

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Two decades of embedding ALL at the University of Technology Sydney

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Two recent publications in the Journal by Hoadley and Hunter (2018) and Edwards, Goldsmith, Havery, and James (2021) provide useful scholarly accounts of recent developments in, and the successful implementation of, what may well be the first complete institution-wide embedded programme of post-enrolment language assessment (PELA) and academic language and learning (ALL) development into mainstream curriculum in an Australian higher education institution, namely the University of Technology Sydney (UTS). Given the considerable challenges of achieving such institutional change, the aim of this letter is to provide the ALL community with some broader contextual background not mentioned in these two papers.

While the Hoadley and Hunter (2018) article focuses more on gradual systemic institutional changes, the Edwards et al. (2021) article gives a more detailed account of the embedding processes over the past four to six years. Neither article provides a historical background to the recent institutional developments at UTS, and this is understandable as it was not the aim of the authors to do so. However, the 2021 paper outlines “challenges [...] for those wishing to set up a similar system of embedded language screening and development” (Edwards et al., 2021, p. 64). To better understand these challenges, and the time frame in which institution-wide changes might take to be achieved, I think it important to appreciate that the groundwork for the achievements described by Edwards et al. (2021) and Hoadley and Hunter (2018) was spread over at least two decades of efforts to embed language development at UTS. An outline of this groundwork is given next.

At UTS, a culture of conducting post-enrolment language assessment and embedding language development into the curriculum started in the mid-1990s, and continues today. Following the outcome of the 2007 National Symposium focusing on English language proficiency issues in international students, I initiated and coordinated a major university-wide project, the “UTS Communication Project”, fully supported and funded by the University. This project, which was not mentioned in either article, was implemented over a three-year period from 2008 to 2011, and provides the foundations if not the blueprint for the project described by Edwards et al. (2021) and by Hoadley and Hunter (2018). The 2008 “UTS Communication Project” included:

1. the implementation of post-enrolment language assessment (PELA) of all commencing coursework students;
2. the development of a compulsory first-year core discipline-based subject/unit in each UTS faculty with an academic language development focus;

3. the funding of extra-curricular support workshops for students needing remedial assistance;
4. the introduction of discipline-based language subject/units over the length of each degree;
5. staff development workshops for faculty staff participating in the project; and,
6. trialling English language assessment for final year students.

The embedding strategies referred to by Edwards et al. (2021) would thus appear to be an evolution of the strategies implemented in the 2008 “Communication Project”, with the evolution afforded by technological and policy advances in the following ways:

1. the earlier PELA was paper-based and has been replaced by an on-line OPELA (Edwards et al., 2021, p. 59-60);
2. the completion of current OPELA and attendance of language development program by students are compulsory, with penalties for non-compliance. Enforcing PELA and compulsory subject attendance was not possible in 2008.

However, staff development workshops and the English language assessment for final year students are omitted in the current project described by Edwards et al..

In 2009, I also drafted the UTS English language policy which the current policy is based on.

While to my knowledge no refereed publications mention the “UTS Communication Project”, numerous other references, e.g. (non-confidential) internal UTS documents (proposals, reports, formal memoranda, etc.) are available (UTS, 2008a and 2008b). There are also several conference presentations and papers outlining the major achievements of the “UTS Communication Project” and detailing data about early results as well as the reliability and the validity of the PELA used at UTS (Barthel, 2009a, 2009b and 2011).

It should also be noted that prior to the “UTS Communication Project”, the trialling of various forms of PELA at UTS goes back to the mid-1990s. Since the early 2000s, UTS ALL lecturers had been increasingly assigned to working within faculties to develop and implement core first year discipline-specific subjects with a language development focus in all but one UTS faculty. Thus, underlying the achievements discussed in the Hoadley and Hunter (2018) and Edwards et al. (2021) papers is a UTS culture of embedding language development spread over at least two decades.

I thus believe, and think it important to note, that the current success of embedding language assessment and language development can be attributed to several factors, among which the following are crucial:

1. the hard work and perseverance of ALL lecturers working collegially with faculty staff over the significant period of the time it takes to change the culture of an entire educational institution; and
2. in the case of UTS, the support of the institution’s senior executives in making the embedding compulsory, and providing adequate funding.

In closing, I hope the above consideration of the background of current developments allows a more comprehensive picture of the implementation of institution-wide embedded academic language development, and a more realistic appreciation of the likely time required for such developments.

## References

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