing in the discipline contributes to knowledge construction (Somerville & Creme, 2005). The embedded academic literacies curricula approach has the potential to enhance students' learning experience, and their understanding of the ways of researching, thinking, writing, questioning and practising in their discipline.

The suggested curriculum development process was informed by Biggs' (1996) constructive alignment or outcomes-based education (Biggs & Tang 2007), with the aim being to align unit learning objectives with assessment tasks and to include the students' literacies as key learning outcomes. Jolly (2001) provides further explanation of how a curriculum design process could support students' acquisition of course learning outcomes by depicting a circular process linking learning objectives, learning activities, assessment tasks, assessment criteria, and graduate learning outcomes. A distinction has been made between "intended", "enacted" and "experienced" curriculum in an attempt to highlight the differences between the curriculum as it is written and planned, and the experiences of the teacher and the students (Marsh & Willis, 2007). Bosanquet, Winchester-Seeto, and Rowe (2012) consider this distinction in relation to whether course learning outcomes could be part of the intended curriculum, but not taught as part of the enacted curriculum. In considering the curriculum design and planning process for this project, it was anticipated that academic literacies development would be included both in the planned or intended curriculum, and that consideration would be given to when and how these literacies might be explicitly articulated and taught.

2.1. Getting started – scoping the project

The challenge in commencing the project was to get "buy in" to the project from the course team members, and as many academics are time poor, there was a need to confirm the relevance and value of such a project. The project was launched at a day-long symposium entitled "Developing academic literacies within your course curriculum". The main themes of the symposium included curriculum design based on literacy skills in the content, and the value of collaboration between discipline specialists and Language and Learning Advisers (Chanock, 2011). Crosling and Wilson (2005) explain the value of this collaboration as disciplinary staff members identifying and articulating "the goals of the disciplinary community" while learning advisers have "the resources to interpret and therefore explain these as writing practices" (p. 7). The symposium was well attended by professional and academic staff from a range of disciplines, and while all feedback data cannot be included here, participants recorded an improved understanding of academic literacies and increased confidence in developing students' academic literacy skills.

In choosing the courses to participate in the project, the coordinators needed to fulfil the overarching project aim of having a positive impact on the academic attainment of students from a LSES background, but they were also guided by course team members' willingness to

engage. A starting point was the University Planning Unit's data on the percentage of students from a LSES background enrolled in each course. This data was used to select four different teams to contribute to the project; the work of two of these groups, in health and early childhood education, are presented here as case studies.

2.2. Mapping academic literacies

In the initial team meetings, there was general agreement that academic literacies could be developed as part of the curricula, but commonly re-occurring questions included, *"What are academic literacies?"* and *"How could they be embedded in the curriculum?"* At the wider university level, a course enhancement process was being introduced, and as part of this process the key course learning outcomes were identified as being discipline specific knowledge and capabilities, communication, digital literacy, critical thinking, problem solving, self management, teamwork and global citizenship (Deakin University, 2013). Consequently, one of the starting points was considering the potential of mapping academic literacies to assessment tasks in each unit of a course. It was anticipated that this mapping exercise would help identify how these literacies could contribute to students' acquiring certain course learning outcomes, such as communication and critical thinking skills, and to students' acquisitions of professional competencies. Mapping academic literacies would also contribute to decisions on how these literacies might be taught and assessed at different stages in the course. Willison and O'Regan (2007) suggest that mapping academic literacies development of students from enrolment in a first year undergraduate course until graduation can help inform course curricula design. Willison, Le Lievre, and Lee (2010) and Harper (2011) have produced frameworks of academic literacies and research skills which seek to identify and describe specific academic literacies, and also articulate how students might develop competencies as part of a developmental or staged process. These frameworks provided a starting point for a conversation between the course team members about an approach to mapping academic literacies at the unit and course level. However, it became clear that the team members needed to articulate an agreed upon set of academic literacies that reflected students' approaches to assessment tasks in specific literacies at the unit and course level.

3. Case Study 1: Health core units

Given the complexity of gaining agreement on which units or courses would be part of the project, the decision to include these health units was made by the Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning). The core first year units were chosen because they had been part of a faculty review process, and some recommendations from the review had included curriculum change, albeit not the inclusion of embedded academic literacies. Three core health units were a logical inclusion in this project because they have large student enrolments (between 1,500 to 2,000 students in some trimesters), and are compulsory units for a large number of courses. This ensured that any curriculum changes had an impact on the maximum number of students. However, focusing on these units also negated the value of viewing embedded academic literacies curriculum as part of a developmental or staged process, planned at a course level. As there were few or no institutional structures which linked these units, there was the added complexity of how Unit Chairs and course teaching teams gained a shared understanding of the overall direction of the project, the value of an embedded literacies curriculum, and possible pedagogical approaches.

A starting point in each unit was to identify the key academic skills and literacies needed to successfully complete assessment tasks. The framework used for this mapping exercise also required identification of those literacies that were supported or scaffolded as part of the curriculum in the unit, and those that were not taught or included in the curriculum (Harper, 2011). The working groups for each unit, which included at least one LLA, chose a set of academic literacies or learning skills with the aim of embedding them in the curriculum in a seamless way so that they were perceived by students as an integral part of their developing knowledge and understandings. Each working group responded differently based on the delivery mode of the unit, assessment of student need and recommendations of the unit review

process. The working group for "Human Structure and Function" developed learning activities to help students adopt an active approach to studying in this unit. During the second week of the trimester, students were directed to complete three online modules which each included an interactive learning activity. The modules cover "getting started with the reading", "learning styles" and "approaches to studying for multiple choice examinations". In the second wholly online unit, "Health Information and Data", learning resources were developed for inclusion in specific weekly topics, including research and report writing. Six videos were produced which included students discussing their approaches to study in this unit, and a liaison librarian demonstrating and discussing online library searches with students. The third unit, "Health Behaviour", included a focus on the value of feedback, in particular the use of feedback for instruction or guidance to help students engage in deeper levels of reflection. A professional development seminar on effective feedback was offered to the teaching team which aimed at having participants consider more targeted feedback, and the value of recorded verbal feedback.

4. Case study 2: Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (BECE)

The BECE course was also a logical inclusion in this project because in 2012, all students entered through a TAFE pathway. However, although in 2013 course entry was broadened, a large number of students still entered into the second year of the course having previously completed a TAFE qualification. The practical framework for curriculum development in BECE included identifying the academic literacies students required for completion of assessment tasks in four units across the two years of the course. These literacies were then mapped to developmental levels – scaffolded, supported or guided – which illustrate the degree of explicit teaching of these literacies included in the curriculum (Harper, 2011). A combination of unit maps provided teaching staff with detailed knowledge of the academic literacies being developed in each unit, and students' literacy development across the BECE course. These maps also helped identify where additional learning objectives, learning resources and learning activities relating to skills and literacies could be included in the curriculum (Jolly, 2001). The BECE team also identified the importance of students reflecting on their literacy development, and relating these to the professional skills required of early childhood educators and to Deakin's graduate learning outcomes.

The LLA team worked collaboratively with Unit Chairs to develop curriculum, including focusing on the clarity of assessment tasks, assessment criteria and feedback on academic literacies development. Major project outcomes of this collaboration were the development of a course level interactive online site (StudyingBECE), which supports students in their transition from TAFE to university and provides a scaffolded approach to academic writing and reflection (Appendix 1), and the development of a framework for early childhood education students to reflect on their academic literacy skills development (Appendix 2).

5. Project evaluation: Methods

Evaluation of the project was based on an action research model and a case study approach. Action research seemed an appropriate method as it provides a framework based on a cycle of enquiry, which includes planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992). As Reason and Bradbury (2001) suggest, this process includes the opportunity for self-reflection and change by participants, and in this evaluation participants had the opportunity to reflect on curriculum development in their own discipline, and the approaches employed in the other case studies. While there is some debate about whether the term "case study" refers to a research methodology (Gillham, 2000) or to what is being studied (Stake, 2000), in this instance it was seen as an appropriate methodology because of the different contexts and domains in which curriculum development was being undertaken. Much of the literature on case study research discusses whether or not this research can have general relevance (Stake 2003; Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000; Yin, 2003), or what Stake (2003, p. 140) describes as the competition between the search for the particularity and the search for generalisability. While each of the case studies in this project are unique, it was anticipated that there would be some generalisations that could be made. Stake (2003) would describe this approach as "collective

case study", chosen because it is believed that an understanding of a number of cases will lead to a better overall understanding, and "perhaps better theorizing" (p. 138). Lincoln and Guba (2000) suggest that what is generated is a working hypothesis rather than a conclusion. They replace the concept of generalisation with concepts of transferability and fittingness. "The transferability is a direct function of the similarity between the two contexts, what we call fittingness" (p. 40). Donmoyer (2000) on the other hand, argues that the identification of differences between case studies can be equally as enlightening, and it was anticipated that differences between the case studies in this project would also be instructive.

In the two case studies presented here, the evaluation set out to measure the level of student engagement with the embedded academic literacies curricula, and students' perception of their learning through this engagement, in particular their academic literacies development. It also sought to measure course team members' and LLAs' increased understanding of discipline specific academic literacies, and to capture their perceptions of their capacity to develop curricula which embeds academic literacies. Yin (2003) maintains that case study research requires multiple sources of evidence. The data collection for this research evaluation was based on a mixed methods approach which included student surveys and focus groups, staff interviews and surveys, and the use of a student academic literacies reflective tool. The following section provides a snapshot of data from the evaluation of the two case studies, including student engagement with curricula in two Health units and the BECE course, and staff capacity building for the Health teaching team and BECE staff.

5.1. Student engagement and learning – Core health unit 1

In HBS109 "Human Structure and Function", a paper-based questionnaire seeking student feedback on the online academic literacies modules was completed by 1,152 students in the first weeks of the trimester. Of all student responses, 82% said they accessed the modules one or more times including 11% who read through all available materials (Table 1). There were 18% of students who did not access the modules at all as they either did not know the modules were available, said they forgot to look at them, felt confident in their existing skills, or indicated that completing the questionnaire had inspired them to go back and look at the modules. Of all students who accessed the modules, only 57% said that they viewed the video clips in the modules one or more times (Table 1). Reasons given for not accessing the video clips were mainly related to issues with the technology. There was also some indication of students having more general difficulties in their transition to being new first year students. For example, students' comments included: "*I have no idea what I should be doing*" and "*I am finding all the online stuff really confusing*."

Table 1. HBS109 students' responses to questions in the questionnaire about on-line modules (N = 1,152).

Accessed introductory modules on HBS109 site?	No, not at all	Once	A few times	Yes, read through all
	18%	32.2%	38.5%	11.3%
Viewed video clips in introductory modules?	No	Viewed once	Viewed some	Yes, viewed all
	43%	22.5%	28.4%	6.1%
Worked through suggested learning activities in introductory modules?	No	Completed one	Completed some	Yes, completed all
	38.5%	19.1%	37.2%	5.3%
Did modules help think about how to get started with study in HBS109?	Not at all	Somewhat helpful	Quite helpful	Yes, very much
	15.2%	32.9%	43.1%	8.7%
Student comments on online modules	*"Very helpful to find 'way' round new subject material/content/time."* *"I found the modules very informative. Really well done."* *"Certainly beneficial. Well expressed and easy to refer back to or replay."*			

Overall, 62% of students worked through one or more of the suggested learning activities in the introductory modules, while 85% said that the modules helped them think about how to get started with study in this unit (Table 1).

5.2. Student engagement and learning - Core health unit 2

For "Health Information and Data", the video learning resources that had been created were presented at a staff capacity building session. Although it was agreed that the resources should be made available to students in the following trimester, they were not uploaded to the unit site. The Unit Chair changed during this period, and the incoming Unit Chair provided the following reasons for the resources not being uploaded to the unit site:

- technical issues at the beginning of the trimester.
- changes in the library interface and video resources needing to be updated (although the resources were changed, there was concern about the need to continually update these in line with the library website changes).
- the potential of the university-wide course enhancement process to facilitate the creation of cloud resources that would be more appropriate.

5.3. Student engagement and learning – Bachelor of Early Childhood Education

Evaluation of the BECE component of the project included students' perceptions of their academic literacies development, and the synergies between this learning and their development of the skills and attributes required of early childhood educators. As part of the evaluation research, students were asked to reflect on this process, and their acquisition of related professional skills. The survey was administered twice in 2013, in March and October. Survey 1 was completed by 69 students, and 51 completed survey 2. Ten academic literacies were surveyed: responding, reviewing, observing, researching, reading, recording, reflective writing, critical thinking, writing (presentation) and referencing. Students were asked to rate their self-perceived skill on a Likert scale – 1 = unsure, 2 = acquiring, 3 = developing, 4 = emerging. As shown in Figure 1, the average response was higher for each of these skills in survey 2. Figure 1 displays the overall trend towards self perceived improvement for each academic literacy.

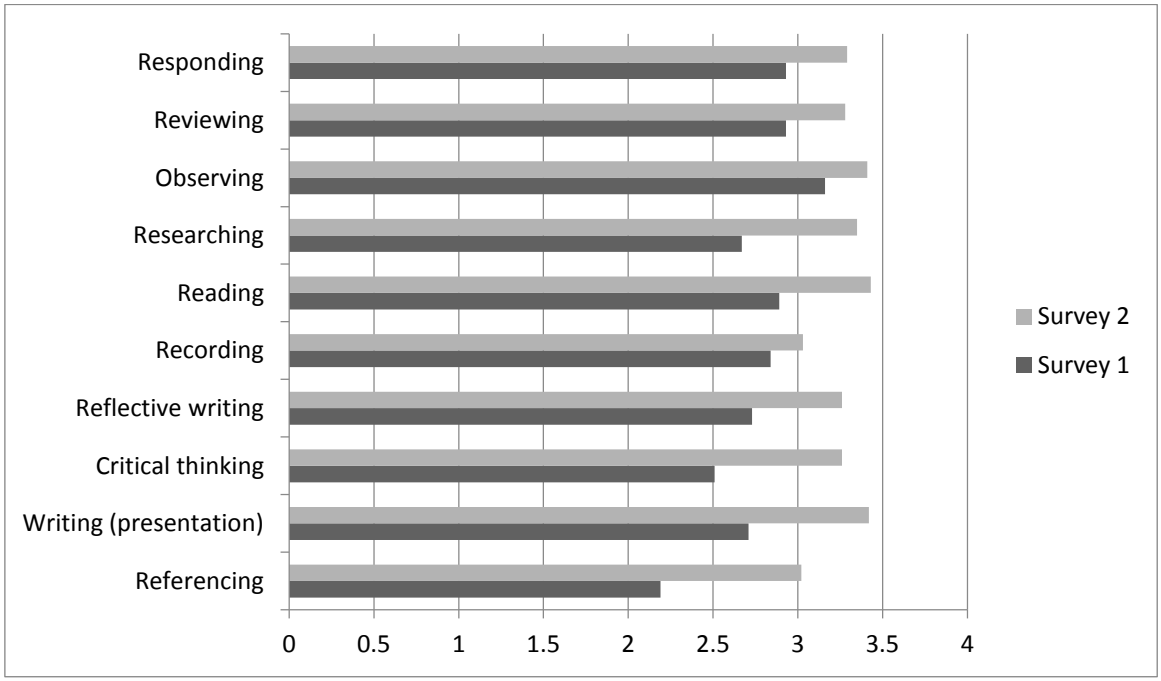

Figure 1. Comparison of average responses for each academic literacy in surveys 1 and 2. (*N* = 69 for survey 1 and *N* = 51 for survey 2. Horizontal axis: 1 = unsure, 2 = acquiring, 3 = developing, 4 = emerging.)

When completing the initial survey, some students included comments which indicated an increased awareness of the importance of developing high levels of competency in oral and written communication. For example, *"This self assessment has reinforced what a huge learning curve I am travelling …"* and *"This task allowed me to consider my strengths, and the areas for me to develop as a learner ...."* In the final survey, students' comments illustrated their understanding of the links between academic literacies development and the professional skills required of an early childhood educator. For example, *"I have developed my abilities over the trimesters, and have acquired skills to apply in my academic literacy and professional skills writing (that is amazing!)"*

5.4. Staff Capacity Building

The feedback responses presented here are from a day-long seminar offered to sessional staff teaching in two of the health core units. The focus for the day was on providing feedback to students' on their academic literacies development. In total, 13 participants provided feedback. Participants could rate their understanding of academic literacies at the end of the seminar as "excellent", "good", "fair" or "negligible". Figure 2 shows that participants rated their understanding of discipline specific academic literacies as "good" or "excellent".

Figure 2. Staff feedback on the academic literacies seminar.

In addition, participants' written comments indicated a reflective approach to defining the academic literacies students need to successfully completing assessment tasks in these core heath units. For example, participants wrote: *"Academic literacies include the skills that students develop during their course ... It is the students' ability to engage with course information in different ways."* and [Academic literacies are] *"the necessary knowledge and skills needed to complete assessment tasks and meet learning requirements – reading, reviewing, referencing etc. Further to this, how we develop these skills and in which units across the course."*

The Bachelor of Early Childhood Education team members were also asked to reflect on their level of understanding of the embedded academic literacies curriculum and their involvement in curriculum development as part of the project. While a full analysis of these interviews cannot be included here, the BECE team members expressed views confirming that the project had helped them think more critically and creatively about how to scaffold students' progressive development of academic literacies (Table 2).

Table 2. Reflections on the project from the BECE team.

Understanding development of academic literacies	*"… getting much more appreciative of it's a developmental path for students and again it requires intentional teaching and quite proactive action on the part of an academic."* *"I realised just how much we have to make sure we're explaining some of the finer points of our own discipline areas… So it's really causing me I think to question and explore my own academic literacies and think about how I developed them … making sure that we actually don't make hideous assumptions that our students will be able to do things."*
Creative thinking	*"… it's certainly made me think more creatively about how we can support students to acquire and then sort of continue to develop these particular skills and these particular literacies and doing that in a more scaffolded and sort of more progressive developmental way."*
Articulating and explicit teaching	*"…being able to more clearly articulate the types of skills that working in university study and university education – what sort of skills are expected and kind of required of students …"*
Understanding student need	*"… really going back to foundations of how can you present this to students and question their assumptions about the way to present it, and try and put yourself more in their shoes and then try and find ways to support them so that they can get more of a handle on it."*

6. Discussion

Although the evaluation presented here focuses on different approaches to curriculum development, some general observations can be made. It seems that embedded academic literacies curricula increased students' awareness of their academic literacies development. This increased awareness of the developmental nature of their learning, and the possible synergies between academic literacies and professional skills can assist students collate evidence of their acquisition of the key learning outcomes for their course. Evaluation of student engagement with online learning resources also indicated that while students could be directed to introductory online modules or to course level sites as part of assessment or feedback, they were more likely to complete learning activities that were fully embedded in their unit of study. That is, academic literacies development is scaffolded, and students can see a clear correlation between the literacies being scaffolded and completion of specific assessment tasks. In addition when presenting online learning resources, especially to commencing students, it cannot be assumed that they have sufficient knowledge of how or where to access the material. While familiarity with the online learning environment can be problematic for new students, if curricula is presented in this way there is a need to facilitate students' access. For example, online resources could be integrated into the content of tutorials. This will not only promote student access, but also help to ensure that the academic literacies curriculum is perceived as an important part of the core course curriculum.

Staff capacity building initiatives which were part of this project were offered in many different formats – both formally and informally, and in some instances included involvement of sessional staff. The evaluation confirms that the professional development program involved participants from all faculties and many professional areas within the university, and was effective in increasing awareness of embedded academic literacies curriculum development. In the feedback, staff indicated that they were appreciative of gaining a better understanding of discipline specific academic literacies, and how to include academic literacies development in

their curriculum. LLAs valued the opportunity to work collaboratively, to "value add" to course material and contribute to enhanced learning of a large student cohort.

Increasing students' perceptions of the importance of academic literacies and staff capacity building were positive project outcomes demonstrated by these two case studies. However, there were a number of challenges in designing, implementing and more particularly evaluating models of embedded academic literacies curricula. As with many long term projects, sustaining staff engagement over the project's timeframe was problematic. While some funding was available to give time release, this was often inadequate, and did not match the time commitment required. Continuity of the project was also made difficult if discipline lecturing staff changed, and often "new" staff were less likely to have the time or the motivation to engage with the project. There seems to be a correlation between staff engagement with curriculum design and students' engagement with the curricula. One example of lack of engagement was in the Health core unit where learning resources were created by one team, but never used as part of the unit curriculum because of staff changes. Clearly there is a need to acknowledge that there may be differing perspectives when new course team members join a project, and time must be given to acknowledging differences and to facilitating the transition.

There were also particular difficulties that were a direct result of the project funding being aligned to the widening participation agenda. Gale and Parker (2013) highlight some issues in attempting to evaluate widening participation programs including "that [equity] program effectiveness can be difficult to establish given non-clinical contexts and uncontrollable variables, which render absolute cause and effect claims problematic" (p. 52). While there were general issues in planning and implementing an evaluation, one more specific challenge was the project's requirement to report on the academic attainment of students from a LSES background – a requirement which conflicted with theories which underpinned the project, such as inclusive pedagogy (Waterfield & West, 2006) and embedded curriculum design aimed at targeting all students (Hockings, 2010). Additionally, there appeared to be some negative connotations based on the project's stated objective of meeting the needs of students from a LSES background. Some course team members appeared to want to distance themselves and their course from the project. These responses were particularly evident when there was considerable politicising of the need to maintain high entry scores for teacher education courses, and links were made between targets to lift participation by the disadvantaged to possible loss of quality in higher education (Hurst & Tovey, The Age, September 25th 2013). The political climate which appeared to question the on-going funding of equity programs also resulted in an approach from some project sponsors which privileged positive "good news" stories and de-valued evaluation findings which might be interpreted as project failures.

The uncertainty about continuing funding and the requirement to report on curriculum development within a discrete period of time meant that in some instances there was only one iteration of the course material. There was an expectation that the evaluation would allow for reflection, possible change, and reiterations of the course material, in keeping with an action research model. However, the trimester (three term) system meant that units were not necessarily offered at a time when curriculum changes could be evaluated. The time involved in collaborative reflection also needed to be factored into the project. This was a much longer process than originally anticipated, and even when teams seemed to have arrived at agreement or a shared understanding, major differences in their understandings would emerge. This was demonstrated through the seeming lack of understanding of the inclusive approach, and in some cases team members attempting to disassociate themselves from the project.

The project outline suggested that one outcome would be descriptions of "evidenced based" models of best practice of embedded curricula development. Certainly it is possible to identify some approaches, such as the BECE students' academic literacies reflection that may have generic value across disciplines. However, the case studies presented here confirm that there are distinct discipline differences, and that high levels of staff engagement and collaboration in the planning and implementation of discipline specific curriculum produces better outcomes. Thus the project does not showcase generic "one size fits all" models, but rather informs the curriculum development process by describing a series of different tools that could be used as

part of the process. Again, one such tool would be an academic literacies mapping exercise that includes the identification of developmental stages and levels of explicit teaching. This would provide an initial blueprint for course teams to adapt and use as best fits their course curricula.

Another objective of the broader HEPPP project was to incorporate embedded academic literacies curriculum development into a university course renewal process which would possibly ensure greater sustainability of some of the project outcomes. This would also acknowledge inclusive curriculum design as a mainstream approach, rather than something that can only be achieved with additional funding. While this would also seem to give the project more legitimacy, the time lines involved and the complexity of the course enhancement process has thus far not included mapping of academic literacies to inform curriculum design. While this is still a strategic direction for the project and there is broad university support for this approach, the project evaluation suggests that more sustainable curriculum changes occur when there is very wide engagement in the process. That is, a whole-of-institution approach needs to support inclusion of course team staff, and more importantly ensure that they have time to fully engage in the processes. Sustainable curricular renewal will only occur if it is supported by institution-wide policy which values and genuinely encourages bottom-up input and involvement.

7. Conclusion

One challenge for all students who commence university study is the expectation that they will be able to employ different literacy practices, and that they will understand which of these practices are transferable across disciplines. The embedding of academic literacies in course curricula is one way of helping students meet this challenge, particularly those who may experience "sociocultural incongruence". The case studies presented here illustrate how the development of curriculum which includes explicit teaching of academic literacies could increase students' awareness of their academic literacies development, help them make the transition into university study, and potentially have a positive impact on their levels of academic success. The case studies also demonstrate the importance of on-going staff capacity building to promote a shared understanding of academic literacies and a collaborative approach to embedded academic literacies curriculum design. The challenges to measuring the success of the project were highlighted in order to examine their likely impact on the sustainability of project outcomes. One of the main challenges related to the funding of the project. While funding which is allocated in order to provide increased opportunities for disadvantaged young people to access higher education is needed, we would suggest that inclusive curriculum design should be recognised as a central part of any course enhancement process and should be funded accordingly. One future direction could be that all universities embark on a curriculum renewal process that encompasses embedded academic literacies curricula through a systemic top-down policy that encourages bottom-up engagement and support.

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Appendix A. Bachelor of Early Childhood Education Course Site (StudyingBECE modules)

Module titles

- Introduction
- Organising your time
- Assignment writing: getting started
- Analysing the question

- Reading a journal article
- Notemaking
- Writing a plan
- Paragraphing
- Introductions & conclusions
- Using the words of others
- Editing for structure and style
- Referencing
- Proofreading
- Reflective writing
- Reflective practice
- Your reflection
- Communicating using eLive
- Discussion forum

Appendix B. BECE Students' Reflections on Academic Literacies Developed in the First Year of the Course

Reflective Practice & Reflective Writing (Academic & Professional Skills Development)

HOW TO USE THIS SELF-ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

This table is a guide to help you think about your academic literacies and professional skills development.

Self-Assessment Checklist [✎]			
Unsure	**Acquiring**	**Developing**	**Emerging**
I don't understand as yet how I would demonstrate this skill	I am new to this skill and need help with it	I am learning this skill and need to work on it further	I can now show evidence of this skill being developed

1. *Tick* the box which best describes what stage you are at with learning each of these skills;
2. With each of the academic-professional skills listed in the table tick *one* of the boxes e.g. 'Unsure' 'Acquiring', 'Developing or 'Emerging' *after you complete the module on Guided Reflective Practice*;
3. *Write* some comments in the space below the table (A Reflection - What Have I Learned Using This Self-Assessment Checklist?). Reflect on your own learning and development using the framework discussed previously in the *Guided Reflective Practice Module*. For example briefly *'Describe'* (what you have learned), then *'Interpret/Analyse/Evaluate'* (think more critically about your own learning so far) and conclude by writing down your *'Next Step'* (what your future actions will be to learn more).

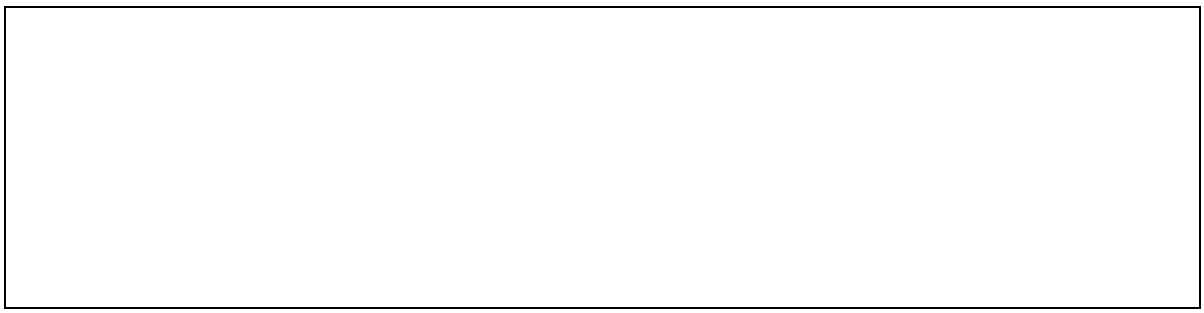
4.

Academic Literacy	Skill Description*	Self-Assessment Checklist [Please tick ✎]			
		Unsure I don't understand how I would demonstrate this skill	Acquiring I am new to this skill and need help with it	Developing I am learning this skill and need to work on it further	Emerging I can now show evidence of this skill being developed
Responding	Responding to questions arising from a specific task and asking or noting down questions to clarify what the task is asking you to do.				
Reviewing	Evaluating sources of information such as observations, written documents e.g journal articles, audio, video or digital content in the context of a task or prescribed criteria.				
Observing	Noticing: *where* the observation took place (context); *what* was happening; *who* was involved; *how* participants were involved or engaged. What *learning* took place; what *teaching* took place and what seemed important.				
Researching	Locating relevant written information to support completion of the assessment task.				
Reading	Reading and then comprehending and extracting relevant information from written sources.				
Recording	Integrating information from written or other sources through: note-taking, transcription, quotations, paraphrasing, summarising and expanding.				
Reflective Writing	Writing reflectively for example: after listening to audio, observing video or other digital sources, from field observations, professional experience placement and/or professional practice.				
Critical thinking	Writing which demonstrates critical analysis – questioning, making judgements, finding connections, categorising, recogising and expressing an argument.				
Writing (Presentation)	Writing which displays clear layout and structure including: an introduction, body, conclusion; paragraphs; correct spelling, punctuation, grammar and appropriate vocabulary.				
Referencing	Demonstrating appropriate procedures for citing and referencing using author-date (Harvard) style as presented in Deakin University's 'Guide to assignment writing and referencing' (4th ed.).				

*Self-Assessment Checklist & Reflective Tool developed by Wishart and Thies (2013) with academic skills descriptors adapted from Harper (2011).

A Reflection

"What Have I Learned Using This Self-Assessment Checklist?"



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