

Language and LEARNING: The learning dimensions of our work

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Introduction

The National Language and Academic Skills conference, convened by Language and Learning Services at Monash University, was held in Melbourne on 25 and 26 November 1999, in the tranquil garden setting of the Corpus Christi College Conference Centre. Over the two days of the conference, the 140 delegates who attended considered the theme: 'Language and LEARNING: The learning dimension of our work'.

The 1999 conference at Monash followed on from two very successful Language and Academic skills conferences held at La Trobe University in 1994 and 1996. These previous conferences explored the themes of 'integration of academic skills programs into the disciplines' and 'the role of one to one consultations in academic skills advising'. While these conferences considered in a general way the perspective of the 'learning' side of our work, the theme selected for the 1999 conference aimed to highlight it. We felt this attention was timely for several reasons. Firstly, in recent years there has been relatively good coverage of many of the 'language' issues that concern us in our work, stimulated in part by the burgeoning research areas of academic literacy, second language literacy, disciplinary discourses, and critical literacy. Thus, the theme of 'learning' was selected partly as a means of balancing the ledger as it were, in deliberations on our language and learning work. A second reason is that the notion of 'learning' has recently become central in many contemporary debates and directions in tertiary education. Perhaps the most prominent of the new 'learnings' is the 'flexible' variety - but there are others that also dominate higher education discourses nowadays - 'lifelong learning'; 'student-centred learning'; 'generic learning'; and 'learning cultures'. The prominence of these terms and the vigour with which they are debated reflect an environment of rapid and almost perpetual change in our universities, creating for academic skills advising a growing range of professional challenges.

The refereed papers in this selection, organised around the conference's four sub-themes - Theories of Learning; Cultures of Learning; Flexible Learning; Generic Learning and Discipline-specific Learning - represent part of the contribution we as language and academic skills advisers have to make to the new 'learnings' of the university. The perspective offered is both Australian and international. Further, the referee process, drawing on the large pool of expertise in academic skills circles, makes this volume a genuine community effort, one that demonstrates well, we believe, the strength of the body of knowledge and scholarship in our area of higher education.

Theories of learning

Part of the Language and Academic Skills project over the last decade has been to identify within the diversity of our practices certain fundamental theoretical perspectives that underlie our work. This task was taken up several years back in an important volume published by the Victorian Language and Learning Network - *Academic skills advising: Towards a discipline* (Garner, Chanock & Clerehan, 1995). At the 1999 conference further efforts were made in this direction.

Graham Webb in his keynote paper 'Learning Theory' begins by noting the importance of theory in our profession, because, as he suggests, it is the basis for 'legitimizing' much of what we do. Webb goes on to provide a useful overview of four paradigms of learning that have particular relevance to the language and learning field: Positivism, Hermeneutics, Critical theory and Post-modernism. Webb points out that Learning Theory is a highly 'contested and interested' area - and in such a spirit seeks not to provide a neutral, disinterested account. There is in his descriptions of the four paradigms a signalling of allegiances to a hermeneutical approach, but also a cautioning against the 'formulaic application' of any one particular theory. But there is an even more serious cautioning in Webb's conclusion - this is that we ignore learning theory at our peril. If we treat learning theory as a separate 'external' field - one that others deal with - it is likely in the present educational climate, Webb suggests, to become 'increasingly physicalist, positivist, instrumental and narrow'.

The need to be syncretic in one's approach to learning theory is embraced wholeheartedly by Wendy Crebbin in an interesting paper that seeks to provide an account of 'how learning happens'. In her work, Crebbin brings together, somewhat ambitiously, four very diverse fields: critical postmodernism; constructionist learning theory; neurological research and 'personal' theory, to argue for a more 'personalised' approach to teaching. The act of learning, she suggests, is at heart an 'emotional' experience.

The remaining papers in this section - all reports of studies into student and teacher practices - are informed by a range of learning theories. Mandy Scott's investigation of student interaction with lecturers' written feedback draws on 'Vygotskian ideas of the social nature of learning'. Heather Winskel's study of coherence in students' essays addresses the issue of how meaning is constructed in writing, depicted in her paper as a complex transaction between writer, text and reader. The paper by Josephine Ryan, Elizabeth Powell, Patricia Cartwright, Patricia Hacker, Fred McArdle, and Jo Reidy which reports a program of writing assistance to students, draws principally on the account of learning and literacy provided by the concept of 'discourse community'. Within such a framework, the 'explicit modelling' of textual processes is seen as an important teaching strategy. In evaluating their program, Ryan et al. consider thoughtfully both the benefits and limits of the 'modelling' approach they used.

Cultures of learning

The concept of culture has become an indispensable one in academic skills advising work. There are at least two ways that the term is commonly employed: i) to refer to the circumstances of our students, e.g. whether they come from English or non-English speaking cultural backgrounds, and so on; and ii) to refer to the institutional circumstances of their studies, e.g. the type of university students are attending, the nature of the disciplines they are studying in, and so on. Both 'cultural strands' are covered in the papers in this section.

Leslyanne Hawthorne's keynote challenges some of the assumptions made about one of our clearly identified cultural groups - non-English speaking background students. Hawthorne suggests that our ways of thinking about and responding to the learning needs of these students have been governed over the last 20 years by models of 'deficit' and 'dysfunctionality'. This model, she suggests, has emerged principally from the 'skewed perspectives' of those discipline areas and services concerned with the academic and psycho-social adjustment of international students. But for Hawthorne, deficit models may no longer have validity (if they ever did), in the face of growing evidence of the 'disproportionate academic success' of these students at Australian universities. In the close of her paper, she touches briefly and tantalisingly on some of the implications of an alternative 'asset model', which she suggests may not be entirely 'popular' with some ESL professionals.

The theme of misplaced assumptions is also taken up by Helen Marriott and Satoshi Miyazaki in a paper concerned with a specific international cohort - Japanese students. Along with similar objections to deficit-based accounts, Marriott and Satoshi express disdain at the literature's tendency to treat international Asian students as 'a monolithic whole'. What is urgently needed, they argue, is 'in-depth research' into the different national educational cultures from which our international students come. As a most useful example of this type of research, the authors describe findings from a comparative analysis of the 'study genres' - both spoken and written - of Australian and Japanese universities.

The papers by Linda Forson & Gerhard May and 'Ema Wolfgramm-Foliaki, which describe language and learning programs in non-Australian settings, reinforce the need for programs to take account of the specific cultural circumstances in which they operate. Forson and May discuss the complex range of factors that have influenced the formation of learning support programs in post-apartheid South Africa. The key to successful program development, they suggest, is the valuing of students' cultures. This poses a range of challenges, including for the authors how they might deal with such cultural precepts as 'religion and ancestral worship', reported by students as significant in their approaches to their study. Wolfgramm-Foliaki, in her description of a support program for Pacific Island students at a New Zealand university, takes up a similar theme of valuing students' cultural backgrounds. She attributes the success of the New Zealand program to its ability to take account of the strong oral and practical orientation of Islander education traditions.

The final two papers in this section, one by Kate Chanock and the other by staff on the University of Adelaide's Integrated ESL Program (Kate Cadman, Karen Adams, Margaret Cargill, Kristin Munday, Richard Warner and Elizabeth Yong) are challenging pieces which seek to 'problematise' the role of academic skills advising in our engagement with student and institutional cultures. Chanock's paper explores most thoughtfully the professional dilemma many of us face when we seek to enculturate students into disciplinary discourses - knowing that this is a necessary process, but knowing also that these discourses are designed seemingly to exclude many who would participate in them. Chanock's way through this dilemma is not to see academic literacy practices as irredeemably 'regulative' and repressive, as others have; rather they have a legitimacy, she suggests, which resides in the possibility they allow for their own critique. Cadman et al.'s report of an intriguing workshop session at the conference shows how the approaches we adopt in academic skills advising are fundamentally ideological ones, shaped in the authors' analysis, by the interplay of two dimensions of belief: how we view our

students' cultural backgrounds and how we view their place in the university. What emerges from the workshop is a level of frustration in the profession - reflected in a clear disparity between participants' 'current actual teaching practice' and their sense of 'an ideal practice'. For the authors, these findings suggest a need for us to adopt a more 'critical' approach to our professional practices.

Flexible learning

The third theme of the conference, 'flexible learning', was chosen as language and academic skills units grapple with issues involved in the provision of support to students studying in 'flexible' modes. As universities seek to widen accessibility to courses, flexible delivery thus aims to provide educational opportunities in times, places, and formats to suit the individual student. This is flexible learning in its broadest sense; however, the current trend in flexible learning is the use of technology.

In her keynote paper, Carmel McNaught argues that flexible learning needs to do more than provide alternative avenues for accessing education and it must do more than offer 'a set of technological tools'. Good educational design in flexible learning takes into account a diverse student population with varied approaches to learning, as well as a diversity of learning contexts. McNaught suggests that at its best, 'Online education might be able to combine the interactive, communicative benefits of face-to-face education with the time/place independence of distance education'. She argues that university policy, culture and levels of support are critical factors in the fostering of an on-line approach to teaching.

The two papers on the use of technology in language and academic skills teaching, those by Tim Moore and Rosemary Clerehan and by Jan Robbins, provide an illustration of the critical reflection necessary for 'good educational design'. Moore and Clerehan describe and critique a web-based language and learning resource, addressing the textual and pedagogical implications of the use of such technology, including its limitations when attempting to translate modes of classroom teaching. Robbins similarly provides a stimulating critique of the issues involved in translating the work of language and learning advisors to a technology-based environment. She argues that one aspect of academic skills advice which cannot be accommodated for in the technology is emotional engagement with the student, and also raises for consideration other financial, ethical and equity issues.

The two remaining papers in this section apply the term flexible delivery in its broadest sense. In her interesting paper on flexible learning in prisons, Jessamyn Clarke points out that 'high-end technology' has 'limited relevance' to current educational opportunities for prisoners. In this context, flexible learning must be seen in terms of its broader meaning, that is a 'focus upon delivery modes which are able to transcend the time/ place/ pace determinism'. Pamela Mort and Robin Ford describe their development of a resource for independent learning after encountering difficulties in attracting students to a traditional mode of academic support - classroom teaching.

Generic learning and discipline-specific learning

The theme attracting the greatest number of papers was Generic Learning and Discipline-specific Learning. The interest in this area indicates that we are continuing to grapple with the pedagogical and practical issues associated with academic 'skills' teaching that were flagged at the first national Language and Academic Skills conference on 'Integrating the Teaching of Academic Discourse into Courses in the Disciplines' at La Trobe University in 1994.

In his stimulating keynote paper, Gordon Taylor examines the arguments on either end of the continuum in the generic vs. discipline-specific skills debate. The commonwealth government and consequently university administrators are pressing teachers to focus their efforts on the development of certain graduate 'attributes'; while some subject specialists argue that 'generic' skills are low level skills that students should bring with them from school and the 'higher' learning skills are the particular province of the discipline-specific specialists. Taylor argues against viewing the generic and the specific within a rigid dichotomy of extremes, but rather in terms of their fluid interplay. As 'outsiders', language and learning specialists are in a position to observe commonalities and differences in the disciplines, and to note the ways in which the general and the particular influence one another. Taylor draws upon Wittgenstein's concept of 'family resemblances' and the notion of 'games', where there is complex web of 'crisscrossing' similarities, but 'there is no single common or essential property that characterises *all* games'. In assisting students to 'read' the play of the 'game', language and learning specialists should aim to develop not a *skill*, but the *faculty* of judgment.

Two of the papers in this section refer to the push within university administrations to develop lists of graduate 'attributes' to be subsequently engendered in students. Corinne Buckland acknowledges the potential negative effects of a national 'Graduate Skills Assessment' but finds that her own work in teaching 'generic' writing skills 'adapted' to Education subjects suggests that this need not be the case, and that many of the 'attributes' posited as valuable sit neatly with the traditional ethos of a community of scholars. Frances Quinn similarly refers to the current trend to identify and teach 'generic skills'. She argues that for sound pedagogical reasons 'skills' teaching must be embedded within the disciplines, but acknowledges that this poses logistical problems - particularly in relation to what is known about 'skills transferability'. One possible solution for Quinn is to use generic courses as a practical complement to discipline-specific programs. Two other papers explore 'generic' issues for particular groups of students. Alex Bartel and Jenny Godfrey explore generic skills in terms of the graduate attributes sought by employers in the fields of Engineering and Computing. They hope to use their findings to develop classes on communication skills for recruitment purposes. Mandy Symons and Katherine Samuelowicz describe the common areas of difficulty experienced by postgraduate students and outline the various modes through which their unit provides assistance to this group of students.

Several of the papers provide stimulating discussion of the nexus between 'skills' and content. Jenny Pittman argues that 'disciplines *do* make a difference': after the fashion of Taylor's language and learning specialist, Pittman usefully draws together 'family resemblances' within the disciplines of the sciences, the humanities and the social sciences. Patricia Cartwright and Lynne Noone begin with a broad understanding of literacy that encompasses more than paragraphing and punctuation, taking as their starting point 'the proposition that discipline content is itself composed of language which has been constructed by each disciplinary community'. They describe an innovative integrated tutorial program that employed the use of journaling in the development of students' critical thinking and understanding of their subject, which in turn contributed to their disciplinary 'literacy'. Margaret Cargill similarly advocates an integrated approach to 'skills' teaching and emphasises the need for collaboration with subject specialists and the need to support integrated programs with 'a wide variety of targeted learning resources which students access as the need arises'. John Grierson and Barbara Westwood outline an interesting program for helping Public Health students to become more critical readers and writers. They argue that it is 'not a universal skill, but a cultural discourse to be learned', and describe their 'sociocultural' approach to disciplinarity. Reem Al-Mahmood and Liz Colbert are similarly interested in developing the critical thinking skills of their students. They discuss the limitations of traditional frameworks for critical thinking, and provide an insightful exploration of what constitutes critical thinking in disciplines requiring the more subjective elements of personal response and interpretation.

Overall, the papers in this collection reflect a broad range of interesting and insightful approaches to the 'learning dimension' of our work. It is interesting to note that several of the papers focussed on the nexus between learning and writing, in particular. It seems that 'language' issues continue to be central to our reflections on our practice. Another area attracting attention from the authors in this collection, however, is that of critical thinking (see e.g. Al-Mahmood & Colbert; Grierson & Westwood; Cartwright & Noone), and this appears to be an area worthy of future research. Critical reflection on our own practice as 'enculturators' has also emerged as a theme, with some authors seeking to 'problematise' the role and position of language and learning advisors within higher education institutions (see e.g. Chanock; Cadman et al.). The often uncertain position of advisors and the tensions involved in the role became central issues in the final panel session of the conference, 'The future of learning and the future of language and learning'. Professional and industrial matters were raised in equal measure to the reflections on learning provoked by the conference. It is clear that in order to consider issues of theory and practice in assisting students' learning, we must also address the pragmatic and political issues of our workplaces. Undoubtedly future conferences will explore further these issues raised briefly here.

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Section 1

Theories of Learning

Keynote paper: Theories of learning

Learning theory

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Abstract

A framework for discussing learning theory is offered comprising the major theory of knowledge categories of positivism, hermeneutical-humanistic understanding, critical theory-action research, and postmodernity. The claim is made that learning theory is a vast and contested area, and always will be. Many of the 'truths' of learning theory are unstable and based within epistemologies that deny the complexity of the human condition and a warning is sounded with regard to particular 'learning theories' dominating the discourse. It is argued that teachers, learning advisers and educational developers need to become better educated concerning the limits of learning theory. This leads on to a brief consideration of the changing nature of educational work and the need for professionalisation to support an educated appreciation of learning theory, rather than acceptance of an impoverished and instrumental view.

INTRODUCTION

There is intense pressure on learning advisors to provide practical tips, strategies, methods and procedures that will lead to an obvious and immediate improvement in student learning. From our own experience we appreciate what has helped us to learn and from observation we see what has helped the learning of our fellow students, other students, our children, family members and so on. However, to make a case that language and academic skills development is itself a serious academic concern, it is usually thought necessary to link practice to theoretical positions of some kind. It is common place for people to talk of the 'theoretical underpinnings' of their practice, and this is usually taken to be a 'good thing' which indicates that practice is based upon some more substantiated foundation than one's own, idiosyncratic, experience.

'Learning theory' is the basis for legitimating much of the practical advice offered by learning advisors. It is interesting to investigate what learning advisors consider learning theory to be: which learning theories inform their practice and which they say they regularly use. There is of course no 'right' or 'stable' way to define what constitutes 'learning theory' and hours of enjoyable conversation can be spent discussing the strengths and weaknesses of particular theories. There are two points that need to be made, however.

First, what constitutes learning theory and what is seen as being important in learning theory is always argued from an interested position. Learning theory seeks to draw boundaries around an immense area of the human condition and human experience. In so doing there will always, quite rightly, be contestation of what is important and legitimate. There will always be different views taken and so we should be wary of fixed and entrenched positions and welcome new perspectives, change and argument. Second, it is important to realise the power of the learning theory discourse. A discourse is a "network of practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). A discourse is far from being merely words that name objects, thoughts or actions: a discourse has the power to create objects, structure our thoughts and make us what we are. So, the discourse of learning theory has a profound effect not only on the professional bearing of language and academic skills development, but also on shaping and constraining the people who populate the area.

The approach taken here is based on the more fully articulated account of the ontology, epistemology and methodology of educational development in 'Understanding Staff Development' (Webb, 1996). In that book, learning theory is categorised within the routinely recognised philosophical positions of positivism,

hermeneutics, critical theory and postmodernity. Of course it should be noted that this scheme is eminently open to contest and critique.

POSITIVISM

Positivism is a view of the world that seeks to base knowledge on rational, logical and empirically verifiable information. Born in the enlightenment period, when science and technology were revolutionising knowledge of the world, reason and reasoning became not only the way to control natural forces but also the principle for judgement regarding social and moral issues. In its strongest form, positivism is seen as establishing the objective truth, standing above and separate from the society or time in which it is produced. Facts are facts; they are theory-free and unaffected by any spatially or temporally conditioned motives, prejudices or ideologies of the observer. Facts can be described in an observation language that does not have any theoretical prejudice or presupposition of its own. Hypotheses are verifiable only by empirical observation and observational acts must be capable of replication.

A telling critique of positivism was mounted by Karl Popper who suggested that general laws or 'truth' could not be established by repeated inductive observation; falsification and refutation of 'conjectures' was a more likely means to progress than verification; and, value-neutral observation by value-neutral observers is impossible: "We do not 'have' an observation . . . but we 'make' an observation . . . An observation is always preceded by . . . something theoretical" (Popper, 1972, p. 342). Thomas Kuhn (1970) and others have widened the critique to explore the social, political, emotional and temporal nature of scientific thought and change.

In terms of higher education learning theory, the discourse of positivist inclined attitudes and methods is still alive and well. In fact, for many of those who make important decisions that affect the provision of teaching and learning, it represents the *only* conception. There is repeatedly the call for 'facts' or controlled experiments to give unequivocal answers to all kinds of questions. Examples may include whether students learn better from lectures or from computers, whether problem-based learning is as good as a traditional curriculum, or what is the best way of organising an electronic discussion group. Those pursuing research and experiments to answer such questions are seen as value-free and the so are the questions they ask. Popper's point that any observation is already located in a theoretical landscape is unappreciated. There are simply 'things' or truths to be discovered, developed and elaborated into general explanations. A good example is the notion of 'learning styles' and the development of this area from the nineteenth century psychology of eugenics, through general intelligence, fields of intelligence, field-dependence/field independence, global/analytical, serialist/holist and latterly the notion of deep/surface. During this development, many discursive positions have been absorbed without question into primary, secondary and tertiary education, without an appreciation of the one-eyed discourse from which they originated, and the particular view of humanity that such a view encourages. Learning styles became a fact, rather than a motivating myth. Realist and physicalist conceptions of learning continue to confuse brain activity with learning and substitute digital metaphors concerning neural networks and processing pathways for the factory and steam metaphors of the last century, or religious iconography of earlier times.

Also implicated in learning theory from this standpoint are 'development' and 'stage' models. Rooted in early evolutionary thought, theorists such as Piaget, Kohlberg, Erikson, Maslow, Freud, Perry, Bloom and Gagné suggested 'stages' that are necessary for one to move through in order to learn or develop from level to level. It is one of the achievements of postmodernity to point out that the highest stage of achievement is usually a mirror image of the theorist and inevitably, their view of enlightenment man [*sic*] (the autonomous individual seeking control over nature). Postmodern critiques have pointed out that there are no pre-determined stages, no necessary progression, and that learning is a far more complex and socially and environmentally determined process than is explicable through a unified stage theory.

HERMENEUTICAL – HUMANISTIC UNDERSTANDING

Hermes was the wing-footed messenger-god who not only announced the messages of the gods to the mortals of the human world, but also *interpreted* them. Hermeneutics is the art and science of interpretation: the continuation of the Hermes tradition. Schleiermacher represents the beginning of a modern understanding of hermeneutics in his linking of philology (the science of interpretation regarding language and grammatical structures) with the art of psychological understanding, especially with regard to empathy in the relationship

between interpreter and author. Hermeneutical understanding sees truth not as correspondence with an external reality, but built through consensual and humanistic endeavor. And human endeavor is more than the 'thinking' of enlightenment/rational man [*sic*] but includes feeling, willing, wanting and an appreciation of cultural and historical life experiences. Hermeneutics developed through Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer into a wide body of thought that puts human experience at the heart of understanding. Heidegger, for example, makes our experience of 'being in the world' (*dasein*) a precursor to any concepts we may construct (concepts such as 'objective' or 'subjective', for example).

Among the insights offered by hermeneutics is the notion of a hermeneutical circle, which, on a personal note, I have found to be a most useful metaphor for representing educational experience. An example of a hermeneutical circle may be taken from language. We can only understand the meaning of a sentence if we understand the meaning of each of the words in the sentence. Following this line leads to the reductive (scientific) position that if we understand each small constituent part, we will understand the whole. But at the same time, individual words have many interpretations and functions. Look up each word in a dictionary and we are offered alternative explanations and equivalents. The meaning of a particular word in a particular context is given by its place in the sentence, and by reference to the meaning of the sentence as a whole. The paradox of the hermeneutical circle is that we cannot understand the meaning of the whole without understanding the meaning of each of the parts, and yet we cannot know the meaning of a particular part without first having a grasp of the meaning of the whole.

In terms of learning styles, this suggests that we are neither necessarily, any of the bipolar descriptions offered earlier (e.g. global/analytical; serialist/holist; deep/surface etc). In developing meaning we move from one perspective to another many times. This destabilises hierarchical schemes such as 'knowledge' being a necessary but inferior precursor to 'comprehension', which in turn precedes 'application', 'analysis', 'synthesis' and 'evaluation'. We often start with 'evaluation' before locating what 'knowledge' we want to obtain. We learn to shift between these categories as we reflect and develop our skills.

It is my position that the discourse of learning theory is unbalanced because the insights of hermeneutical understanding have only patchily entered the mainstream. Writers such as Carl Rogers and Donald Schön have had a profound effect by reinventing and recontextualising elements of hermeneutics, without realising that this was in fact what they were doing. For language and academics skills advisors, who of necessity are working in close relationships with learners and others, hermeneutics offers important insights concerning how mutual understanding might be achieved.

I would also argue that both 'constructivism' and the technified, triangulated and objectified methods of much modern 'qualitative' research, represent minor parts of the hermeneutical tradition. At its base, hermeneutics is more than an intellectual or cognitive process but a realisation in terms of all that we are. This includes our emotional and intuitive understandings, forged in the perennial human riddles of life and death, joy and sorrow, love and hate, the value of an individual life, and its meaninglessness. Hermeneutical understanding anticipates a completeness and richness that follows from human experience, which surpasses rational explication, and which has importance for both parties. In gaining an ever-closer understanding of 'the other' (person or 'thing') comes the possibility of discovering and revealing oneself. This is the essence of learning, and of teaching.

CRITICAL THEORY AND ACTION RESEARCH

Critical theory was the euphemism for Marxism that 'Frankfurt School' theorists used to describe their work on fleeing Hitler's Germany for the United States. The origins of critical theory lie in two Hegelian positions later reinterpreted by Marx. First was the vesting of ultimate truth and reason in the social group rather than the individual; second, the association of what *should* happen (concerning normative, moral and value imperatives) with causal explanation of what *would* or what *does* happen. These have survived into modern views of how, why and what people should and do learn.

The major contemporary figure in critical theory is Jürgen Habermas. Habermas asked the basic question concerning why knowledge is produced at all, and came to the conclusion that it is produced to serve three basic interests. The 'technical interest' represents the desire for technical control over the natural world, while the 'practical interest' refers to the desire for the hermeneutical understanding of others. The problem with both of these views (according to Habermas) is that power distorts who and what is heard and so the way in which

knowledge is developed. Only if there are equal, fair and democratic processes in place can real and not distorted communication take place. The development of society along these lines is seen as the third or 'emancipatory interest'.

Critical theory has most notably been interpreted in terms of education by Jack Mezirow (1981). The 'technical' domain is task oriented and can be associated with behavioural objectives, competency-based learning, skills training, criteria-referenced testing and empirical research and evaluation. The 'practical' domain emphasises empathy with others by discussion and role-play. The 'emancipatory' domain becomes 'learning for perspective transformation' which includes becoming aware of "the cultural assumptions governing the rules, roles, conventions and social expectations which dictated the way we see, think, feel and act" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 13). To achieve this we need 'critical awareness' or 'critical consciousness' and the process of self-reflection in the context of ideology critique represents the most significant kind of learning we can achieve. It is the imperative of educators to ensure that such learning takes place.

The method by which the aims of critical theory can be advanced has been 'action research', a term originally coined by Kurt Lewin for a range of community development projects in the United States. Carr and Kemmis (1986) provided a strong link between critical theory and action research for the educational context. This view of action research retains the Hegelian/Marxist views of the importance of the group for action and the strong position on normative issues of what teaching and learning *should* be about. Apart from favouring a group approach to education including learning, learning development and teaching development, critical theory and action research emphasise that learning and teaching problems and issues in microcosm (i.e. in the classroom, the institution, or for the particular learner) reflect the problems of the wider society and ultimately hinge on political and power questions.

Some of the problems associated with this view include an uncritical and fairly naive Habermasian and Enlightenment-like assurance in 'rationality and justice', an unproblematic view of equality, an acceptance of the Marxist notion of false consciousness and thus the charge of being patronising, and a somewhat uncritical acceptance of the privilege of the group over the individual. The less ideological variants of 'technical' action research and cyclical models of teaching and learning (i.e. Kolb) generally occupy an uneasy position between the values of instrumental rationality and positivism on the one hand, and critical theory and action research on the other.

POSTMODERNITY

Postmodernity points to the lack of firm foundations given the decline in acceptance of the grand organising principles by which people made sense of their lives (including religion, science and revolution). Where once there was some certainty to do with boundaries and identity, postmodernism emphasises the many ways in which identity can be constructed and the movement we make between these constructions. For example, the critical theory view that inequality is simply a fact becomes more complex when viewed from a postmodern perspective. Chisholm (1990), talking about gender, provides a good illustration:

Whilst some of us, as feminists . . . can legitimately claim membership of (a) relevant oppressed group, we are, at the same time, class-privileged – and where young people are involved, we have the privilege of adulthood. Therefore, our identities are multiple and contradictory; and we are inevitably bound up in power relationships which we should not be able to afford to deny . . . I propose that we begin by not kidding ourselves: about what is achievable in action research; that we know and understand what emancipatory action is; about the elusive character of symmetrical research relations (pp. 253, 255).

Postmodern approaches have been used to critique a number of well-known positions. For example, Cherryholmes (1988) mounted critiques of Bloom's taxonomy, Tyler's rationale and Schwab's 'practical four', and Webb (1997) critiqued phenomenography and the notion of 'deep' and 'surface' learning. Such critiques develop from questioning the basic logical device of binary distinction: the distinction between being something and not being something. They suggest that at the boundary, distinction tends to break down, interpretation becomes complex and that power ultimately influences definition. This is as true for deeply held binary distinctions (such as 'man' and 'woman') as it is for more tenuous constructions such as 'deep' and 'surface'

learning. The importance of power in affecting definition and legitimation in a discourse has been underestimated by those working in the field of higher education.

e are members of a higher education development community which defines what is appropriate, current and valid in the field, and from which we absorb guidelines as to the nature, scope and purpose of our own endeavours. In Foucauldian terms, we are part of an anonymous discourse which pre-dates our own arrival on the scene, and which moulds and constrains our agency as individuals. (Webb, 1992, p. 351)

The postmodern position also suggests that in terms of learning theory, a number of questions should be asked, such as, who is authorised to speak and whom to listen, what can be said, how does one become authorised to speak, what explanations and metaphors are valued and praised, which are excluded and silenced, what social, political and institutional arrangements reward or punish what kinds of explanation (Cherryholmes, 1998)?

CONSEQUENCES

Perhaps the first thing to note is the huge expanse of learning theory and the need for all those concerned with teaching and learning in higher education to themselves be lifetime students and scholars in this area. An educated approach to learning theory recognises positive and negative aspects, strengths and weaknesses, in any of the basic positions outlined above. It suggests the need to avoid being a proselytiser, zealot or salesperson for a particular position, be it based in action research, phenomenography, neuro-linguistic programming, problem-based learning or whatever. It suggests the need to be open to different positions and interpretations.

In terms of practice this brings one close to the position of reflective practice which itself can be interpreted as part of the hermeneutical tradition. It suggests that the formulaic 'application' of a particular 'learning theory' or approach should be avoided. Reflective practice starts with authentic listening to the needs and requirements of the particular people involved and taking account of their own understandings and appreciation. One avoids having the answer available (in terms of theory and particular practices) from the very beginning. It suggests encountering each new problem freshly, attentively, positively and with humility. The refusal to apply a formulaic prescription to a new situation can leave the practitioner feeling exposed, naked, vulnerable and uncomfortable. But this is rich ground for experiencing and learning, whereas the certainty of holding a given position as 'the' right theoretical position, or practical solution, denies learning and educational development.

Apart from the 'micro' level of an individual's professional practice, there are also wider consequences associated with our stance on learning theory. It can be argued that academic work is changing rapidly and that we are at a crossroads in terms of how we approach teaching, learning and educational support in higher education. For example, it is possible that academic work will become increasingly fragmented, de-skilled and outsourced to contract work. There are pressures to separate the development or learning materials from outsourced delivery, and both from evaluation and quality assurance. On the other hand there are other pressures to professionalise teaching at University level by insisting on the accreditation of staff as teachers. Professional qualifications help ensure a teaching workforce familiar with learning theory, and one that is familiar with the development of materials and processes, alternative approaches to teaching, evaluation, quality assurance and feedback for improvement purposes. The telling question then becomes, how are we as professionals in the field of higher education and learning, professionalising and accrediting ourselves, and ensuring that we keep up with what is happening elsewhere in the sector? This question applies equally to higher education teachers, learning support and staff development people. It is also worth noting that a professional structure not only considers qualifications for entry, but also for continuing membership of the profession, continuing professional development, and ethical and support matters. I have written elsewhere about the need for a more professional approach to the restorative, normative and developmental functions of support for staff developers (Webb, 1996, p. 108) and I believe that this applies equally to learning support workers.

Learning theory is therefore not a 'external' field of research which is in some way alien to us, and that we simply have to accept. It is a highly contested area and always will be, so long as there is the diversity of humanity, and of interests served by various formulations of how we learn. It should not be confined to a limited and formulaic application of a particular theorist or theory. The position I have attempted to outline argues for the 'educated' practitioner with regard to learning theory and the need to develop a professional apparatus in order to ensure educated workers in the various areas of higher education practice. If we do not follow this

route, my fear is that learning theory will become increasingly physicalist (dominated by brain research), positivist, instrumental and narrow. We deserve better.

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How does learning happen?

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Abstract

Constructivism is a learning theory which attempts to explain how learners make meaning through language and other sources of information, whilst critical postmodernism challenges modernist notions of knowledge as 'objective reality'. In this paper I will provide a brief overview of how I have combined these theories with recent findings from research in neurological studies of consciousness and emotion, as well as research on student's perceptions of learning, to build a model to describe current understandings of the processes of learning and suggest some implications for teaching.

My motivation for this research is to try to develop an understanding of how learning occurs and, more importantly, why it is that so much of what students 'learn' is not constructed in ways which enable that learning to be meaningfully used.

My findings so far indicate that a possible explanation of why past approaches to teaching and learning have frequently been less successful than teachers have hoped is that they have tended to overlook the significance of the context and purpose of the learning, as well as the personal elements such as the learner's expectations, emotional propensity, and self-understandings, in all the processes of meaning-making.

Based on these ideas about learning it becomes imperative that we as teachers re-conceptualise our understandings of teaching, particularly teaching in higher education.

INTRODUCTION

To attempt to explain why I am arguing the need to reconceptualise teaching I am calling on four different, separate areas of research and theorising. Those areas are critical postmodernism, particularly in relation to knowledge and meaning; constructivist ideas about learning; neurological research in brain functioning; and the impact of 'personal theory', which has been researched in relation to students' ideas of learning and themselves as learners. After briefly outlining some of the most pertinent ideas from each of those four areas, I will then attempt to draw together strands from each to build a model of how learning happens. Finally I will use that model to explore what that might mean for teaching in higher education.

Critical postmodernism

Yeatman claims that "postmodern politics is associated with the contestation of what is taken to be core assumptions or values within modern democratic/emancipatory politics" (1994, p. ix). She lists modernist assumptions of objective knowledge, meaning and truth, and the assumed impartial, unitary identity of sovereign subjects (1994) as significant areas which are open to question and re-evaluation. Also open to contestation are modernist ideas which situate those assumptions outside of, and separate from, contextual frames of representation, history, or social and cultural constructions. According to Yeatman, one of the core features of critical postmodernism is a concept of 'the politics of knowledge', which she describes in part as a "critique of epistemological foundationalism" (1994, p. 28). She argues that the modernist foundationalism is based on assumptions that language and knowledge stand outside, and are free of, the power regimes in which they were constructed. Such an assumption posits language and knowledge as a conduit (1990, p. 162), or a mirror (1994, p. 28), which, being singular in meaning, can be claimed to be 'objective' and universal, because such cultural elements are held to be untainted by social conditions and/or personal interpretation.

In challenging such assumptions, from a postmodern critical perspective, knowledges and meanings are considered to be culturally and historically situated, and saturated with previous power contests. Knowledge is therefore understood to be political, contested, and irresolvably multiple (Foucault, 1980; Kenway, 1992;

Martusewicz, 1992). In this context each individual is "positioned within the discursive traditions that have formed them" (Yeatman, 1994, p. 9).

This perspective of knowledge and 'knowers' differs from a modernist pluralist view of knowledge as culturally relative in that it takes account of the contestation and power struggles which are integral to knowledge construction. It also differs because, in not giving higher status to particular forms of knowledge, which in the past in western society has usually been 'scientific' knowledge (Yeatman, 1991, 1996), it also allows space for recognising multiple forms and sources of knowledges, multiple meanings and interpretations.

Constructivist ideas about learning

One of the central tenets of the constructivist view of learning is that knowledge does not exist outside people, "there is no knowledge without a knower", [and] "the knower personally participates in all acts of understanding" (Kincheloe, 1991, p. 26). From this perspective, learning is seen as an interactive relationship between experiences, ideas and existing constructs. When a person learns, they construct their own knowledge according to what they already know and the social, historical, linguistic, context of the learning.

Another, associated tenet is a rejection of realist and/or rational views of knowledge. When a constructivist argues that all knowledge and meaning are social artefacts, they are recognising that, whilst it is the individual who constructs meaning, meaning-making is never done in isolation from the social context (Bourdieu, 1991; Freire, 1970, 1985). This context is inevitably influenced by culture, language(s), politics and history. This understanding of learning is diametrically opposed to the positivist position that 'objective' knowledge is there to be accumulated by the learner.

A focus of constructivism is therefore not on an 'external reality', but on how people organise and impose interpretive structures on their experiences to make meaning. The process of meaning-making is understood to be a continual process in which learners actively interpret new experiences and transform their prior knowledge. In these processes each person's system of constructs is not seen as an exact replication of external reality, but as a set of 'working hypotheses' or 'frames' which that person uses as if they were reality. Over time these mental constructs become that person's reality, as they see it (Crebbin, 1995). But whilst a person's 'worldview' may frame how they see the world, such processes are understood to be rarely linear or uni-dimensional; it is considered much more likely that they are experienced as part of an 'ever-evolving, dynamic complexity' of problematic and unpredictable cycles which have no final resolution (Bawden, 1991, p. 309).

Neurological research in brain functioning

Since the development of techniques which allow for non-invasive monitoring of brain functioning, it has become possible to be clearer about how the brain functions. Currently there are two different areas of research. Possibly the most well publicised are the various forms of 'brain mapping' which produce visual images of a person's brain showing areas of increased oxygen usage and/or electrical currents as a specific task is performed. This has led to a greater understanding of which areas of the brain are involved, including the recognition that it is not only the cortex which contributes to 'thinking' and 'learning', but also the whole of the 'lower brain' or limbic system. This is important because, as a result of this insight it becomes possible to understand how emotion, personal interpretation, and varying levels of consciousness, are involved in constructing meaning as well as memory.

Alongside that research is work being done to try to identify the actual electro-chemical processes which are involved in learning, memory and consciousness. It is some of the different aspects of this work which I am finding most useful in trying to re-conceptualise what is meant by learning, and knowing. In this, there are three different areas of research which I see as contributing important information.

Neurotransmission of messages

In searching for explanations of how memory is stored through the use of neurochemistry there is now a 'plausible' explanation of the memory mechanism of brain circuitries involving physiological/chemical processes (Lynch, 1999, p. 1). This research has begun to highlight the complexity and multiplicity of the learning process. For example, it has been estimated that there are approximately "100 billion neurons in the human brain and each has about 10,000 contacts with other neurons" (Department of Psychology, California State University DP CSU, 1999, p. 1), and that at any time a neuron can be receiving thousands of messages (DP CSU, 1999). The messages are carried through the movement of chemicals known as neurotransmitters which

move across the synaptic space between an axon of one neuron and a dendrite of another. Currently there is known to be approximately 100 different varieties of neurotransmitter in the brain (DP CSU, 1999, p. 3).

The significance of these findings to my research in trying to redefine learning include the knowledge that:

- (i) any thought process, or 'learning experience', involves multiple sources of information including information from different sensory modes (Crick & Koch, 1990; Bergenheim, Johansson, Granlund & Pedersen, 1996), each of which undergoes a series of analyses which incorporate both parallel processing, and integrative linking (Haberlandt, 1998),
- (ii) all of these processes involve several different chemical neurotransmitters, each of which carries its own form of instructions, and
- (iii) at least some of these neurotransmitters carry messages of emotion, awareness, and/or intention which become inextricably linked with the information. For example, the importance of arousal, intent, and associated with this, a sense of self, is talked about as integral components of learning, memory and thought (Penrose, 1994, pp. 35-36); incoming stimuli is thought to be subjected to an emotional evaluation which contributes to, but is separate from, the conscious awareness of emotion (Reiman, Lane, Ahern, Schwartz & Davidson, 1996); and emotional arousal is considered to be critical for enhanced conscious memory (Cahill, 1999, p. 1).

Consciousness

Some of the most recent research into consciousness has indicated that a great deal of our emotional evaluations, information processing, and meaning-making are interactive processes which occur at a pre-conscious or sub-conscious level (Kihlstrom, 1996; Reiman, et al., 1996; Schwartz, 1996). It is also now recognised that learning and interpretation can occur during what Koch (1996, p. 250) refers to as "subliminal perception" and/or "learning without awareness". These processes seem to be particularly sensitive to the interpretation of contextual cues and are understood to have the potential to influence subsequent learning.

How memory is stored and retrieved

Despite the previous language of memory as re-call or retrieval, there is evidence from research in neuropsychology which indicates that memories are not stored intact in any one part of the brain to be retrieved, but are reconstructed through complex re-activation and re-connection processes (Freeman, 1995). But that does not mean that each retrieval requires exactly the same processes as the initial experience. It seems that repeated similar events, or even some single events, can establish links, or pathways, which may be characterised by changes in the protein structure of the synapses (Flanagan, 1996), a process associated with increased synaptic strength which lasts indefinitely (Lynch, 1999).

By linking these ideas with the previously mentioned understandings of neurotransmission of messages being multiple rather than singular, I have come to the belief that the processes of memory re-activation and re-connection will have the potential to bring together all of the different forms of information, including sensual and emotional, plus the interpretations and meaning(s) which were part of the previous experience(s). This is an idea which supports a notion of memory being made up of multiple rather than singular messages which have been 'bound together' (Crick & Koch, 1990) in some way. In some of the research on how memories are retrieved as a re-construction of meaning(s), the centrality of the self as the constructor and corrector of meaning(s) is acknowledged (Conrad, 1996).

The impact of 'personal theory'

Over the last two decades a range of different kinds of research has been carried out with students in higher education, and how they go about their academic learning. For example, one substantial area of research has focused on students' learning approaches and expectations and the impact which that has on how they deal with new information (Entwistle & Waterson, 1988; Ramsden, 1988, 1992; Trigwell & Prosser, 1991; Eley, 1993; Marton, Dall'Alba & Beaty, 1993; Weinstein & Meyer, 1991, 1994). Although several of these authors have approached their research from different perspectives, or used a range of different words to describe what they mean by effective learning, there is some consensus that students bring a range of different expectations and approaches which impact on the effectiveness (depth) of their learning. According to Marton, et al., (1993) and Akerlind & Jenkins (1998), an important dividing line between these learning approaches is based on underlying assumptions about knowledge. For example, a view of knowledge as given or transferred between teacher and learner is consistent with passive learning approaches of receiving and absorbing information, whilst a view of learning as understanding or making meaning is linked with active learning approaches. An alternative

interpretation is offered by Ramsden (1992) who suggested that students also include information about the context and the subject, about self-as-learner-in-this-subject, and about task demands, into the interpretation. Those students who had access to a range of different ways of approaching a task (superficial → deep) then choose the approach which they consider most appropriate for their needs.

On the basis of this research, it seems that each student's 'personal theory' about learning and knowledge, and of themselves as a learner in that context, has a very strong impact on how they approach their academic learning. The value of this idea of 'personal theory' is that it highlights for me just how deeply embedded a student's learning responses and expectations might be.

BEGINNING TO BUILD A MODEL OF HOW LEARNING HAPPENS

In drawing ideas from, and making links between, these four different areas of research and theorising, I have identified a number of what I see as key elements which are probably different from most previous understandings of academic learning, and which I believe need to be given consideration in furthering and changing our understandings of how learning happens. These key elements, such as complexity, differences, and the importance of context and personal interpretation, are present, but are drawn upon differently in each of the four theoretical perspectives.

Therefore the most obvious unifying elements which link across these four areas of research and theory are that:

- (i) learning is impacted on by the *context* - cultural, social, linguistic, and physical, as well as the individual's interpretation of that context;
- (ii) explanations which acknowledge *complexity* and the possibility of *differences* are more appropriate than simple explanations. For example, the learning process includes *complex* transformations of information as it is linked, interpreted, and laid down as chemical/protein structures, it is not simply storing information for some future retrieval;
- (iii) meaningful learning is *connected* in a number of different ways - in the processing of information, sensory input is linked - new information is linked to prior knowledge - and individual interpretations are linked with social/cultural meanings
- (iv) we need to recognise the potential of multiple meanings and interpretations, both at a social/cultural level, and at the level of each individual, we also need to recognise
- (v) the significance of each individual's *personal meaning(s)*. It is the learner who is the person who constructs meaning from an experience, and who has choices about the interpretations which they make. In this regard we need to acknowledge the integral connection between, and the potential impact of:
 - the individual's emotions and emotional reactions, expectations and prior assumptions, as well as their pre-conscious, or sub-conscious, perceptions and emotional evaluations of information
 - students' prior experiences, their cultural, social and linguistic backgrounds
 - students' perceptions of the context and themselves as learners in that context
 - how students understand the purpose(s) and processes of the learning

These elements challenge 'modernist' notions on which a great deal of our teaching and assessment have been based. If learning is complex, personal and emotionally laden, rather than rational or unidimensional, and knowledge is neither objective nor universal, but a product of the historical, social, cultural and linguistic contexts in which it is developed, then assumptions that teaching is the communication of information, or that learning is the acquisition or accumulation of information, can no longer be supported. Nor can we assume that many of the forms of assessment which have been traditionally used provide us as teachers with an accurate demonstration of what students have learned, or know about a subject.

WHAT THAT MIGHT MEAN FOR TEACHING

There are some strong implications here for how we teach in higher education where we tend to have high expectations about the quality of students' learning, but are frequently disappointed that they are not able to

'make sense' of information in the ways we expect. In particular it seems that we need to give more consideration to how students are interpreting their role, their definition(s) of learning and themselves as learners in that subject area, as well as their purposes for learning.

In order to do this, as teachers we probably need to implement some kind(s) of process(es) early in our teaching programs which could give us some cues about how the students are approaching their learning. This is not as difficult or time consuming as it may sound. Already in most courses teachers are required to have pre-defined assessment tasks, including criteria, and to discuss these with students at the beginning of the unit. If amongst the criteria there are explicit statements about the level of conceptualisation which is expected (e.g. analysis, synthesis, reflection, critique), then a discussion about the meaning of those terms could give the teacher some indications about students' perceptions and assumptions.

Having identified that at least some students may have approaches to academic learning, or interpretations of the learning tasks, which will work against their chances of high level achievement, (this might include approaches which in previous research have been labeled 'passive' and/or 'superficial', as well as views of knowledge as given, of teaching as transferring and learning as accumulating, and/or of themselves as 'not very good at') the next steps are potentially much more difficult. Clearly simply telling students that their ideas and expectations are inappropriate will not be enough to convince them to change their approach to academic learning. Some of the ways (and combinations of ways) that teachers may need to consider are:

- teaching in ways which challenge the student's prior expectations and assumptions about the learning tasks and themselves in the learning tasks - OR
- changing the kinds of learning tasks, assessment tasks, and/or assessment criteria, so radically that the students are unlikely to call-on their prior assumptions, OR
- if students are responding consciously, or unconsciously, to the context of the learning then you may need to also consider changing the context.

But we need to be aware that in making such radical changes, some students who have been 'successful students', because they have learned to read the signals and comply with academic structures, do not like to have 'the rules' changed.

The processes of challenging students' interpretations and approaches also requires time and support:

- such changes need time for the students to learn to adapt to the different expectations, this means that you may need to consider working collaboratively with others over periods longer than a semester
- if you create environments where students are pushed to question their pre-conceptions, about learning and themselves as learners, you will probably need to provide both challenge and support - that is challenge in the explicitly high expectations, plus support for the students who are working to re-frame their own expectations.

These needs are particularly significant when we consider the significance of the individual's emotional reactions and prior assumptions within the learning process.

However, I am not sure if any of these approaches are likely to make much difference to students who have made a decision to function on a minimalist level, that is those students who have decided that 49% - 50% is 'good enough'. Their purpose in study is generally very pragmatic and has little to do with 'learning' as it is defined in the constructivist theory of 'making meaning'. Perhaps with those students, teachers need to examine the students' assumptions about education from a different perspective and question if they are working from expectations that our courses have little to offer them, or if they see the qualification as more important than their own learning. These are questions which necessarily raise a very different set of responses.

But changes in teaching are not all that is implied in the 'model of learning' which I have constructed here. What knowledge is, and the ways that it is interpreted and communicated are also areas which require radical shifts away from traditional views. It seems from this perspective that if teachers want their students to 'think' about the information which they are learning, then they also must allow them to interpret it according to their own understandings. In some disciplines, the idea of presenting or searching for multiple explanations and interpretations of the areas under discussion is taken for granted, whilst in other disciplines such an approach

would be rarely considered. Depending on which of these approaches are dominant, such assumptions about knowledge have an impact on how students interpret their relationship with it. For example, in a context where students are expected to learn 'one way', then it is quite possible for them to interpret their task as memorisation, whereas, in a context where multiple interpretations are encouraged, students will find it more appropriate to construct their own meanings and more difficult to memorise.

The ways in which the students are assessed also conveys messages to the students about the way(s) in which knowledge and learning are understood. Exam questions, or any kind of tasks which require students to simply repeat information that they have met elsewhere, convey to students messages that that is the kind of learning which is required. That expectation and view of knowledge is part of the context of their learning, which they interpret and act upon.

However, it seems to me that at least the first three of the theoretical perspectives which I have drawn on here support the idea that in a teaching context we should be encouraging our students to work within an understanding of knowledge and learning which opens up spaces for the complexity of multiple meanings, multiple interpretations and differences. Such approaches to teaching, learning and assessment place high demands on students and teachers, but also, in the process, support high levels of conceptualisation and the acknowledgment of students as competent learners.

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Supporting Academic Writing Explicitly (SAWE) project: Modelling explored

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Abstract

The project, Supporting Academic writing Explicitly (SAWE), aimed to give students a more explicit understanding of academic discourse by having English Education lecturers and academic skills staff work together during lectures to demonstrate to students the actual steps they, as experienced writers, took to complete a significant example of academic writing. A series of ten minute inputs saw the lecturers and advisers demonstrate and discuss various aspects of essay writing in front of the students. The project culminated with students being shown the final drafts of essays written by their lecturers and advisers (after students' essays were submitted). The team saw the modelling as inducting students into the discourse of an academic community, and enacting the integration of discipline specific knowledge with more generic academic skills that writers on tertiary literacy have seen as desirable (Delpit, 1992; Swales, 1990). The results showed much about the value of modelling as a teaching approach, the needs of tertiary writers and the power of collaboration between members of the academic community to meet those needs.

INTRODUCTION

Our project, Supporting Academic Writing Explicitly, or SAWE, took place with the assistance of a small Australian Catholic University teaching development grant. The project's conception was a result of often-repeated conversations about students' academic writing in meetings and staff rooms at the university. Among lecturing and academic skills staff there is anxiety about students' academic writing, that it often seems to be based on too little reading, is not clearly argued and is poorly documented. Moreover, lecturers doubt whether students really understand what is wanted. The academic skills advisers confirm that students whom they see often seemed not to know, for example, what reading might be expected for a major essay or what kind of writing might be required. For the project team, English Education lecturers and academic skills advisers on three Australian Catholic University campuses, the need to respond constructively to the situation seems more urgent since the students we are concerned about will become teachers, soon to be responsible for teaching writing in primary and secondary classrooms.

Our perception of students as having difficulty with their writing tasks is one which has received considerable scholarly and practical attention both internationally (Gibbs, 1994; Swales, 1990) and in Australian universities (Chanock, 1994; Golebiowski, 1997; Golebiowski & Borland, 1997) during the last decade or so. Researchers have argued that many students are unclear about academic writing requirements. For example, students are unsure about what is expected when they are asked to "analyse" (Catterall & Martins, 1997, p. 129). Sometimes they do not have a deep understanding of the purposes and practices of citation (Buckingham & Neville, 1997). Significant in the thinking about tertiary writing, and important in the SAWE project, is the idea that, at university, students need to see themselves as learning to think and write in the often unfamiliar language of the university (Bartholomae, 1985). It is sometimes claimed that tertiary educators are "culture blind to their own discourses" (Ballard, 1994, p. 23). Opportunities for students to learn about essay writing are often limited to interpreting comments on their essays or in hearing general feedback in classes. Students may not understand the very general 'improve expression' or the cryptic 'awk' or 'more analysis' (Ballard & Clanchy, 1988). Researchers believe that the discourses of disciplines need to be made explicit to students.

For the designers of this project, an important position within the debate about academic writing is the idea that generic reading and writing skills should be integrated with discipline-specific knowledge. International writers like Delpit (1992), Swales (1990) and Gee (1996), and Cartwright and Noone (1999) in the Australian context, argue that students need to have the skills and knowledge to operate successfully in various academic contexts. Our project was based upon this view: that students will be assisted in their learning when we make explicit to

them the skills, conventions and expectations of academic reading and writing in the particular discipline in which they are operating. In the SAWE project we aimed to demonstrate the actual steps experienced writers take to complete a significant example of academic writing, in this case the major essay for the English Education unit that students were undertaking. We thought our team of discipline-focussed lecturers and academic skills advisers could enact the interaction between the teaching of discipline-specific knowledge and more generic academic skills that writers on tertiary literacy have seen as desirable. Swales (1990) argues that students need knowledge of the discourse community within which specific academic genres are situated. We wanted to write the essay with the students as a way of inducting them into the discourse community of which we were "full members" (Swales, 1990, p. 220) and the students relative apprentices.

THE THEORY AND THE PLANS

Cope and Kalantzis (1993) argue that explicit modelling of the target genre is essential for apprentice writers: "for those outside the discourses of power and access, acquiring these discourses requires explicit explanation: the ways in which the 'hows' of text structure produce the 'whys' of social effect" (p. 8). The process through which significant genres can be made explicit for students has been described in the Martin model of a pedagogical "wheel" (Cope & Kalantzis, p. 10) and in Derewianka's (1990, p. 6) "curriculum cycle." Successful modelling, according to these writers, involves exploring with students the social purposes as well as the text features of target genres. We wanted all of our students, not simply those who were struggling, to have further explicit knowledge about the rather demanding forms of academic discourse. Although our target group was mainly second year students, many appeared to be apprentice writers in relation to the kind of paper we wanted them to write: a research-based position paper which asked for exploration of the literature in the field of the topic, and the development of a view about implications for the primary classroom; in other words, a fairly typical paper within the field of educational theory and practice. The unit was the students' first in the English Education field. (See Appendix for actual essay topics.)

We were particularly concerned about the reading aspect of preparing an essay as we saw students as not engaging effectively with the literature in the field. It seemed that they did not read widely enough or at sufficient depth to understand the way academic debates are conducted. It should be noted that in the project we were modelling both a specific genre and the process of writing an essay. We wanted to reveal to students something of the thinking processes that we went through in producing a piece of academic writing. We hoped to take them to a deeper understanding of how knowledge is constructed within the discourse of education. Therefore, we wanted to begin our modelling early with a focus on the reading which is an integral part of academic writing. We planned a series of two inputs of ten minutes each to be given during lecture time by the lecturers and advisers. During this time it was planned that, amongst other things, we would do a thorough analysis of the topic, prepare for writing by critical reading and economical note taking, and generate an appropriate introduction.

We planned that over the course of the semester we would write the essay with, or more precisely, just ahead of the students. We would enact crucial aspects of the process in front of them. On each campus, students would see a lecturer and an academic skills adviser work on the essay independently of each other. We saw our process as providing students with an insight into the ways in which writers in the field debate issues of significance. While we did not plan that the lecturer and adviser would necessarily present different points of view, we did expect that the students would see the ways in which the disciplines, including education, depend on the canvassing of opposing viewpoints as ways of coming to 'final' positions. As in a previous collaboration at RMIT (Elliot, 1997) which had been a stimulus for our project, we saw the collaboration about academic reading and writing between lecturing and academic skills staff within and across campuses as being crucial for the program. The planning of the SAWE sessions meant the team was much engaged in discussing various perspectives on the topics. The collaboration of lecturers and advisers during lecture time meant that the project brought the academic support staff into the centre of the formal lecture program.

Lecture time was deemed to be the most practical time to undertake our program as there we had access to all the students at once and this made it possible to have the academic skills advisers and lecturers working together. The lecture time was also chosen for the program because recent cost cutting had decreased tutorial time from two hours to one hour per week and the students had been given a second lecture hour instead. We hoped that a program which was so directly connected with students' assessment requirements would be a way of making the potentially-distancing lecture context more engaging.

We planned to ask students to evaluate the program, both each week as we did it, and at the end of the project. The students' essays and the lecturers' and advisers' perceptions would also be sources of information about the success of our program.

THE PROGRAM SESSIONS

The weekly sessions on each campus took various forms, depending on the individuals doing the demonstrating and what they were showing. As far as our ten-minute time limit permitted, we attempted to think and write about our essays in front of the students rather than talk about how it might be done. For example, we 'brainstormed' about the topic as the students watched. Presenters talked about the nature and amount of reading they had been doing for their essay and showed samples of their notes. On one campus note-taking methods were demonstrated using an overhead projection of the computer file on the topic. Others showed examples of hand written notes. Initial attempts at plans and opening paragraphs were read out or shown as overheads. On the two larger campuses, where student groups each comprised 100 or more, the sessions took the form of two mini-lectures with limited time spent on questions or discussion. On the third smaller campus, where there were about 60 students in the group, the sessions more often became discussions between the class and the two presenters, giving students a very immediate experience of academic debate. We spread out our presentations over the time during which we expected the students to be preparing their essays. After they had submitted their papers, we asked students to assess our final drafts according to the required criteria.

STUDENTS' ON-GOING RESPONSES AND EVALUATIONS

The on-going evaluations were mixed. Many students said it was useful to see the varied ways in which the demonstrators undertook the tasks, or that it was worthwhile to know what their teachers were reading. Others expressed frustration that the topic and requirements seemed very complex as they witnessed lecturers and advisers discussing the details of their thinking as it developed. One such student's advice on an evaluation sheet was:

Explain the question more clearly, take it step by step and make it relevant to students. Don't just show what you've done as it is confusing as you write on a different level.

It became clear that many students were not doing the reading and writing along with us but were listening and taking notes for when they did begin. Six weeks into the nine-week program, we asked students whether they had started reading and preparing for the essay. Despite the essay being due in a little more than two weeks' time, half of the students on one campus had not begun reading. It seemed they were waiting for the Easter break that was to come in order to begin. However, on the same campus a week or so later, some students had a draft to share and the peer-conferencing sessions seemed fruitful, with students discussing complex questions about topic, evidence and structure.

Throughout the program, the level of concern and anxiety that students expressed about the essay was considerable, and seemed much greater than in previous years where similar assessment tasks had been set. Many students commented that it seemed an exceptionally demanding task, some expressing anger that all the attention given to the essay had made it seem very difficult.

The time would have been better spent helping students with their essays rather than scaring them with the amount you both put into preparing for your essay.

Some students seemed to have a low tolerance for discussion about the various ways the essays could be tackled. One student said that the lecturers and advisers "... went down different tracks. You showed us what you did and not how we were meant to go about ours." Another noted, "Essay conventions which I had learned were 100% contradicted through the SAWE program." These remarks suggest that some students at least were unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the contested nature of academic discourse. On one campus a student was critical of her lecturer saying she, the lecturer, had been 'too hard on' her colleague, the academic skills adviser, in their discussions about their essay approaches. It seemed that this student had not seen the learning practices embedded in collegial debate, and interpreted disagreement as a form of negative evaluation.

Further insight into some students' rather tenuous relationship with the academic arguments we were modelling was the fact that they tended to want to know how the lecturer rather than the adviser responded to the topic. As these students saw it, the lecturers would be doing the assessing so it was important to know what the lecturer wanted. It seemed that some students were still struggling with the demands of the academic discourse. Despite, or perhaps because of their fears, the vast majority of students submitted their essay on time. They read with interest the final drafts of their lecturers and advisers, many making very incisive comments about each text.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

It is not possible to make a definitive comment about the standard of the essays that students wrote in comparison to what they might have done without the support of the program since we had not taught these particular students before. However, the essays seemed strong in comparison to similar essays written by roughly similar groups. On one campus, fewer than 10 of the 120 student papers were unsatisfactory. It seemed that even though many had not begun to read and write as early as the project team had hoped, the program had provided some context for their writing. Interestingly, while there was the occasional example (two or three brief instances in 120 essays) of students being overly influenced by the lecturers' or advisers' ideas or drafts, on the whole, the essays seemed the students' own work. It seemed that some students' writing had improved as a result of the extra support. We discussed during project meetings whether the main value of our modelling was not that it had involved students in a deep understanding of academic writing; rather, our presentations had increased students' anxiety about the task, and hence the amount of work they had done for their essays and this had resulted in improved work. Student evaluations and our own reflections suggest a number of things about what we achieved. We asked students for their overall evaluations of the program before they received their essay results, so students' responses were based on what they perceived themselves as learning before they received affirmation or otherwise from their lecturers.

1. On one campus a little under one third of students (21 out of 76) were positive about the program with most mentioning things that seemed in line with the aims of the program. For example:

It was helpful to have an example of two other people as models for our own essays.

And

I think it was a very valuable experience. Especially when I was writing the essay because it gave me ideas on how to go about it, things I hadn't thought of.

2. About half (36 out of 76) had a mixture of positive and negative things to say. Some said they had learned something significant from the program but there was a bit too much of it and that perhaps the effort was not quite worth the rewards. One student wrote that she became confused:

So I disregarded everything they said, started my own essay, then went back and looked at what they had done and said.

3. Seventeen of the 76 students had only negative things to say, such as:

Strategies were not clearly stated, therefore didn't use any.

And

I thought about what was said but often confused myself while trying to apply them. I ended up writing my essay based on what I already knew from 18 years of school.

The rather mixed response of many students concurred with the lecturers' and advisers' impressions of the program. The feeling among the latter group was that it was quite difficult to show the thinking involved in producing a piece of writing in front of a large group of students in a way that was comprehensible to them. For example, our attempts to show the recursive nature of writing as we reflected aloud about previous ideas, seemed to come across in a confused way to some students. We were not directly teaching strategies for essay writing but demonstrating what we did as we wrote. Yet we found ourselves, partly for reasons of time, presenting the products of the thinking we had done before the session. Note taking, for example, we saw as crucial to the process of reading effectively, yet it was hard to show it as a whole process in a brief presentation. While overheads and computer displays were useful, it did seem that many students were engaged at the level of copying our overheads. These overheads were intended to reveal tentative thinking processes and work in

progress, but a significant number of students asked whether the OHTs could be displayed for longer indicating their preference for "product" rather than "process." It seemed that the earlier sessions, where we were exploring the meaning of the topic, were easier for students to follow than later ones in which we were trying to demonstrate the complexities of our thinking after considerable reading. Some students' evaluations showed some irritability as the weeks went on and it was clear that the students could not take full advantage of our presentations mainly because, as noted earlier, about half had done little reading of their own.

I have no idea what is going on. You make no sense at all. It is difficult to find the correct texts to read. Could you please tell us who is for or against.

This student's expectations that the program would give clear direction on how to interpret the literature were certainly in collision with the project team's goals of exposing students to the discourse of academic debate.

CONCLUSIONS

In relation to the teaching of academic writing, especially with regard to the power of modelling as a teaching strategy, we believe there are implications in five areas.

1. Reading

We found that the complex nature of academic writing was not easy to model in brief presentations, especially where students were not on an equal footing with us in terms of reading. When genre theorists write of the importance of modelling, they do not see it in terms of transmission of ideas to students by having them watch while teachers do. In both Derewianka's (1990, p. 6) curriculum cycle and the Martin pedagogical wheel (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993, p. 10) the initial phase of modelling a genre is an exploration of the field by both teachers and students. In the case of our project, this exploration would have involved students reading, right from the beginning of the program, to familiarise themselves with the issues and approaches of writers in the field. As has been noted, this was not done by a significant group of students, for a variety of reasons.

2. The tertiary context

The failure of many students to start reading early in the program needs to be seen in the context of their tertiary studies overall. As students told us, at the same time as they were doing the essay for our unit, they had a number of other assignments, not to mention paid work which was for many of them a non-negotiable part of their weekly schedule. Students' highly strategic approach to the academic requirements ('just tell me what to do') was sometimes at odds with lecturers' and advisers' aims for both a deep interest in the field with growing control of appropriate academic discourse. For some of our prospective teaching students too, some academic tasks are seen as remote from their need to be able to manage as future teachers in the classroom.

3. The role of tutorials

Genre theorists who espouse modelling also describe joint construction of an example of the genre (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993, p. 10), so that the apprentice writers are able to practise writing in the genre. Having students and lecturers and advisers composing together would have been a task better suited to tutorials. In fact, as a number of students said in their evaluations, the whole program would have been better suited to tutorials, where interaction is much easier to encourage. As mentioned earlier, on the smaller campus the program was more interactive. In the larger groups, lecturers and advisers felt their roles as presenters at the front of a big audience seemed to propel them towards a more performance-oriented approach rather than one which invited questions or debate. The advisers commented that whereas in their one-to-one sessions with students they can use a model essay as the basis for discussion about ways of writing, in the lecture hall context the modelling seemed to become more rigid. SAWE suggests that the institutional pattern of limiting tutorials has potentially negative consequences for student learning (Gibbs & Jenkins, 1992).

4. Participating in the discourse of the discipline

Despite the limitations which have been discussed, the program can be said to have enhanced the sophistication of discourse discussions between students and teaching staff and among students, because these discussions often involved comparing the writing choices of the lecturers and advisers with the directions of students. Without SAWE, these conversations most likely would have been less informed about the nature of the academic field students were entering. Our project provided a rich, if singular, experience of the discourse community for many students. It was revealing, also, for lecturers and advisers, most of whom had not written an essay for the

perusal of peers and students for quite a while, to experience the pressures to get reading done and drafts complete that students constantly experience. For, as suggested earlier, it was impossible for the assessors to entirely share the experiences of the assessed; nevertheless the project did give us more insight into students' experiences.

5. Collaboration

Although the impact of the program on the 300 or so students who took part in it was not as far-reaching as hoped, the experience of collaboration between advisers and lecturers across three campuses was very successful. Not only did people in different roles work together effectively, but many different modes were used to facilitate communication when face-to-face contact was impossible. All advisers and lecturers were equal stakeholders, so that it seemed natural to write the paper collaboratively. Both the project itself and the writing of the paper gave the team members a forum for an ongoing professional conversation about literacy related issues. We will continue to explore the issues raised by the SAWE in a future project.

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APPENDIX

Topic 1. Mercy and Christ Campuses

“If writing is constructed as natural - as personal, original creativity rather than social, textual construction – students may have difficulty knowing how they can ever become better writers, and teachers may have difficulty deciding what can and should be taught about writing.” (Gilbert, P. (1990). *Authorizing disadvantage: Authorship and disadvantage in the language classroom*. In F. Christie. (Ed.). *Literacy for a changing world*. Hawthorn, Victoria: ACER

Explore the arguments of proponents of the views of writing referred to above and discuss what you see as a useful approach to the teaching of writing.

Topic 2. Aquinas Campus

When we read the word, we read the word, the world and the self (Freire, 1990; Sumara, 1996). Relate this statement to your considerations of *Someone like me* (Forrestal, 1996). How do we read the ‘word’, the ‘world’ and the ‘self’, and how do these ‘readings’ impact on the classroom and our reading books with other people (children)?

'Sorting out the scribble': Making sense of teachers' written feedback

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Abstract

This paper reports on a small study to explore what students actually do with teacher feedback on their written English. It examines how students approach the task of amending their texts in line with written suggestions and comments, and their degree of success in, as one student put it, "trying to sort out all this scribble". Data was collected by asking students to work in pairs and to record their discussions. The revisions they made indicated that the students were able to correct about two thirds of their language problems with the help of their partners and the clues provided by the teacher comments. The students used a range of strategies to understand and deal with the problems indicated. Which strategies were used related to the nature of the language problem on the one hand, and the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the students on the other. While showing how written feedback and peer dialogue can assist in text revision, the study also indicated that students need to be encouraged to reflect on the problems and uncertainties they encounter as well as the discoveries they make during the process of revision to maximise the chances of language consolidation and development.

INTRODUCTION

This paper explores what students actually do in response to teacher feedback on their written English. It examines how a group of eight students in a writing workshop approached the task of amending their texts in line with my written suggestions and comments, and their degree of success in, as one student put it, "trying to sort out all this scribble". The study thus also adds to previous research on the usefulness of such feedback and the role of peer dialogue in the improvement of writing skills. The paper is organised as follows. Firstly, I explain why I focused on student problems at the word and sentence level, and outline the conceptual framework within which I am working. I then describe how the study was conducted. The results are then examined in terms of product, process and student feedback. Using these observations I go on to discuss the effectiveness of teacher written feedback and peer revision, suggesting ways to overcome the shortcomings identified and to encourage student control over their own learning. The final section is the conclusion.

BACKGROUND

In 1998, I was conducting a writing workshop once a week with eight students who were enrolled in the second semester of a one year credit-bearing academic skills unit at the Australian National University (ANU). We had spent most of the semester concentrating on global issues relating to the planning, structure and organisation of academic essays, mainly using the students' work for the ANU courses in which they were enrolled. Towards the end of the semester I decided to focus on the sentence and word level since the students still had many problems in these areas. This was of particular concern to at least two of the graduate students, who felt that their difficulties with the mechanics of English were affecting their grades. The students also noted that it was difficult to get assistance at this level.

All but one of the students in the writing workshop were international students enrolled full time at the ANU in their first year of study in Australia. Four of these students were studying at graduate level. The eighth student was a mature-aged Australian Aboriginal student who was fluent in spoken English but had been advised to spend a year improving her academic English skills after attempting the first year of university study the previous year. A summary of the students backgrounds is given below.

Student	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Back-ground	Korean Female	Chinese Female	Japanese Male	Indonesian Male	Aboriginal Female	Japanese Male	Chinese Male	Indonesian Female
Year	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1
Level	U/grad	U/grad	Graduate	Graduate	U/grad	Graduate	U/grad	Graduate

Conceptual framework

In this study I assume that accuracy in the target language can be improved by encouraging students to consciously reflect on the form of their output and seeing how it differs from what is expected (see Swain, 1998). To be able to reflect on their problem areas, learners first need to notice them. Teacher annotations on written texts would seem to be one way to encourage students to notice problems in their written expression. However, much of the research in this area has questioned the effectiveness of written teacher feedback in improving students' writing skills (see Cohen, 1987; Leki, 1990; Spolc, 1996). One reason for this is the number of variables involved; for example, the nature of the comments and the way they are acted on by the students. There is also a lack of data on what students actually do in response to teacher feedback. This paper focuses on one type of teacher comment and analyses student discussion as a way of finding out what students understand by the written comments and how they deal with these.

Since I looked at dyads, the study also draws on research which considers how student talk and collaboration can improve the accuracy of target language production (see for example Swain, 1998). Also relevant is the literature which discusses the role of peer revision and peer tutoring in the improvement of students' written skills. I found the work of Villamil and De Guerrero (1996) particularly relevant since they also recorded pairs of students in class in the process of revising each other's writing, and analysed how the students interacted with each other and with their texts.

PROCEDURES

I made detailed comments on copies of essays the students had written for an assignment in their academic English course. These comments related to sentence level problems such as tense, prepositions, spelling, sentence structure, vocabulary and so on. The length of the essays was 500 words for undergraduate students and 750 words for graduates. I did not grade the essays, the originals of which were being marked by the course lecturer. The comments I made were of three main types:

- a) an indication of the location and nature of errors and infelicities by the use of codes
- b) recasting or reformulation of certain problem words and phrases
- c) one or two detailed comments on a particular problem.

The key I gave the students to help them understand my comments is given in the Appendix (A).

Students were then asked to discuss their essays in pairs and record their dialogues. The membership of the four pairs was as follows: Pair 1, Students A and B; Pair 2, C and D; Pair 3, E and F; Pair 4, G and H. I was present in the room during the taping and checked on each pair periodically to monitor their progress. Students were also free to call on me if they had a particular query.

In this paper I focus on the students' discussion of the coded comments (type a), above. While it was possible for them to just read b) and c) type comments, students had to verbalise their ideas about how to correct or improve the problems identified by the codes since no 'correct' alternative was provided. This therefore gives more information about whether they understood the problem, and if so, how they dealt with it. The students' views on the activity were collected by means of a short questionnaire distributed at the end of the semester.

DATA

The Appendix (B) provides extracts from student texts and indicates how they were annotated. The kind of dialogue that went on between the students can be seen in the extracts from the transcripts, which are taken from almost two hours of dialogue, each dyad spending about 30 minutes discussing their essays. All references to transcripts in this paper refer to the extracts in the Appendix. These extracts give some idea of the students' level of involvement in the task, the range of strategies they used to understand both the meaning of the comments and the meaning of the text, and the strategies used in relation to nature of the language problem on the one hand and student knowledge/skills on the other.

RESULTS

The results will be discussed in three sections: firstly, in terms of the product, i.e. the number of comments acted on and the final form of the revisions; secondly, in terms of process, how the students interacted with the text and with each other; and thirdly, by considering how the students evaluated the activity in the questionnaire.

Product

Table 1 shows that over 90% of comments were acted on in some way. About 65% of the revisions seemed to be acceptable or appropriate (these were revisions made by the students without my intervention). Some 13% of revisions were not appropriate, and a similar proportion were either discussed and then abandoned or 'uncertain', which means I was unable to discern a clear decision on the part of the students, in some cases because they each decided on a different solution (as in transcript 2c). As a measure of the effectiveness of my written codes to guide appropriate revision, these results are rather inconclusive due to the small numbers involved and the difficulty of categorising some of the revisions because students were not required to write down their final decisions. However, the figures do suggest that the students were able to correct a considerable number, about two thirds, of their own language problems.

Table 1.

Student	Appropriate		Inappropriate		Ignored		Misunderstood		Abandoned		Uncertain	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
A	10	71	2	14	0	0	1	7	0	0	1	7
B	5	55	1	11	0	0	1	11	1	11	1	11
C	12	63	3	16	1	5	1	5	2	10	0	0
D	17	63	3	11	2	7	0	0	1	4	4	15
E	9	69	1	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	23
F	0	0	2	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
G	9	75	0	0	1	8	0	0	0	0	2	16
H	33	62	8	15	7	13	1	2	1	2	3	6
Totals: 149	95	64	20	13	11	7	4	3	5	3	14	9

Process

I first looked at the strategies the students used to see how they related to the task at hand and whether they varied between students, and then at the patterns of peer interaction and the relationship between these and the students' personal characteristics.

Strategies

Using a framework based on the work of researchers like O'Malley and Chamot (1990), I identified nine strategies from the students' dialogues. Some were used by all. For example, all the students worked cooperatively and asked each other questions to clarify points, which was to be expected given the nature of the task they were set. All the students read at least some sections of the text aloud, the majority concentrating on sections where problems had been identified, so that they could consider the context. All students also repeated amendments or corrections, sometimes more than once. Most also consulted an external resource, the most common being the key, to obtain clues as to the nature of the problem and how to solve it (see for example transcript 2a). In addition, with the notable exception of Student E, all students made great use of linguistic rules or terminology to think through or explain their decisions. E showed little awareness of metalinguistic terms and relied mostly on inference from context, often focusing on meaning rather than form.

The strategies noted above were quite effective in dealing with certain types of problems. For example, comments related to vocabulary and meaning, unless they were ignored or abandoned, were dealt with by making suggestions for alternative wording appropriate to the context and/or by questioning the peer (e.g. transcript 1a). Codes regarding tense, verb form and articles were usually dealt with by considering context and, for all but student E, explicitly mentioning linguistic rules or terminology. However, problems with spelling and prepositions could not usually be 'worked out' from context and meaning (though Student D appears to be trying to do this in transcript 2c). Acceptable forms were either known or not known, so students were not solving a problem but recalling what had been learnt by rote (compare transcript 2b with 3a). This meant that students had difficulty judging the value of one alternative over another and were less successful in dealing with these types

of comment than others such as word form or vocabulary (over 30% of revisions to prepositions were inappropriate).

Only Pair 2 showed evidence of 'metacognitive' strategies, which involve monitoring and evaluation of the overall task (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). C was the only student to evaluate his and his peer's performance and encourage reflection on their general problems. While this seems an extremely valuable strategy (see Discussion Section below), which reflects C's interest in improving his English accuracy, it did not increase the pair's level of 'success' as measured in Table 1. This was largely because a large proportion of their problems (over 30% for C) related to prepositions.

Pattern of Peer Interactions

I also looked at the patterns of peer interactions. Information from the transcripts about who did most of the reading aloud and who suggested and/or decided on the final form of the revisions indicated that students B, C and E tended to dominate in Pairs 1, 2, and 3 respectively, while the pattern of interaction was far more balanced in Pair 4. The tendency of one student to control the interaction obviously affected both the process and the product of the revision exercise. This is not to say of course that the less dominant member of a pair did not take the lead in some decisions and discussions. There are plenty of examples where they did (e.g. transcript 3a), just as there are examples of 'peer scaffolding' where neither student alone solves the problem (see 3b).

Other factors which affected the patterns of peer interaction included the students' level of interest, attention to detail, knowledge and skill in English, self confidence and assertiveness, and fatigue. In Pair 1, for example, B is more confident and assertive than A. Student B tended to disregard the codes, relying on context and inference to suggest revisions. A was more careful in her reading of the comments, but her quietness and lack of assertiveness meant that time was sometimes wasted exploring other possibilities. Student B also seemed more interested in improving A's essay than her own. For example, she spent a considerable time on the 'vocab' comment in transcript 1a (which should probably have been coded as 'meaning') while dismissing a 'meaning' comment in her own essay with a laugh, saying "no meaning" and curtailing further discussion. As a result the pair spent more time revising A's essay than B's.

In Pair 3, Student E is a self-assured, outgoing, Aboriginal Australian, while F is a quietly spoken Japanese student who tends to think carefully before speaking. E dominated the peer interaction because of her fluency and confidence in spoken English while F tried to communicate his explicit knowledge of language structure (see for example transcript 4a). Communication was not easy; the codes presupposed a metalinguistic knowledge and E's lack of this made it difficult for her to understand solutions offered by her partner and to help F solve his problems (both of his coded comments related to prepositions, where his deductive strategies could not assist).

Pair 4 were both quiet students who showed the most balanced pattern of interaction (see transcript 5a). Their dialogue involved a great deal of questioning of each other for clarification, and repetition of the answers agreed on. They were the only students who did not use me as a resource during their revision. Both were equally involved in reading aloud and suggesting revisions to H's essay, though G's attention flagged towards the end. This is hardly surprising given the number of codes to deal with (I was horrified to count 53 when I came to analyse the transcripts).

Students' written feedback

Six of the students provided written responses to a short questionnaire I distributed at the end of the semester. All six agreed that this detailed sentence level of revision was useful. Some reasons given were:

- "it makes me realise some mistakes I made and points out something I've always regarded as 'right'"
- "through revision I can understand my weaknesses and I can correct them"
- "the tutor [in my major subject] attaches great importance to [grammar] as well as content in marking an essay".

Asked to specify two things they had learnt from the activity, four specified weaknesses it had highlighted, two said they had realised the importance of proof reading, and one said he had learnt "much about grammar, especially prepositions and tense". When asked about the codes, all said they found them useful and easy to understand with the help of the key. One student particularly liked the code which indicated that the meaning was not clear: "it is very useful for me because it enables me to realise the importance of paraphrasing those sentences". As to the advantages and disadvantages of revising in class, three said it was good to be able to seek

the help of others. Out of class, however, there were advantages also. Those mentioned were: being able to concentrate on one's own essay, consult a dictionary, and spend as much time as one wanted on the task. One student thought it better to revise at home.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that students were able to use my written comments to improve the accuracy and clarity of their texts.¹ The codes were a useful way to locate and identify specific problems, putting the onus on the student to make the necessary revisions. The communication difficulties encountered in Pair 3, however, made it clear that some of the codes would be of limited use to students who lacked the necessary linguistic metalanguage. While just marking the location of problems might have been enough to ensure improvement in some cases, there is evidence that students were often guided by the codes and actively used the definitions in the key to narrow the scope of their discussion. This emphasises the need for a teacher to explain what his/her comments mean. One problem that became apparent related to the number of comments. There were obviously far too many on H's essay, as shown by G's loss of concentration and the number of codes that were not noticed (see 'ignored' column, Table 1). In future I would limit the number of comments, either by annotating only part of the essay or by concentrating on nominated problem areas (ideally identified by the student, as discussed later)

The study also demonstrates the strengths of peer revision. Such peer work exploits the communicative and social nature of written communication. In responding to queries from one reader (the teacher) the writer has to use spoken language to clarify the meaning of the text to another (a fellow student). The writer can also enlist the aid of his/her peer to understand the teacher comment and decide how to improve the accuracy and clarity of the text. Dialogue with a peer can also pinpoint areas students are uncertain of and need to work on in the future.

The findings also point out the problems of peer revision. Some students felt that they did not have enough time or sufficient opportunity to either consider the issues they were most concerned with or to state their own opinions. It was also clear that students were often unsure about the correctness or suitability of many of their revisions. This was particularly true of, though not restricted to, revisions that involved knowledge of conventional phrases or expressions (see for example transcript 2c). The students felt (rightly or wrongly) that the levels of knowledge and skill within the dyad were not enough and that recourse to an external authoritative resource, such as a dictionary or teacher, was needed. This indicates that while very useful, peer revision needs to be followed up in some way. In the case of sentence level revision, students could rewrite their texts and resubmit them for comment. An alternative, which would be less time consuming and encourage students to take control of their own learning, would be to require them to mark areas they would like to check on later, either alone or through discussion, at home or in a future class.

Finally, the identification of the various strategies used by the students points to some gaps in student repertoires which it might be useful to address. For example, students could be encouraged to summarise and reflect on their overall performance. This need not focus only on their problems and weaknesses. It would also be valuable to ask them to consider their strengths and areas in which they think they are improving.

CONCLUSION

This study gives a glimpse into how learners deal with written teacher comments and how they use what they know about language to revise their texts. It demonstrates some of the strengths and weaknesses of peer revision, and suggests how to capitalise on the discoveries that students make during the process by encouraging them to take control of their own learning and thus become more autonomous. The findings also confirm my belief that providing students with clear detailed feedback on their writing at the sentence level can assist them to improve the accuracy and clarity of their written English. At one level it helps them become aware of the need for careful proofreading. At a deeper level it draws attention to gaps and misconceptions in their knowledge of vocabulary and the grammar of their interlanguage, and may assist language learning in the long term.

ENDNOTE

¹ However, as one anonymous reviewer pointed out, one cannot assume that what students do in pairs in class necessarily reflects what they would do in other situations.

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APPENDIX

A: THE KEY I GAVE TO THE STUDENTS

<u>General</u>	
_____	I underline the section queried (I may suggest alternative wording)
① , ② etc.	Detailed comment/s given at end of paper
<u>Grammar and expression</u>	
vf	verb form inappropriate
tense	another tense would be more appropriate
wf	word form (e.g. you may have used an adjective where you need a noun, or a noun where you need a verb)
art	article (e.g. <i>the</i> or <i>a</i> omitted, or the wrong article used)
sp	spelling
prep	preposition (preposition omitted or another may be more appropriate)
vocab	vocabulary - another word would be better (I may suggest alternatives)
?meaning	meaning not clear
<u>Editing</u>	
[]	I suggest you omit this word/phrase

B: EXAMPLES FROM STUDENT TEXTS AND TRANSCRIPTS

Text 1a) A (the writer) = Korean undergraduate, B = Chinese undergraduate **CODE**

At the age of 14, as John mentioned, he didn't change that much. He had the notion that the upper class could have. for example, he was for conservative. *tense*
vocab

Transcript 1a)
 B. [reading through the text] For example he was [pause] He was for conservative?
 A. You know what I mean? [laughs] You know?
 B. What do you mean he was ..
 A. The party conservative.
 B. Oh! maybe it's not for [long pause] He picked, he, or maybe can 'he support Conservative party like .. '
 A. [inaudible] conservative party.
 B. Oh, because he was conservative. If you want to say like conservative as a nouns or a adjective
 A. Oh, I want to say the party ..
 B. So you should say that he support the Conservative party. Yeh. He was for conservative, yeh. [long pause] or sometimes he held conservative ideas. Like he have the same ideas with the conservative. He have the same [pause] yeh

Text 1b)
 And he were stable in his identity and he knew exactly what he was going to do, *vf*
 so I believe he reached the stage of 'Identity Achievement' *tense*

Transcript 1b)
 B. ... and he was [loudly]
 A. [laughs - acknowledges mistake]
 B and A [chorus] had reached [A and B had been puzzled by a 'tense' code earlier ('didn't change' in 1a) and had called on me to help. I had suggested that 'hadn't changed' would be a better form]

Text 2a) C = Japanese graduate student. D (the writer) = Indonesian graduate student

When Bruce and Andrew was childhood, they went to private school in London, and they were intelligence.

vf, wf
wf

Transcript 2a)

- D. When Bruce and Andrew was child
- C. Vf vf, what is this? Verb form inappropriate OK, ah yes this one, maybe, plural, were
- D. Were, sorry oh my god, yes, Bruce and Andrew, sorry
- C. Yeh yeh, yeh.
- D. .. were. Childhood is wrong?
- C. Mm [reads on]
- D. What is this? adjective [looking at key]
- C. Ah yes, child, I think um, this this is a noun so it should, you should use adjective like child ... so you should not put this word 'when Bruce and Andrew were child'
- D Mm [agrees]
- C. Ah no, children, children sorry [laughs] children, plural
- D. no? [queries this]
- C. Children, because child is singular, children is plural, so there are two person
- D. Mm [does not sound too convinced]
- C. And this one, intelligent.
- D. Yes t, that's right [laughs] I forgot to put t
- C. Ah yeh. OK

Text 2b)

Trying to put them by 28 years old to the four identity status, I will put Bruce into the status [I inserted *of*] Moratorium and Andrew into the status of Achievement.

Prep

Transcript 2b)

- C. [reads text] Yes, yes
- D to? what?
- C. [reads through again] ... from
- D. for, for
- C. for, OK ...
- D. in, maybe in.
- C. in
- D. in
- C. Mm [reads]
- D. Oh no in, on
- C. On?
- D. On [laughs] oh what do you think? on I suppose
- C. [reads through the sentence again]
- D. on
- C. Ah yeh, on, based on.
- D. It should be in here
- c. Yeh yeh yeh, based on
- D. Or at
- C. At, no no, I think on is better because you mean based on the four identity status.
- D Yes.
- C. [continues reading, failing to notice parallel structures] I think it is ..

Text 2c)

... the values, beliefs and goals of individuals and the environment have a big role to develop [I recast this as *in the development of*] personality. ... This can be seen on Bruce and Andrew's experience.

prep

Transcript 2c)

- C. This can be seen [long pause] in
- D. Ah no in, at
- C. I think in [pause] in the, in, in
- D. In should be in one four dimension, yeh inside, in
- C. Mm
- D. so maybe at
- C. at? ah I'm not sure but, OK in, at or
- D We can ask ... this one

Text 3a) (C = the writer)

Firstly, Jackie and Suzy were in very different situations when they were seven years old. Jackie went to ^ average government school ... In contrast, Suzy went to ^ private boarding school and experienced ^ well disciplined life. ... Suzy was shy and cautious about some boys because they were horrible for her to communicate ^.

art art
art
prep

Transcript 3a)

- D. Firstly, went to [reading text]
- C. art, went to the average government school or an average government school, art
- D. should be the?
- C. the
- D. because this already [pause] definite?
- C. yes, specified one, yes I think, art, Suzy went to the ahh
- D. the private school
- C. the yes
- D. a private maybe because we don't know
- C. or a private?
- D. yes, because we don't know, maybe this is also a average government because
- C. mm
- D. we don't know, you know the name of school?
- C. ah yes, no we don't know the ah so an or a yeh. [reading] 'and experienced a well ..'
- D. where where [pause] this one? article. experienced
- C. article
- D. maybe a
- C. Oh, maybe a [very quietly reading] 'and Suzy has' ah yes 'for her to communicate with'
- D. Communicate with?
- C. yeh
- D. uhh
- C. preposition

Text 3b)

In conclusion, Jackie and Suzy experienced different way [I added s] to develop their identities because they were grown in very different circumstances.

tense/vocab

Transcript 3b)

- C. [reading text] 'In conclusion Jackie and Suzy experienced different ways', ah yes, because plural, they [pause] are grown? no no they were grown? tense
- D. they were grown, they [pause], without were maybe
- C. were? 'are' you mean?
- D. no without verb to be, they grow, you mean they grow up?
- C. ah they grow up, yes
- D. yes, without
- C. they grew
- D. grew up maybe
- C. grew up in different ah yes.

Text 4a) E (the writer) = Aboriginal undergraduate student, F = Japanese graduate student
According to Garton, many historians have written of the invasion of Australia.
Some describing the event as benevolent, while other historians describe the event as a conquest.

vf

Transcript 4a)

- E. Now 'some describing', now what should, that's a verb, what should I have said?
F. mm
E. I've spelt it wrong?
F. er some is the subject
E. OK
F. so [long pause]
E. so what should I put?
F. des describe
E. description, no describing the event
F. no some is the subject
E. yeh
F. of this sentence, so, where is the verb?
E. some of it describing should I say? Some of the history
F. there is a comparative relationship between this part and
E. yeh
F. this part
E. So what should I put?
F. so after the, after the word 'while' you use describe
E. mm
F. as a verb form so
E. some describe
F. yeh
E. oh OK [pause] describes, describe the event, yeh, OK.

Text 5a) G = Chinese undergraduate student, H (the writer) = Indonesian graduate student

For instance, he criticises people who come to the pub just listening ^ the
the music box. He does not want to go there because he is [I suggested 'is'
be replaced with 'would'] rather [to] talk ^ something more valuable such as
[talking about] literature Another example

vf prep

prep

art

Transcript 5a)

- G. [reading text] For instance
H. [reading text] he criticises people who come to the pub
G. people who come to the pub
H. just listening in [loudly]
G. just listening [pause]
H. listening to
G. Listen to, yeh.
H. to the music
G. Yeh. [reading] He does not want ...
H [reads along softly at the same time]
G. to go there because he would rather talk something
H. To, talk to
G Talk, talk about something
H. talk about something more valuable
G. talk about something more valuable such as literature. Oh, there should be
another sentence [I had not commented on this].
H. Yeh, yeh
G. Dot.
H. Should be dot [both laugh]
G. You lose dot.

Development of coherence in novice, tertiary student essays

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Abstract

The research investigates the development of coherence in written text by novice tertiary students. Coherence is an ambiguous, complex term, which is difficult to conceptualise, and has often led to confusion, in particular in relation to the distinction between the terms cohesion and coherence. The view adopted in this study is that coherence is predominantly in the mind of the reader, relies on conventional reader expectations, and such psychological notions as connectedness, consistency, relevance and theme. Two essays, each from sixty students enrolled in the University's bridging program, were collected at the beginning and end of semester, and analysed for breaks in coherence, factors that interfere with the processing of the texts or with following the flow of ideas. The occurrence of these different types of coherence breaks are discussed, and the implications of these findings are considered in relation to the teaching of academic literacy.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Coherence is an ambiguous, complex term, which is difficult to conceptualise, and has often led to conflicting opinions, in particular in relation to the distinction between the terms cohesion and coherence. One direction has been to search for coherence in the text itself, another direction has been to search for coherence in the mind of the reader (Givon, 1995). The contrasting perspectives are expressed by Hellman (1995), in terms of three differing views of coherence: cohesion is a necessary and sufficient condition for coherence; cohesion is a necessary but not sufficient condition for coherence; and cohesion is neither necessary nor a sufficient condition for coherence. These differing views have caused much discussion amongst text linguists and cognitive psychologists.

According to Reinhart (1980), in order for a text to be coherent it must satisfy all of the following three conditions: a formal connectedness, semantic consistency and pragmatic relevance. In Reinhart's terms, connectedness means that the clauses of a text should be formally connected, in that each adjacent pair is either referentially linked or linked by a semantic connector. Consistency means that each sentence has to be logically consistent with the previous sentence, and relevance means that each sentence of the discourse must be relevant to an underlying discourse topic or theme, and to the context of the utterance. Reinhart claims that all three conditions, including the occurrence of explicit cohesive markers, are necessary conditions for coherence. That surface cohesion markers are not sufficient for a text to be coherent is demonstrated by the following example (Text 1):

- 1) *John ate a banana. The banana that was on the plate was brown. Brown is a good colour for hair. The hair of the dog is a drink to counteract a hangover.*
(taken from Enkvist, 1990).

According to Enkvist this text is pseudo-coherent, i.e. it is held together locally in terms of traditional discourse devices, but its elements do not produce a sensible whole; in other words, it has no governing topic (Enkvist, 1978, Enkvist, 1990). In contrast, it is possible to have a text which is coherent but does not depend on any specific surface markers. These utterances are connected by way of inference.

- 2) *At dinner last night, John burnt his mouth. The soup was far too hot.*
(taken from Sanford and Garrod, 1994).

The first example (Text 1) has explicit cohesion but not coherence, whereas the second example (Text 2) has coherence but lacks overt cohesive links. These examples show that textual cohesion alone fails to reflect an underlying coherence, in contrast to the 'pragmatically coherent text', which indicates the importance of

semantic or pragmatic factors in defining coherence. In considering coherence of a text it is necessary to consider the reader's perspective, so that coherence is a property of the mental representation or interpretation of a text, rather than a property of text (Sanford & Garrod, 1994; Sanford & Moxey, 1995). Coherence is the interrelatedness of a text's underlying semantic content, rather than the sequential surface organisation of a text (Hellman, 1995). Despite Reinhart's text linguistic orientation, her notions of connectedness, consistency and relevance are still very valid, however, rather than being reflected in the surface text, they exist in the mind of the reader. Coherence in the text itself is meaningless, the surface structure of a text can only facilitate an interpretation. This is the predominant view, which is adopted in this study.

In further attempting to understand what coherence is, the characteristics of the human processor need to be taken into consideration too. A characteristic of the human cognitive system is towards meaningfulness and coherence. The human processor expects continuity, and for any connections that are lacking, we attempt to fill in (Hellman, 1995). According to Hellman (1995), an active quest for coherence starts only if and when coherence breaks down. The focus of the present study is on these breaks in coherence.

In relation to coherence, the socio-cultural expectations of the reader need to also be taken into account. According to Brown and Yule (1983), our interpretation of discourse is based to a large extent on analogy, i.e. what we have experienced in the past. This is heavily reliant on conventional socio-cultural knowledge. These discursal expectations operate at different levels in a text: local and global levels. According to Swales (1990), when the reader recognises the match of the organisation of text with a familiar genre, this boosts coherence. Genres or text types are characterised by their distinctive communicative function and organisation of information. Many kinds of texts have conventional patterns and hence conventional strategies in them, and optimal coherence results from conforming to these optimal strategies.

In summary, the view espoused in this research is that coherence is predominantly in the mind of the reader, and relies on conventional reader expectations and psychological notions of connectedness, consistency, relevance and theme which operate at local and global text levels. The student essays were analysed for breaks in these coherence categories. In this research, interferences, which affect the smooth, continuous processing of a text by an attentive reader are termed "breaks" in coherence, as adopted by Wikborg (1985). However, a more appropriate description is probably interference or interruption, as it is often not such a discrete, discontinuous or abrupt effect as inferred from the word "break". These different types of "breaks" all interfere, to a varying degree, with the continuous, smooth processing of a text by an attentive reader.

METHOD

Two essays, Essay 1 and Essay 2, were each collected from sixty students enrolled in the University's two semester bridging program. Essay 1 was collected in week 4, and Essay 2 was collected in week 10 of semester 1, a 12 week introductory course in academic literacy. The essay questions for Essay 1 and Essay 2 are enclosed in the Appendix. The student texts were analysed by the researcher for breaks in coherence, and then categorised into one of the coherence break categories discussed below. These categories are operating at various text levels, local and global. The text level that the coherence breaks are operating at is recorded as follows: (a) sentence level, (b) above sentence level, but below paragraph level, (c) paragraph level, and (d) above the paragraph level. These breaks in coherence are discussed in greater detail below, drawing on examples from the students' texts.

Breaks in Coherence Categories

A. Conventional expectations of the academic reader

Anglo-Australian academic essays have certain general, conventional characteristics. For example, it is assumed that the introduction of an academic essay should orientate the reader to the subject to be discussed (Ferguson, 1997). The body then should develop the ideas or the argument presented in the introduction and the conclusion resummarises, but does not introduce any points not already made. If these conventions are not adhered to and expectations of the academic reader are contravened, then a coherent representation of the text by the reader is not facilitated. The student essays were assessed as to whether the introduction and conclusion contravened academic essay conventions, in accordance with the following questions: Does the introduction tell the reader what the essay is going to discuss? Does the conclusion summarise what has been discussed in the essay? In addition to these conventions, the genre-experienced Anglo-Australian academic reader has a distinct preference for a linear and deductive structure, an emphasis on relevance, and avoidance of digression and repetition

(Crosling, 1993; Kaplan, 1987; Nightingale, 1988). These contraventions in reader expectations are to some extent reflected in the other coherence break categories discussed below.

B. Connectedness-related breaks

Connectedness or interrelatedness of underlying semantic content forms the basis of coherence. However, for the purpose of classification of breaks in coherence for this study, connectedness breaks were identified as being due to ideas in a text not being connected, or which are interrupted and primarily operate at a local text level. The reader has to infer the intended meaning. Breaks in this category have been broken down into two types:

Type 1 - A reference item, such as an article or a pronoun lacks a referent in the text or the referent is uncertain. The tie between two cohesive items is difficult to follow. For example, the reference item 'it', gives information to the reader that a non-human entity is being referred to, but the reader has to be able to infer what meaning exactly is being referred to. Reference words such as 'it', or 'this' can lack an easily identifiable referent in the text, e.g.:

- 3) *Universities are the institutions which offer tertiary education, as well as other institutions it has also adopted a number of international, federal and state laws that relate to discrimination and equal opportunity, which protect the right of those students with disadvantages and disabilities.*

Type 2 - This group refers to breaks in coherence due to wrong or imprecise lexico-semantic usage, which again interrupts the processing of information by the reader. It can also make it difficult to infer the meaning, and the reader has to guess at the intended meaning, e.g.:

- 4) *Gender is another important factor that can **disable** a person from achieving goals.*

The student has mistakenly written the word 'disable' instead of 'disadvantage', which interrupts the processing of the text by the reader to some degree.

C. Consistency-related breaks

Consistency means that ideas expressed in a text have to be logically consistent with ideas expressed previously. Problems in this category arise from an illogical and inconsistent way of expressing ideas in a text. Often one or more steps in the argument are missing. This category operates at local and global text levels.

Type 1 - This type of break is an inconsistency in the logical flow, or argument development, expressed in a text. An example of this category is:

- 5) *Furthermore, learning to me involves interacting, listening to other people's ideas and views as well as being able to formulate my own opinion through a series of discussions and my own personal ideas. Similarly other students will have a different opinion of what learning involves to them.*

Type 2 - The content is in the wrong order within the paragraph and above the paragraph levels, and this interferes with the smooth processing of the text by the reader. In the example below (Text 6), the writer is discussing strategies for listening to lectures, and discusses strategies for the end of the lecture prior to signposting signals, which occur either at the beginning or middle of a lecture, so the more natural, logical order is contravened:

- 6) *According to the authors another important strategy is to pay attention to the way a lecture finishes, very often in the form of a summary or a conclusion. An active listener takes note of verbal signposts, like 'The next important issue ...', It is significant to note that ...'*

D. Relevance-related breaks

According to Reinhart, relevance means that each sentence of the discourse must be relevant to an underlying discourse topic or theme and to the surrounding context. To be relevant at the text level and hence answer the essay question in an appropriate, relevant way is of critical importance. In addition to this text level analysis, the essays were also analysed for relevance at paragraph and sentence levels. This means that each part of the

discourse must be relevant to its surrounding context. The purpose or function of sections of student texts are often not clear, and they appear to have no relevance to the overall topic or to the surrounding discourse. Also included in this category is unnecessary detail, repetition and when the content is off-topic.

In the example below (Text 7), the student is discussing equal access to education services for students in remote and isolated areas of Australia, but as can be seen, the student gets too involved with unnecessary detail about the School of the Air, which is not directly relevant to the essay question, especially as the required length of the assignment is relatively short (2,000 words) and hence expected to be concise and to the point:

- 7) *The Flying Doctor Service helped to develop the School of the Air by allowing the Education Department to watch the Service and its operations in the use of radio networks to communicate Australia-wide. The networks that the Education Department are using is the two-way radio system which link the teacher to the student/s. The teachers are given the responsibility and are also trained and qualified to handle an approximate 25 minutes per day on-air lesson for a given class of children. They are then given the task of marking the children's correspondence work, when it arrives fortnightly. The correspondence work for the children is delivered to the children via the mail and is used in conjunction with the lesson given over the air (Fitzpatrick 1983). The two-way radio system has advanced through the years and...*

Another example (Text 8) of a break in this category is when a student adds information (in bold), which is not relevant to the surrounding context:

- 8) *Communication plays an important part of academic studies, a student does bring an element of communicational skills with them but at an academic study level, the skill of communication can definitely be broadened. Throughout the intense studies of academia communication must be a two-way system. Whether communicating with a fellow classmate and gaining different perspectives on the tasks in front of them of using the range of different communicational resources [for] writing [in] the university. **Counsellors and student associations offer a variety of support and advice and students are encouraged to use such facilities.***

E. Theme-related breaks

Type 1 –In this category no common topic can be identified at the paragraph level. In impaired texts such signals are inadequate, with the result that the reader is reduced to guessing at a possible governing topic or global theme (Wikborg, 1985). An extreme example of this is the pseudo-coherent example (Text 1) taken from Enkvist (1990), which illustrates this type of problem. Another less extreme example (Text 9) of this type of break, is given by Wikborg (1985):

- 9) *Adidas stocks 115 different kinds of sports shoes. The company's employees enjoy generous benefits. It has recently raised its prices. Adidas' head office is an architectural monstrosity. The company was founded in the 1950s.*

In this example all the sentences share Adidas as a common topic, yet because the facts they express about Adidas are unrelated, the text does not have an overall, governing topic. According to van Dijk (1980), if a sequence of sentences cannot be summarised, then it lacks a governing topic. Applied to the Adidas example in Text 9, it can be seen that the miscellaneous facts presented in Text 9 cannot be readily summarised.

An example taken from a student essay is:

- 10) *To read and take clear notes also develops a student's skills. Bate and Sharp (1990) comment that skills such as, language, written expression, reading, listening and communication skills are developed at university. Notetaking helps a student to produce clear and accurate notes in which correct grammar, spelling and vocabulary are used. Dictionaries and a Thesaurus are helpful here, as well as listening skills when taking notes. A student has to learn to be an active listener, meaning to listen as well as think and understand what is being said, rather than just accepting what they are being told. Effective reading and communication skills are also essential skills. Speaking clearly and*

plainly, understanding body language and being able to ask questions develops skills of interpretation, critical thinking and helps to determine important facts and ideas. Reading requiresetc.

As can be seen from this example (Text 10), the topic within the paragraph keeps changing and is not consistent, which makes it very difficult to infer a governing topic for the whole paragraph. The text needs to be developed so that there is a common theme running through all the sentences in the paragraph. 'A reader processes a text by constantly developing hypotheses as to what its main and sub-topics are' (Wikborg, 1985, p. 368), or, in other words, the reader attempts to 'hierarchically organise' a text (van Dijk, 1980), and identify the purpose or function of the paragraph. When the reader can not do this, then coherence breaks down.

Paragraphing conventions

Misleading paragraph division is similar in its effect on the reader, for, like the other types of breaks, it interrupts the reader's smooth processing of the written discourse. Paragraphing conventions vary from genre to genre. Paragraph conventions are only partially logical; in addition, they are determined by considerations of layout, register, and rhetorical effects (Wikborg, 1990). However, there are for the reader dysfunctional paragraph practices, which interfere with the processing of information to some extent. Two different types of problems with paragraphing conventions were identified: Type 2a is when a change in paragraph is made, but there is no change in topic, and, Type 2b is when there is a change in topic or sub-topic, but no new paragraph is made.

An example of a Type 2a paragraph convention break is:

- 11) *According to Baker, it is stated that motivation may be encouraged by prompting student interest, limiting stressful test conditions and by making it quite clear to the student what is expected of them throughout the course.*

Motivation is a very significant means of dispelling negativity, fears of failure and lack of confidence, which hinder the learning of skills.

In this example (Text 11), the two separate paragraphs need to be integrated as they are on the same topic: motivation and learning.

An example of a Type 2b break is:

- 12) *A language is a way of representing and consequently of manipulating ideas. There are many "Languages" including the symbolic representations used in mathematics and specialist languages adopted in most areas of study. A good essay plan includes the introduction, stating what we are going to write about, and our understanding for the question.....etc.*

As can be seen from this example (Text 12), the topic changes (in bold), but no separate paragraph is made. The first part of Text 12, which discusses language, needs either to be expanded, so that it relates to the overall topic, the essay question, and so forms a separate paragraph, or it needs to be deleted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From Table 1, it can be seen that 44.2% of the total essays collected (120 essays) were not relevant to the essay question, i.e. the content in the essays was not directly relevant to the overall topic or question. These essays only partially answered the question, and neglected to answer the question fully. When writing an assignment, it is essential that the content is relevant to the question. This forms a major hurdle for novice student writers. However, in comparing the results between Essay 1 (68.3%) and Essay 2 (20%) in Table 1, it appears that this ability has improved substantially.

Table 1. The percentage of essays not relevantly answering the question and not adhering to introduction and conclusion conventions.

	not relevant to essay question	introduction not adequate	conclusion not adequate
Essay 1	68.3%	40%	66.7%
Essay 2	20.0%	28.3%	40.0%
% of Total Essays	44.2%	34.2%	53.3%

A total of 34.2% of introductions to essays and 53.3% of conclusions to essays broke the conventions for a western academic essay, i.e. that an introduction should orientate the reader to what is going to be discussed, and that a conclusion should summarise what has been discussed. It can be seen that there is a decline in the percentage of introductions and conclusions that contravene academic essay conventions in Essay 2 in comparison to Essay 1. It can also be seen that forming acceptable conclusions forms more of a problem for these novice student writers than forming introductions.

Table 2. Percentage of coherence break types and percentage of essays with an occurrence of a coherence break type (total no. of essays=120, total no. of breaks=760).

(*Text level refers to level of operation in the text, i.e. (a) sentence level, (b) above sentence below paragraph, (c) at paragraph level, and (d) above paragraph level)

Type of coherence break		*Text level	Total no. of Breaks	Total no. of Essays
connectedness	Type 1 referring expressions (63 instances in 34 essays)	a/b	8%	25%
	Type 2 lexico-semantic usage (104 instances in 42 essays)	a/b	14%	35%
consistency	Type 1 break in logical flow (40 instances in 24 essays) (151 instances in 59 essays) (8 instances in 8 essays)	a	5%	20%
		b	20%	49%
		d	1%	7%
	Type 2 wrong order of information (6 instances in 5 essays) (6 instances in 6 essays)	b	1%	4%
		c	1%	5%
relevance	Relevance to surrounding text (53 instances in 39 essays) (44 instances in 27 essays)	a/b	7%	32%
		c	6%	22%
theme	Type 1 no common paragraph topic (71 instances in 40 essays)	c	9%	33%
	Type 2a change in paragraph, but no change in topic (85 instances in 37 essays)	c	11%	31%
	Type 2b change in topic, but no change in paragraph (129 instances in 52 essays)	c	17%	43%

As can be seen from Table 2, the incidence of coherence breaks is in the following order:

1. break in the logical flow within the paragraph (20%) occurring in 49% of student essays,
2. change in topic, but no change in paragraph (17%) occurring in 43% of essays,
3. lexico-semantic usage (14%) occurring in 35% of essays,
4. change in paragraph, but no change in topic (11%) occurring in 31% of essays,
5. no common paragraph topic (9%) occurring in 33% of essays,
6. referring expressions (8%) occurring in 25% of the essays,
7. relevance below the paragraph level (7%) occurring in 32% of the essays.

As can be seen from Table 2, a significant proportion of essays displayed problems with these coherence-related factors. There appeared to be particular problems in constructing a logical and consistent flow of ideas within the

paragraph, and in acquiring appropriate paragraphing conventions. In addition, appropriate lexico-semantic usage, use of referring expressions and relevance were problems for these novice, student writers

Table 3. The total no. of coherence breaks in Essay 1 and Essay 2 (standardised to 1000 words per essay).
(*Text level refers to level of operation in the text, i.e. (a) sentence level, (b) above sentence below paragraph, (c) at paragraph level, and (d) above paragraph level)

Type of coherence break		*Text level	Essay 1 (n=60)	Essay 2 (n=60)
connectedness	Type 1 referring expressions	a/b	50.7*	19.9*
	Type 2 lexico-semantic usage	a/b	63.7	45.7
consistency	Type 1 break in logical flow	a	19.5	20.8
		b	80.6	73.9
		d	2.6	5.0
	Type 2 wrong order of information	b	3.9	2.5
		c	3.9	2.5
relevance	Relevance to surrounding text	a/b	31.2	24.1
		c	36.4*	13.3*
theme	Type 1 no common paragraph topic	c	75.4**	10.8**
	Type 2a change in paragraph, but no change in topic	c	50.7	38.2
	Type 2b change in topic, but no change in paragraph	c	63.7	66.4

(* indicates significant at the 5% level and ** indicates significant at the 1% level)

From a developmental perspective, as would be expected, there was a marked improvement in Essay 2 in comparison to Essay 1 (see Table 3). From Table 3, it can be seen that there was a significant decline in the number of coherence breaks in Essay 2 in comparison to Essay 1 in the following coherence break categories: referring expressions ($\chi^2 = 6.72$, d.f. =1, $p < 0.05$), relevance at the paragraph level ($\chi^2 = 6.72$, d.f. =1, $p < 0.05$), and having a common paragraph topic ($\chi^2 = 24.21$, d.f. =1, $p < 0.001$).

However, some problems still persisted. Specifically, these were in constructing a logical and consistent flow of ideas, being relevant, and adhering to paragraph conventions, in particular, making new paragraphs when the topic or sub-topic changes. These problems need to be directly addressed through the academic literacy program.

Implications for Teaching

Novice, student writers need to be given information about the conventions and expectations of the academic culture. The 'deep' rules of the culture shape the entire process of student writing (Ballard & Clanchy, 1988). At university these cultural conventions are rarely addressed directly, and it is left for the student to 'read' the culture or 'crack the code'. It is important that these rules are explicitly explained to students, so that they can effectively operate within that sub-culture. This includes acquiring the skills involved in constructing a coherent text. Of primary importance is that the text's underlying semantic content should be connected and interrelated. Arguments or ideas should be consistently connected with previously expressed ideas, i.e. they should not contain propositions that contradict other propositions in the text. It is of paramount importance that an academic essay should be relevant to the overall topic or assignment question and at a more local level to the surrounding context. That is, the essay should not digress, be repetitive, and off-topic. Theme is another important organising factor, and ideas should be grouped together under a governing topic using appropriate paragraphing conventions. In addition, it is important that students appreciate the important function that the introduction and conclusion perform in developing an academic essay. If a student is to effectively operate in the academic, discourse community, it is essential that they understand the underlying, academic writing rules and conventions, which include using the coherence-related concepts outlined.

Teachers need to be able to objectify and make these rules and conventions explicit to their students as far as possible; however, there are confounding factors in acquiring these practices, as they are often not consistently used and applied, and there is significant sub-disciplinary variation (Ballard & Clanchy, 1988). Genres are not rigid, formulaic structures, but have a degree of variability. This degree of variability can be of great confusion to novice students, when they find that the rules that they have learnt previously are not as fixed as they had presumed. This is reflected in the problems students have in acquiring paragraphing conventions, in particular, when deciding which of the many subtopics merit a paragraph of their own. Paragraph conventions are only partially logical; in addition, they are determined by considerations of layout, register, rhetorical effects (Wikborg, 1990), and consideration of ease of processing for the reader.

In teaching academic writing skills there is a need to move away from an over-emphasis on the surface structure of the text or the product, to a greater focus on the underlying semantic content, and the process involved in writing. It is important when teaching academic writing, that students are challenged to reflect on their conception of what an essay is (Prosser & Webb, 1994). There is a need to instil in students a more global perspective on the essay writing process, which includes perceiving the essay as having an overall purpose and function, to focus on the interrelatedness of the text's underlying semantic content, and to take into consideration the perspective of the reader. Emphasising the importance of adhering to these coherence-related notions in an academic literacy program would affect the overall approach that students would adopt to the essay writing process as a whole.

Problems in constructing a logical, consistent argument or flow of ideas is clearly a problem for novice, tertiary student writers. It appears that many of these writers are still in the process of clarifying their thought processes or assimilating the material they have gathered. Taylor and Nightingale (1990) argue that poor writing at tertiary level is usually the result of poor understanding of the subject content. Deficiencies in undergraduate essay writing are related predominantly to higher order thought processes and the ability to analyse information critically and develop arguments, rather than problems with basic skills and mechanics (Nightingale, 1988). Grammatical errors in academic essays are primarily related to the constitution of meaning, rather than an inability to apply the grammatical rules correctly. Understanding of content needs to be taught as part of the writing process, and students need help understanding the content knowledge prior to constructing their essays (Entwistle, 1995; Taylor & Nightingale, 1990). Help needs to be adjusted to an appropriate level, which suits the level that students are currently operating at (Campbell, Smith & Brooker, 1998), so that they can be extended towards a more abstract level of conceptualising the content knowledge of the essay.

In this study, the emphasis rather than being on the surface structure of the text itself, has been primarily on the mental representation of the text in the mind of the writer, the transference of these ideas into text, and the mental representation that is consequently induced in the mind of the idealised reader. It is an extremely difficult task for a writer to effectively convey their ideas to their readers. Even skilled writers, who continually evaluate whether their words convey their intentions (Hayes, 1988) can still fail to communicate effectively. Novice students in particular have difficulty considering the needs of the reader (Schriver, 1992) and taking the reader's perspective. According to Traxler and Gernsbacher (1995), one reason for a writer not producing a coherent text is a failure to accurately envision a reader's interpretation of their text. They propose "that coherent communication enables the reader or listener to build a mental representation of what the writer intended to convey". Traxler and Gernsbacher (1995) further suggest that writers need to "envision the mental representation that their readers will build from their text" (p. 218), and compare this with the mental representation of the ideas that they wish to convey, and then match these two representations, in order to produce a coherent text. This perspective-taking ability is important both to clearly express one's meaning in written form, and to follow the socio-cultural conventions, which are expected by the reader. This can be encouraged by envisioning the intended audience, and through explicit peer and lecturer feedback.

Prosser and Webb (1994) found that essays which were 'reader-friendly', which revealed their organisational structure explicitly to the reader, i.e. used explicit structural cues or 'predictive scaffolding', were not only easier to read, but also tended to gain the highest marks. From a reader perspective, ideally, in order for a reader to build a coherent representation of a text, the reader needs to be able to follow the flow of ideas expressed in a text, with a minimum of interruptions in the smooth processing of the text. Coherence is very much facilitated if the genre expectations of the reader are adhered to, and explicit structural cues can also facilitate a coherent mental representation of the text in the mind of the reader.

This research can also be used to help teach revision strategies to students, so that they develop skills to be able to detect when the flow of ideas or coherence breaks down in their own writing. They also need to be encouraged to alter their revision task schema to incorporate more global revision strategies, which include such notions as connectedness, consistency, relevance, theme and reader expectations, as well as local strategies (Wallace, Hayes, Hatch, Miller, Moser & Silk, 1996). As it is notoriously difficult to detect this break in flow in one's own writing, peer editing can be used to help writers to detect these anomalies; for example, a revision prompt sheet can be used to facilitate this process. Student writers need to not only detect breaks in coherence, but also need to have the skills to be able to solve or fix these barriers to communication, and these higher order skills take time and require practice to develop.

SUMMARY

The view adopted in this research is that coherence is predominantly in the mind of the reader, and relies on conventional reader expectations and psychological notions of connectedness, consistency, relevance and theme, which are operating at local and global text levels. In order to write an optimally coherent text these concepts need to be integrated into the following process:

- 1) the writer needs to formulate a coherent mental representation during the writing process,
- 2) he/she needs to be able to transfer this mental representation into a linear, sequential, written format, and
- 3) he/she needs to be able to use appropriate organisational conventions that meet the cultural expectations and knowledge base of the reader.

Breakdown in coherence can occur at any of these different stages in the writing process.

Tertiary students need to be assisted through this highly complex process by lecturers giving explicit instructions which explain the academic, cultural values, practices and their expectations. Students can also be helped to become aware of the underlying semantic processes involved in creating a coherent text. The coherence categories discussed in this study can also be used by academic literacy lecturers to monitor students' academic essay writing progress, in, for example, an academic literacy program or intervention program in an undergraduate or postgraduate course.

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APPENDIX

Essay Questions

Essay 1

Length: 750 words

During academic studies, how can students acquire transferable skills?

Essay 2

Length: 1,200 words

Are all Australians able to participate equally in important institutions regardless of factors, such as age, gender, class or language background? Choose one type of institution and discuss with reference to at least two factors.

Examples of Institutions: Schools, Hospitals, Community Health services, Universities, Law courts, Financial institutions.

Section 2

Cultures of Learning

Keynote paper: Cultures of learning

Re-thinking the impact of cultural difference on learning: The evidence for asset versus deficit models

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INTRODUCTION

In 1976, the one and only year I taught in a country high school, the Aboriginal Health Service swept through town. Only Aboriginal children were examined, and solely for defect. By the time the Health Service left town, the following list was pinned prominently to the staffroom board:

Hartley K: Half deaf. Sit with left ear to wall.

Stephen J: Defective concentration.

Sharon L: Behavioural aberrations ...

It is instructive to ask how such descriptions may have shaped the attitudes towards Aboriginal students held by teaching staff, including their pedagogical assumptions. No comparable examination and/or stigmatisation of 'mainstream' students had occurred - despite the fact that many arguably had equal, or even more serious problems.

It is not my intention here to 'talk down' the major transitional adjustments confronting many NESB students. However, I'd like to suggest there may be certain parallels between the indigenous case study cited above and the assumptions frequently made about the 'dysfunctionality' characteristic of NESB students - particularly those of Asian origin. I have had the opportunity to work with such students for 20 years across three Victorian universities - most recently developing and managing a Faculty-specific concurrent support program designed to assist the 550 international students and many local NESB students enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences at the University of Melbourne. Around half of all international students enrolled in the Faculty make use of this service. Many are confronting significant linguistic and cross-cultural barriers. Despite this, in line with the theme of this conference (cultures of learning), it seems vital to raise an issue virtually never addressed at ESL meetings: the *disproportionate academic success* achieved by NESB tertiary students in Australia.

This trend has been affirmed by a range of recent Australian studies. It applies particularly to students of Asian origin, despite the greatest level of academic dysfunctionality being presumed of precisely this cohort.

CONSTRUCTING THE 'DEFICIT' MODEL OF NESB STUDENTS

Indeed, the Australian literature on 'NESB' students focuses almost exclusively on the Asia-born - by 1995 representing 85% of all international scholarship and fee-paying students enrolled in Australia (Shu & Hawthorne, 1995, 1996). The published research has been dominated by two key disciplines: educational psychology (including counselling) and applied linguistics (see for example, Ballard & Clanchy, 1984, 1997). By definition, however, professionals in these fields develop 'skewed' perspectives on NESB students. They observe and work with those requiring substantial preliminary support, plus those experiencing ongoing difficulty with academic and/or psycho-social adjustment. The publications these professionals have generated - however reflective of personal practice - have arguably resulted in an over-emphasis on the *dysfunctionality* of NESB students, a 'deficit' view which has distorted university policy development and thinking.

A pervasive assumption underlies much of this literature: that successful adaptation involves the cloning of NESB students towards Australian academic norms, with 'traditional' learning strategies presumed to be culturally inappropriate. But is this view justified by the evidence?

ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

By 1997 there were 62,974 international students enrolled in Australia's higher education sector (Dobson et al., 1998, p. 7). Primary source countries (in rank order) were Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong (Commonwealth-Asian countries), followed by Indonesia, India, Thailand, China, Taiwan, South Korean and Japan. International students were thus immensely varied in terms of lived experience, English as a Second Language (ESL) ability, and exposure to western-based academic learning norms. Many Commonwealth-Asian students, for instance, might be described as sophisticated cosmopolitans at the time of arrival - often characterised by native speaker ability in English, and the completion of previous stints of expatriate academic study. A growing proportion of international students have completed upper secondary studies in Australia - in the case of the China-born, for instance, often arriving as early as lower or middle-secondary school prior to commencing tertiary courses. For many such students the process of social and academic adaptation is swift. It is likely to prove far more onerous for students with relatively poor ESL, and/or from non-Commonwealth source countries.

Regardless of these variations, what has been reported to date in terms of overall academic outcomes?

In 1993 and 1994, the Australian International Development Aid Bureau (AIDAB) published two studies analysing the academic results achieved by AIDAB scholars from a range of predominantly Asian source countries in the higher education sector. These studies provide an important indicator of academic success - for by definition AIDAB scholars are often chosen for reasons other than academic merit (perhaps by virtue of their position in the country of origin). The findings of the research were as follows. AIDAB scholars had achieved outstanding course completion rates. Despite the multiple academic, psycho-social and linguistic challenges facing them, 97% of women and 95% of males had passed. The reason? Students were described as 'bright, assertive, and highly committed to achieving their academic goals' - qualities too rarely asserted in Australia's 'Asian student' literature, where attributes such as passivity and reticence are far more likely to be mentioned (AIDAB, 1993, p. 19).

At the 1998 IDP Education Australia conference Dobson, Sharma and Calderon (1998) released a benchmark study comparing academic performance for the total number of Australian and international undergraduate (UG) students across all Australian universities, based on 1996 data. As part of this study the authors examined individual subject completion rates, as well as overall pass levels.

Across the board, international UG students were found to have outperformed local UG students. Further, they had done so within a wide range of academic fields - not merely disciplines such as business, engineering and science 'conventionally' taken by international students as a way of minimising ESL-related challenges, but in language-intensive fields such as arts and the social sciences. In line with the AIDAB data, female international students were shown to have outperformed males from comparable countries. In summarising the research findings, the authors noted the extraordinary failure of Australian academics to date to assess these 'performance aspects' of international students.

The following year, at the October 1999 IDP Education Australia conference, Hackett and Nowak (1999) released their study of academic outcomes for students enrolled at on-shore versus off-shore locations - at a time when distance education courses had become the most rapidly growing mode of study (the choice of 25,158 international students that year). An analysis of the results achieved by Curtin Business Faculty students demonstrated that international on-shore students achieved higher pass rates than 'mainstream' students or international off-shore students. Once again, females had outperformed males in both locations.

ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND 'LOCAL' NESB STUDENTS

Within Australia a disproportionate number of 'local' tertiary students have come in recent decades from NESB countries - often the very same countries supplying international students. Students resident in Australia 10 years or more may experience minimal or no problems in terms of linguistic and academic adjustment at university. Others, more recent arrivals or those characterised by a higher degree of cultural and/or linguistic enclosure, may encounter significant barriers within a range of advanced educational settings.

Throughout the post-war period, regardless of such differentiation, there has been serious concern for NESB students' well-being - including their risk of under-representation in tertiary settings (Martin, 1975; Bullivant, 1986).

Many of the teachers, social workers and other professionals responsible for providing services to children from non-English speaking migrant communities felt that they were struggling to cope in the face of English language difficulties, cultural conflicts between school and home, and a school system inadequately funded to deal with their needs (Birrell & Khoo, 1995, p. 1).

Only in recent years have large-scale quantitative studies demonstrated the disproportionate academic success of many such students - in particular those who have come to Australia *relatively recently*. Findings such as these confound conventional wisdom. Indeed, the intellectual foundation of the Australian tertiary sector's access and equity program has been an assumption that recency of arrival equates with academic 'risk' - resulting in support services being targeted at such students.

In 1997 Dobson et al., outlined the basis of the Federal government's tertiary equity policy - the inclusion of 'recent NESB arrivals' along with other potentially disadvantaged groups - namely 'women', Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, students with disabilities, persons from rural and remote areas, and those from low socio-economic backgrounds' (Dobson et al., 1997, p. 46). The 'moral foundation' of this tertiary equity program derived from *A Fair Chance For All* - a report prepared by the National Board of Employment, Education and Training for the Department of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET, 1990). According to the authors,

The overall objective for equity in higher education is to ensure that Australians from all groups in society have the opportunity to participate successfully in higher education. This will be achieved by changing the balance of the student population to reflect more closely the composition of society of as a whole (NBEET, 1990, p. 8).

There was one major problem with the NBEET report's overall thrust however - the fact that:

NBEET noted there was little systematic evidence of the extent of the 'problem', especially in regard to second-generation NESB persons. It also acknowledged that participation rates probably varied greatly between different NESB groups ... Despite these uncertainties the Board felt that, 'first generation immigrants have real disadvantages' and 'second generation students are still likely to need help to succeed in higher education' (Dobson et al., 1997, p. 46).²

Despite this acknowledged lack of 'hard data', Federal government acceptance of the report recommendations resulted in a requirement for universities to prepare equity plans (1991-1993) - indicating the ways in which they would boost the participation of 'disadvantaged' groups, including NESB students. By 1994-96 this requirement had resulted in 24 universities defining plans to institute NESB student support programs, plus 14 developing 'awareness plans' designed to 'alert ... NESB students to the institution's courses, and curriculum reviews directed at making courses more relevant to NESB persons' concerns' (Dobson et al., 1997, p. 47; Higher Education Council, 1995, p. 15). The application of this strategy, however, was inherently flawed:

The typical definition of 'NESB' included persons who spoke a language other than English at home. That is, they included both persons born in Australia and overseas ... Most of the institutions had difficulty explaining their particular NESB enrolment target ... No institution differentiated between the many NESB country of origin or language groups, so none would have been aware whether the NESB students assisted by their programs belonged to a group which was disadvantaged or not (Dobson et al., 1997, p. 47).

In 1994 the so-called Martin Report was published by the government, with the intention of more clearly defining the parameters of tertiary disadvantage. Three groups were analysed in terms of potential risk: recently arrived overseas-born NESB students, longer-term NESB residents, and Australia-born NESB students whose parents were born in an NESB country (Martin, 1994). According to Dobson et al.,

After reviewing these three categories, the Martin Report recommended the narrowest of these definitions, which limited the NESB category to those who were born overseas and arrived in Australia less than ten years ago, and who spoke a language other than English at home ... The Project Team for the Martin Report decided to retain the '10 year' restriction for the purposes

of developing a NESB equity indicator, 'leaving a re-thinking of the issue to subsequent work'. The Martin Report did not investigate whether recent NESB arrivals were actually experiencing disadvantage in gaining access to the university system. Indeed, the Report's examination of a sample of institutions showed that, in most cases, '10 year NESBs' were over-represented relative to their share of the population (Dobson et al., 1997, pp. 47-48).

Dobson began to assess this issue through his definitive analysis of patterns of student participation across the totality of the Australian higher education sector (including by language group and gender). In 1997 Dobson published startling findings related to permanent residents, based on 1995 higher education enrolments. These demonstrated that disproportionate academic success had in fact been achieved by relatively 'recent' NESB groups (most notably Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, Polish and Russian speakers). Serious disadvantage was found to be experienced by select *longstanding* NESB groups (most notably Italian, Arabic, Macedonian, and Turkish speakers - often second generation Australians).

ESB students of any origin in Australia had a 12.7% chance of gaining tertiary places, compared to an overall average of 13.2% for NESB-origin students. By contrast 32.6% of the relevant age group Korean speakers, 26% of Chinese speakers, 24.9% of Vietnamese speakers, 22.7% of Polish speakers, and 19.4% of Russian speakers had gained tertiary entry. This far exceeded outcomes for established NESB groups - with just 6% of Italian speakers, 8.1% respectively of Arabic and Macedonian speakers, 8.8% of Turkish speakers, 9% of Khmer speakers and 9.9% of German speakers securing tertiary places. With the exception of Khmer speakers, the majority of these students had been long (or permanently) resident in Australia - a finding posing serious challenge to the thrust of Australia's tertiary equity policies.

Table 1. Australian Tertiary Participation Rates by Language Group (1995) (Dobson, 1997, p. 4).

Language Group	No of Students	Participation Rate (%)
Arabic	2336	8.1
Chinese	13772	26.5
Croatian	1389	10.5
German	964	9.9
Greek	6397	10.5
Italian	4079	6.0
Khmer	245	9.0
Korean	1228	32.6
Macedonian	999	8.1
Polish	1252	22.7
Russian	553	19.4
Spanish	2160	13.0
Turkish	734	8.8
Vietnamese	5475	24.9
Other NESB	11724	12.1
Total NESB	53307	13.2
English	276977	12.7
Language not stated	5930	9.4
Total	336214	12.7

In terms of country of origin, Dobson et al., drew the following conclusions about 'NESB' disadvantage:

It is evident that the language groups with the highest participation rates ... are drawn predominantly from recently-arrived communities. The Discussion Paper's claim that people from these groups are under-represented in the higher education system is incorrect. This is most obvious with the highly successful Chinese-speaking group, 59.1 per cent of whom arrived in Australia between 1985 and 1991. Had we included those who arrived after 1991 ... the proportion of recently-arrived would have been even more striking. This also applies to the Korean group and to some extent the Vietnamese speakers. (Of the Vietnamese-speaking

students resident before 1991, 43.3 per cent arrived after 1984.) On the other hand, the language groups with relatively poor participation rates are primarily drawn from language groups where most students have lived in Australia for more than ten years or were born in Australia. This is obvious with Italian speakers, who have the lowest participation rate of all major language groups. But it also applies to the four next lowest participating groups: the Macedonian speakers (only 6.1 per cent of whom arrived between 1985 and 1991); the Khmer speakers, of whom 28.2 per cent are 1985-91 arrivals; and the Arabic and Turkish speakers, just 22.9 per cent and 11.4 per cent respectively of whom arrived in Australia between 1985 and 1991.

Current Government equity planning is ostensibly designed to assist disadvantaged NESB persons to gain access to higher education. These data show that it is focussed in the wrong direction. Government policy favours groups which, in most cases, are already over-represented in the higher education system and ignores most of the genuinely disadvantaged language groups (Dobson et al., 1997, pp. 50-51).

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THESE RESEARCH FINDINGS FOR 'CULTURES OF LEARNING'

The research findings above are counter-intuitive and not widely known. Indeed, they may prove unpopular with ESL professionals working with NESB students in the Australian tertiary sector - those in the process of grappling with a very real range of linguistic and academic disadvantages. Simultaneously, they may prove unpopular with select ethnic groups wishing to establish academic disadvantage.³

At the same time, in line with the theme of this conference, I would suggest it may be important to consider the following propositions.

Firstly, there is merit in acknowledging the *disproportionate academic success* achieved by recently arrived NESB students in Australia, particularly those of Asian origin - despite the skewed sample typically seen by ESL staff and university-based counsellors. Given the Australia-wide research outlined above, there is compelling evidence to suggest that the majority of NESB students do *not* experience undue difficulty with their tertiary courses. With the notable exception of the Vietnamese, *class* remains the key determinant of university access in Australia - and recent Asia-born students have come to Australia through middle-class migrations (Dobson, 1997; Birrell & Dobson, 1998).

Secondly, given the above, there is obvious value in exploring cultural differences in learning as a *potential source of strength in Australia*, rather than as a potential weakness to be remediated. In recent years, important exploratory work has commenced in this area. A range of analysts have reviewed the academic 'dysfunctionality' highlighted by earlier authors, including the presumed need to 'clone' Asia-born students towards Australian academic norms. In the process, many have highlighted the particular strengths of 'traditional' learners. These include:

- The exceptional motivation and adaptability demonstrated by many Asian students (including a capacity for critical reasoning) (Biggs, 1996; Salili, 1996);
- The value of Asian respect for effort, including a willingness to accept personal responsibility for learning (Salili, 1996);
- The superior capacity of many Asian students for 'deep learning' and 'achieving' (see for example Volet, 1993; Biggs, 1990; Biggs, 1996; Ballard, 1987);
- The academic applicability of traditions such as rote learning and memorisation to disciplines such as law and medicine, given their requirement for students to absorb large chunks of factual information (Biggs, 1996; Marton et al., 1996; Lee, 1996);
- The capacity of students to form study groups which work with a high degree of collaborative effectiveness - if necessary creating culturally and linguistically homogeneous alternatives to the 'forced' heterogeneous tutorial groups which may inhibit some students (Volet & Ang, 1998; Salili, 1996);
- Beyond these, the degree of similarity rather than difference between Asian and Australian learners in terms of learning style (Volet, 1993).

Such positive differences in terms of 'cultures of learning' merit systematic research attention in Australia. The resultant empirical findings could assist in counterbalancing the emphasis on 'dysfunctionality' which has characterised so much of the Australian 'NESB student' literature to date. Further, they could lead to a reappraisal of the flawed assumptions underlying current equity policies in the Australian tertiary sector.

ENDNOTES

¹ While the issue of gender is only noted in passing here, consistent evidence of women's disproportionate academic success has been emerging over the past decade - calling into serious question their designation as a 'disadvantaged' equity group (Birrell & Rapson, 1998; Birrell et al., 1995).

² In 1995, a benchmark study, *The second generation in Australia: Educational and occupational characteristics* (Birrell & Khoo, 1995) demonstrated that the children of 'disadvantaged' NESB migrants have secured superior educational outcomes in Australia to those of 'mainstream' Australians and the relatively privileged immigrant groups (coming from the UK and major West European source countries, e.g. Germany). These findings are not reported in any detail here, given the focus of the current paper on educational outcomes for recently arrived international students and NESB migrants.

³ In the mid 1990s, when the author was employed as Research Manager (Social & Demographic Research) at Australia's Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research, a number of ethnic groups sought research to confirm their perceived academic disadvantage. Part of Dobson's study was in fact funded by the Bureau with the intention of securing definitive data re tertiary participation rates by language groups in Australia. In a range of instances, the resulting findings seriously contradicted community assumptions.

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Critical perspectives on ESL in the tertiary sector: Workshopping the views of TESOL lecturers

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Abstract

Many academic ESL teachers face a common dilemma: how do we avoid stereotyping and marginalising our students if we continue to perpetuate what Alistair Pennycook has called the hegemonic 'one-way flow of prescriptivist knowledge' which is often the practice of our tertiary institutions? Our primary aim, and one which we hold dear, is to help students to change their behaviours, learning styles, even their identities, in order to meet the expectations of specific academic contexts.

TESOL lecturers in Adelaide University's Integrated ESL Programs (IEP) are developing ESL learning programs which address this dilemma by incorporating change and development for the institution (including ESL and faculty lecturers) as well as for students. In this process, members of the IEP teaching team have discovered that we agree wholeheartedly on goals of equity, social justice and access to education for all our students. However, we find ourselves in quite different political and professional positions with respect to two key considerations: the extent to which we aim to challenge the dominant academic mores of our own institution to accommodate the learning needs of non-traditional students; and, whether we approach our students primarily with understandings based on our knowledge of their cultures, or rather on their individualities as a learners.

At the 1999 Language and Academic Skills conference, a team of IEP lecturers led a workshop to involve participants in activities through which they could consider their own work and their views in relation to these issues. Data collected from this workshop revealed that, for a variety of reasons, an overwhelming majority of these tertiary TESOL lecturers located their work in facilitating change through students, rather than to institutional practices, though they wanted to move their practice significantly in this direction. The majority also sought to validate students' situations and needs as individual learners, rather than to explore students' needs on cultural grounds. Overall the enthusiastic analyses which emerged in the workshop helped us all to clarify some of the ideological and practical issues underpinning the work of ESL teachers in 'Western' academic institutions.

INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKSHOP

Tertiary ESL programs in Australia are usually conducted by TESOL lecturers situated either in support units, often designated 'Language and Learning' or Study Skills', or in faculty-funded positions. The ESL programs we run may comprise voluntary workshops, embedded literacy development modules, credit-bearing subjects, individual consultations or full compulsory adjunct courses. This means that, as TESOL lecturers, we play a surprising variety of educational roles within and across our tertiary institutions. Completely different constraints are placed upon colleagues in the same field, who may or may not share similar ideological and philosophical views about how they carry out their teaching. And in the context of the pragmatism and economic rationalism in which we are all situated, these ideologies are rarely given space for clarification and debate.

We, the authors, are members of the TESOL team in Adelaide University's Integrated ESL Programs (IEP) and we have been working for some time to reflect on our own differences in ideological and professional positions, and how these differences inform our work. Inspired as we all are by goals of equity, social justice and access to education, we share an interest in the ways in which institutionalised learning necessarily involves cultural politics, and how an understanding of 'critical social literacy' (Luke & Walton, 1994) can influence educational practice. Indeed as a team we seem to share a basic view that we would like to work in this 'critically'¹ reflective

way on behalf of our students, exploring the dominant hegemonies of our monolingual academic traditions. However, despite our philosophical agreement, we find ourselves feeling and positioning ourselves quite differently from each other about how we approach our primary task of helping students to change their language, their behaviours, learning styles, even their identities, in order to meet the expectations of specific academic assessments.

It was for this reason that we offered a workshop at the 1999 National Language and Academic Skills Conference in order to stimulate practising TESOL specialists² to consider their own positions in relation to some of these fundamentally ethical questions. We were interested to learn how our colleagues in other universities saw their own practices, and how comfortable they were about their roles in fulfilling their professional purposes.

In this paper we would like to describe the workshop which we ran, in the order of the phases in which it was structured, and to discuss its results as an informal study. We will situate the views of those conference delegates who participated in our activities within a theoretical model which we have designed to accommodate the ideological issues raised. Our aim is to present our findings not as those of a controlled research project but as the outcomes of a valid pedagogic process in which participants reflect on a learning experience with fellow learners. Above all, we hope to share the vitality of the workshop in relation to these important areas of debate with colleagues in other institutions.

PHASE 1: MAKING CHOICES ABOUT PRACTICE

The workshop opened with participants being randomly positioned around seven tables in groups of up to six participants per table. There were about 30 participants in all. On the tables we had placed an instruction sheet and four sentences on separate pieces of card. The four sentences read as follows:

- 1) *The problem is not located with the students; the solution lies in their flexible adjustment to the conditions they encounter.*
- 2) *... at the first encounter [with a student], cultural information provides the only grounds for communicative predictions.*
- 3) *In an EAP class...students' needs should not be subordinated to institutional requirements; rather, the institution should give up some of its power.*
- 4) *...getting to know students on an individual level...is a good place to start.*

The ideas in these sentences were originally expressed by Prior (1996), Nelson (1998), Benesch (1996) and Spack (1998) respectively. The participants were asked to read the four sentences (whose referents had been removed) and then to decide which two of the four could best be said to reflect their own teaching practice. They were encouraged to discuss their choices with other members of their group and to suggest reasons why they felt the particular sentences they had chosen came closest to expressing a view which informed their teaching. Finally, they wrote down their individual choices by ticking the appropriate boxes on the instruction sheet.

We did not expand on the ideologies underpinning the sentences at this time. We had decided that we wanted to ask these tertiary TESOL lecturers first to reflect on their own practice, and then afterwards to consider its theoretical implications. The reason for this decision was that we believe, with Alastair Pennycook (1989, p. 590), that whether or not we have consciously decided to take an ideological position, every act of teaching and learning is a political act, and practice cannot fail to reflect as well as propagate ideology. However, in the discussions which followed, participants naturally teased out the theoretical implications of a particular idea. Many participants recognised that some of the sentences were mutually exclusive, and that perhaps none of them represented their own position exactly.

PHASE 2: LOCATING PRACTICE IN THEORY

A Theoretical Model for Positioning Practice

After the choices had been made, we presented the participants with our own schematisation of the relationships between the fundamental concepts expressed in the statements. We were aided in our creation of this model by recent debates focussing on two topics which impact strongly on the roles of tertiary ESL and EFL teachers: the

globalisation of English as an international language (Pennycook, 1994) and the internationalisation of English language education in 'Western' universities (Nelson, 1998; Spack, 1997; Biggs, 1997). In our discussions we had realised that these two approaches intersect continually in our practice and so we represented them as continua, as paired ideological opposites on two bisecting axes (Figure 1).

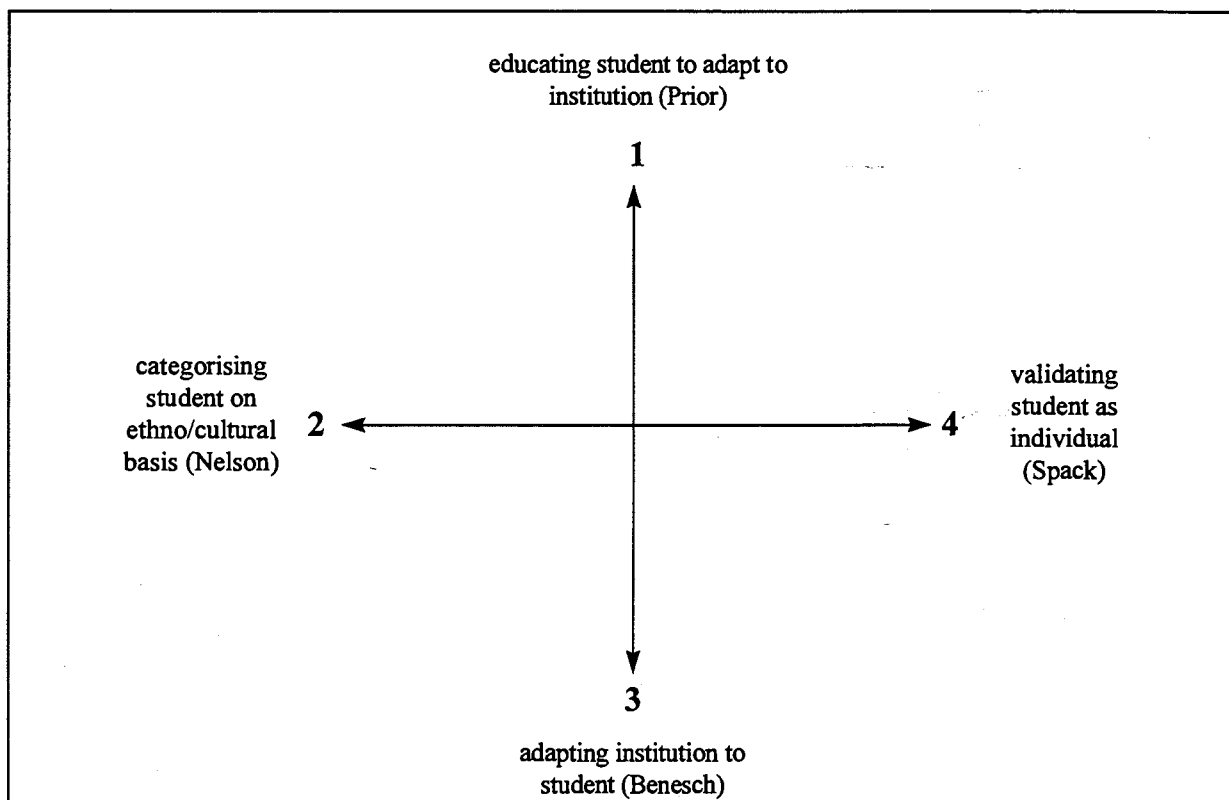


Figure 1. Schematisation of ideologies expressed in statements

One pair of opposites, Benesch (1996) and Prior (in Benesch, 1996), deals with ideas about expectations of change and flexibility in students and learning institutions. Specifically, Prior's view represents effective learning as the adaptation of students to meet the predetermined requirements of the institution. In this view the teacher's role is to facilitate this adaptation, with its underlying need for change in the student. Benesch's statement, on the other hand, views the role of the tertiary TESOL lecturer in a critical perspective as needing to address the inequities of power which inform the knowledges and dominant discourses of our Western academic traditions. She presents effective learning as the result of institutions recognising and responding to students' existing knowledge and epistemologies. The institutions can then adapt curriculum and teaching styles to meet and be guided by the students at any point in their learning.

The other pair of opposing ideological positions was represented in the statements by Nelson (1998) and Spack (1997) which deal with ideas about teachers' views of students. Nelson defends the need for teachers to bring to their practice prior knowledge and understanding of students' learning styles and strategies as these have been shaped by ethno-cultural influences. Nelson's view strongly suggests that teachers use these understandings to inform their teaching (see also Carson, 1998). Spack, however, firmly argues that teachers should approach each student as an individual with unique learning requirements; she particularly criticises what she sees as a dominant historical tradition of ethno-cultural stereotyping of students.

By representing these contrasting views as intersecting axes, we hoped to allow workshop participants to translate their earlier choices of viewpoints into a single position on the grid, arrived at by a consideration of how far along each continuum they felt they were positioned by the realities of their teaching. Then, because we are aware that our industrial position and the educational and institutional contexts of our courses often force us into uncomfortable ideological positions, we also asked our participants to mark on the grid where they ideally *would like* to be positioned: in other words, in what directions they would like to be developing as professionals in their field.

A Case Study

At this point in the workshop, one member of Adelaide University's IEP team presented different aspects of her current teaching situation as a case study to exemplify the complexity of clarifying where we find ourselves in these debates. The teaching context for this lecturer is a credit-bearing subject in communication skills for international students and at this point she gave two examples of positions on the grid (see Figure 1), both of which emerge from teaching in this course, and offered justification for each position.

The first position reflected the teaching approach in one aspect of the course, the writing component, and it was located close to the top right hand corner of the upper right quadrant because it was based on non-negotiable expectations of students in writing skills. In a course for credit such as this, successful students are required to develop skills such as:

- analysis of text,
- formulation of a proposition,
- structure of relevant arguments,
- substantiation of arguments, and
- acknowledgment of sources.

The assessment criteria in this subject reflect the objective of developing students' expertise in the dominant academic discourse which in this case is that of Engineering. Thus, students are unequivocally expected to adapt to the institution. However, along the other axis, in facilitating each student's development, the aim of this lecturer is to treat students from the outset as individuals with different levels of skill and diverse needs, rather than as members of a largely homogeneous ethno-cultural group.

Her second position, which was based on negotiated assessment criteria for class participation, fell midway down and well to the right in the lower right quadrant. In this oral component of the course, the lecturer is not required to apply faculty-generated criteria and so is able to negotiate with students about ways in which they may participate in class. The students are surveyed on how comfortable they feel about contributing to a traditional tutorial discussion in English. On the basis of the survey responses, lecturer and students negotiate alternatives to the conventional expectations of the way students participate in class. For example, one student has indicated that when she is prepared to answer a question she will look at the lecturer and wait for a personal invitation to speak. Other students have asked that they be given time to prepare a contribution to class discussion, and some undertake to talk in small groups.

The survey questions and discussion about participation serve to draw students' attention to the dominant expectations elsewhere in the university where students themselves may choose to pursue further change. Thus, by this lecturer negotiating alternative ways of assessing class participation, the institution is beginning to adapt to the student. A second objective of this practice is to understand the positions of individual students concerning class participation, and to learn from them. In this way students may feel increasingly validated as individuals.

In respect to where this lecturer *would like* to situate her practice, her preferred position was on the extreme right of the horizontal axis: always aiming to validate the student as an individual, but midway between adapting the institution to students, and educating students to adapt to the institution, according to the context and individual student's choice to adapt. Thus, from this case study we hoped to show how, in terms of our ideological standpoints as situated TESOL practitioners, we can find ourselves moving fluidly between positions when we are actively engaged in practice on a daily basis.

PHASE 3: PARTICIPANTS POSITIONING THEMSELVES

Red and Green Dots

At this point we handed each group two identical transparencies showing the grid (Figure 1) and a red and a green pen. Participants were then asked:

1. using one of the transparencies, to place a red dot locating their position on the grid in terms of their current teaching practice. This red dot location was intended to reflect their position in terms of the sentences they had chosen in the first task and in relation to how strongly they felt about the statements of ideology which

marked the ends of each continuum. Thus the dots were mostly located in areas of a quadrant rather than on one of the axes.

2. using the other transparency, to place a green dot to show where they would, ideally, wish to be positioned, again relative to both of the continua.

The difficulties associated with reducing the complexities of practice into one red and one green dot provoked lively discussion. It was gratifying for those of us presenting the workshop to observe the animation and laughter which characterised people's attempts to justify to their group-mates their placement of dots within the framework. Comparisons and contrasts were drawn, as these lecturers clarified their understanding of why they found themselves in certain positions and to what extent these represented their preferred teaching philosophies. Groups began to be able to characterise themselves and to see their own practice and philosophy in relation to that of their peers.

The Emerging Picture - 'Where We Are and Where We Would Like To Be'

After 10 minutes, the spokespeople from each group came up individually to the overhead projector and briefly presented the two transparencies completed by their group. With their permission, their comments were recorded on audiotape. They focussed on the distribution of coloured dots in order to raise the key issues which had emerged in their discussions. Each presenter began with the red dots, and then the transparency showing the green dots (representing where the group members felt they really *would like* to be located) was laid over the first one so that the prevailing shifts could be identified. As each group presented, the transparencies were overlaid in a single pile, so that finally a composite picture emerged both of where this significant gathering of TESOL lecturers felt they were positioned in their practice (Figure 2), and where, ideally, they would like to be (Figure 3).

In terms of the quantitative distribution of participants' views (30 red and green dots were placed on the transparencies), there were some marked patterns to be observed. Red dots were clearly clustered in the top right hand quadrant of the grid (21 dots), with a further six in the bottom right hand quadrant. One red dot was placed in each of the remaining two quadrants and one in the centre of the grid (Figure 2).

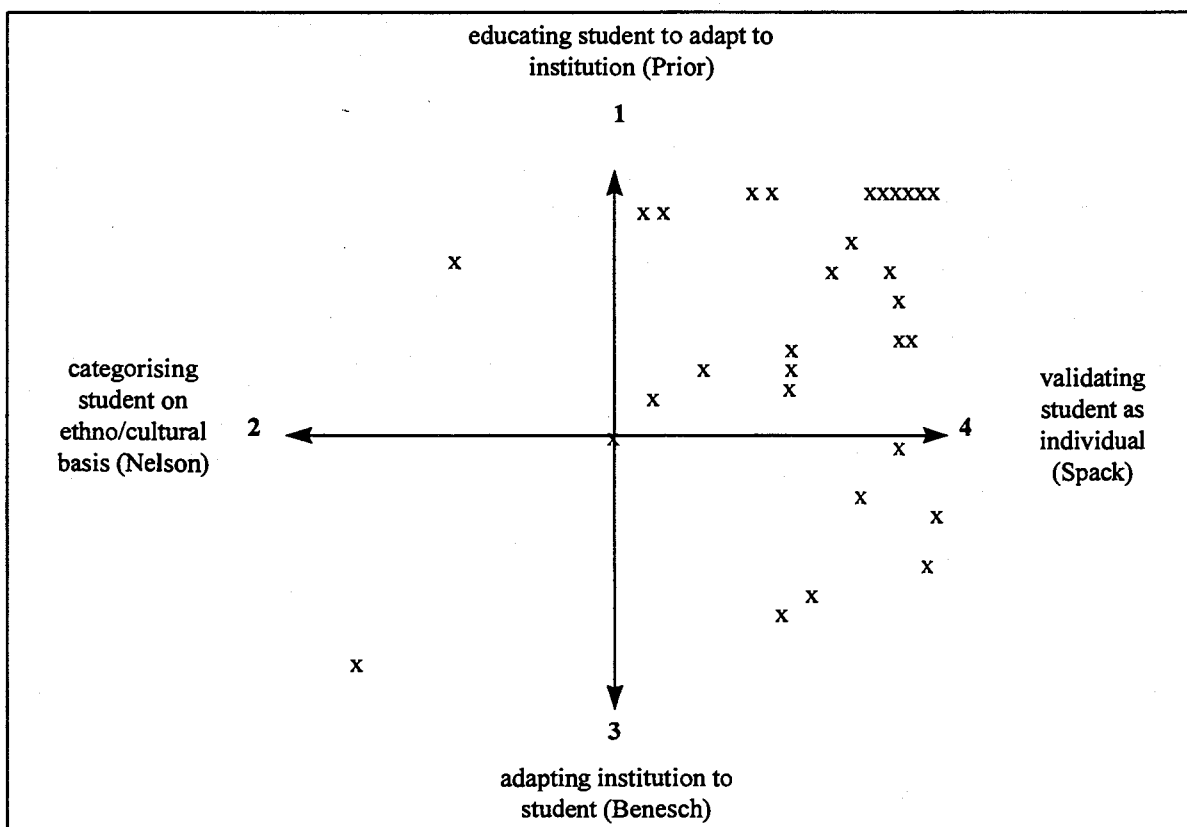


Figure 2. Ideological positioning of workshop participants in terms of their current actual teaching practice (n=30, x = red dot)

Green dots clustered in the bottom right hand quadrant (16 dots) and four were placed on the horizontal axis near the right hand end. Another six green dots were placed in the upper right hand quadrant, and three were placed on the vertical axis, with two in the centre of the grid and one midway between this point and the lower extremity (Figure 3).

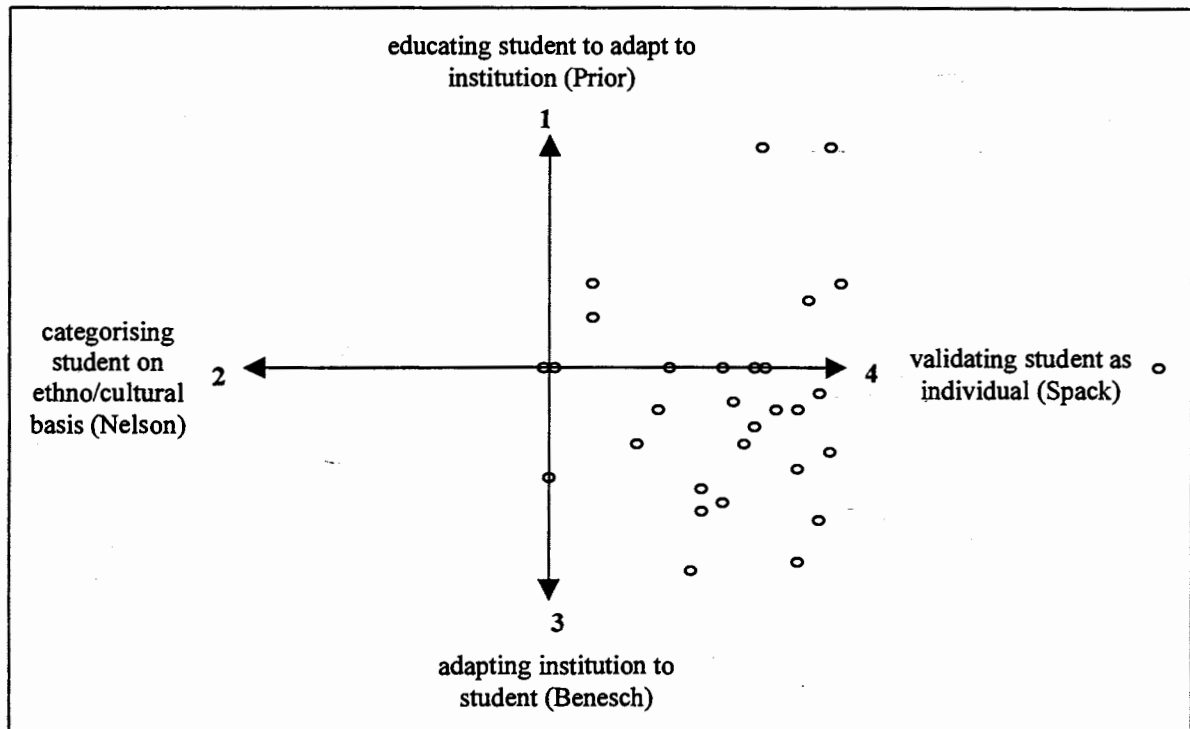


Figure 3. Ideological positioning of workshop participants in terms of their ideal practice (n=30, O = green dot)

PHASE 4: WHOLE WORKSHOP DISCUSSION OF IMPLICATIONS AND ISSUES

Lecturers' Approach to Students

The trends demonstrated by the emerging composite picture were fascinating for all of us, participants and observers alike, sharing as we do so many of the contexts, and thus the issues, which were raised. It was immediately noticeable that 27 of the 30 red dots were to the right of the vertical axis, with many more than half of them in the furthest quarter of the continuum. It was agreed that this shows an enormously strong practice amongst these TESOL lecturers of validating the student as an individual rather than approaching the teaching context with anecdotal or research evidence of students' ethno/cultural learning styles or language deficits. The ensuing discussion produced reasons for this, one of which was that working one-to-one with students, which many of us do, may lead naturally to this approach and practice. Furthermore, participants also commented on how they had picked up on what, to them, were the definitely negative implications of Nelson's (1998) term, 'categorising', and they followed Spack (1997) in associating this term with the 'stereotyping' of students, which was clearly not the believed practice of these TESOL practitioners.

Neither was it seen as a preferred practice. From the green dots grid it was evident that no participant had indicated that they wanted to move towards generalising on ethno/cultural grounds in their personal development, and the two lecturers originally positioned on this side had moved onto the axis itself, leaving the left quadrants empty. The participant who located her practice in, possibly, the least 'critical' position furthest to the left, responded to a request to comment by giving us a fascinating insight into her relationship with her students. As a white study adviser in a rural, black university in South Africa, she teaches students whose identity as members of a cultural group is much more important to them than their individual needs as learners. This participant explained that in the current environment it is her responsibility to approach her teaching with as much knowledge and understanding of her students' ethnic backgrounds and generalised needs as she can,

though she hopes to work towards a greater balance of perspectives in time, both for the students and the institution. Her position was clearly outside the general picture here.

Overall, these findings are especially interesting in the light of recent research, some of which was presented in a keynote address at this LAS conference (see Hawthorne, 1999) which suggests that it is fairly common practice for academic ESL and EFL teachers in Australia and overseas to work from 'common misconceptions' (Chalmers & Volet, 1997) and 'anecdotal stereotypes' (Kember & Gow, 1991) of so-called 'Asian' students, or students from 'Confucian Heritage Cultures (CHCs)', or 'internationals' (see also Biggs, 1994, 1997; Renshaw & Volet, 1995; Volet, Renshaw & Tietzel, 1994). The self-selected sample of TESOL lecturers in this workshop would in no way support the prevalence of this approach in Australia (see also Cadman, 2000).

Expectations of Change

Interestingly, in relation to the other axis, reflecting expectations of change through the educational processes of TESOL in tertiary institutions, there was only a slightly greater spread of views among participants. However, on this axis the majority of red dots was on the less radical side. Of the 30 participants, at least three quarters saw their practice as facilitating each student's mastery of the conventions and discourses required by the academy, with the emphasis on the lecturer's role in the adaptation of the student to the institution, rather than as attempting to change the institution to accommodate the NESB student. In the ensuing discussion, groups teased out why this was. One group humorously contrasted the '*realists who said we have to teach courses where we're teaching people how to cope with the academic, the specific academic discipline...up there*' (pointing to the upper quadrants) with the '*wishful thinkers, perhaps the wishful thinkers posing as realists, down here*'. One of the spokespeople explained that for her group an unresolved problem had been what was meant by 'institution': '*Do we mean the whole place and the whole sort of... procedures and the way they do things, or are we just talking about the disciplines...?*' This lack of clarity undermined lecturers' confidence about how far their practice extended in this direction, and, also significantly, how far they wanted it to.

More salient issues emerged as the groups discussed the implications of the green dots grid. Of the 22 participants who positioned themselves above the line in their practice, aiming to facilitate the student's adaptation to the dominant discourse and power structures of the academy, only six chose clearly to remain there in terms of their 'ideal' position. It was extremely interesting to note how strongly the TESOL lecturers in this workshop, despite the lack of clarity mentioned above, recorded their desire to shift downwards, mostly out of the upper quadrants, towards trying to influence their institutions to accommodate the distinctive situations of NESB students.

Again discussion of the reasons for these shifts raised pertinent issues which were spontaneously agreed upon. For example, there was some feeling among participants that for both the debates represented by the axes on the grids, the so-called 'critical' position carried the moral high ground over the 'pragmatic' position in this peer group of TESOL lecturers, and this feeling greatly influenced the preference to shift downwards. As one spokesperson said, '*...the interesting question is what it means, whether it really means we want to be there or we were trying to predict what a nice answer it would be.*'

Counterbalancing, restraining factors, on the other hand, were also introduced. One individual raised the consideration of '*lowering the standards of your institution*' which received knowing nods from listeners. A further agreed restraint on the debates was the insecure industrial situation of many of the participants. One group brought this out delightfully into the discussion forum, as seen in the dialogue below.

- Spokesperson: *A truly critical theorist teacher is of course going to move down here, so ... we did have one person bucking the trend and moving back up in the other direction...*
- Participant: *I'll be honest, it was me. It was me, and I was here to begin with but I think that, probably, I should be accommodating the institution a little bit more than I actually do.*
- Presenter: *Should be? ...No, this was a want to, this was a want to be sentence...*
- Participant: *I think I do want, I want to be... I think I want to be accommodating the institution, I ... you know...*
- Interjection: *You want to stay employed? [bursts of laughter]*
- Participant: *That's right! [laughter]*
- Spokesperson: *...in the beginning, this one provoked the most outrageous comments. I liked the comment from our group that went something like: GET REAL! [laughter]*

It was generally agreed that specific institutional constraints, both professional and industrial, create the fundamental context for much of our thinking on these ideological issues.

CONCLUSIONS

Academic TESOL lecturers find ourselves daily in situations in which we meet dilemmas rooted in our (often unarticulated) critical perspectives: how can we try to contribute positively to institutional change to prevent NESB students from being potentially marginalised by the exclusive practices and discourses of our institutions, without disadvantaging them by leaving them outside what we know to be the dominant knowledges and skills they need? This dilemma also gives rise to a related one which centres on how much we find ourselves categorising students based on their cultural backgrounds, rather than, in Ruth Spack's (1997, p. 773) terms, allowing these students 'to name themselves and thus define and construct their own identities' as they negotiate unfamiliar intellectual climates.

When we put these questions to 30 TESOL lecturers in a professional development workshop, it was clear that they overwhelmingly located their professional aims as, on the one hand, facilitating students' mastery of English language academic skills which may be neither valued nor appropriate in their countries of origin, and on the other hand, as seeking to validate individual students' situations and needs as learners rather than categorising them on cultural grounds. This second finding directly conflicts with the prevailing assumptions of TESOL lecturers' 'misconceptions' which underpins much recent research.

Interestingly, in the majority of cases, participants' ideals were also clear. Even despite different confounding and restraining considerations, these TESOL lecturers registered that they wished for a more socially critical practice in relation to how they conceptualise diverse students and also, much more markedly, to how they may be involved in institutional change to accommodate them. What was particularly significant was that lecturers related their own current practices to the constraints of their professional and industrial positions as much as to their philosophical ideals.

There were, to our view, considerations for the future which emerged naturally from this workshop. Firstly, if we are to move in the preferred directions indicated by our results, then as a profession we need to participate as fully as we can in all the contexts and at all the levels in which our work impacts upon our institutions: at policy level through membership of committees and advisory groups; at faculty level through curriculum design and staff development, both formally and informally; at a personal level through individual initiatives such as media contributions and collaboration with departmental staff; and not least, with students themselves in their own negotiations for change. In this way we can develop strategies to work more critically in all these environments and begin to effect in practice the shifts which we would like to help to bring about.

Finally, a second and unmistakable sense of promise for the future was evident in the workshop, in the enthusiasm, commitment and analytical rigour with which the workshop participants debated these deeply significant ideological issues. It has long been agreed that self-reflective practice is the key to successful teaching outcomes. The sincerity and integrity of these TESOL practitioners' reflections offer strong, positive potential, we believe, for valuable future contributions to internationalisation in tertiary institutions. It becomes the responsibility of those of us in this profession to keep these issues alive in, and through, our practice.

ENDNOTES

¹ The many and varied ways in which the descriptor term 'critical' may be used and interpreted are well explored by Colin Lankshear in *Changing Literacies* (1997, pp. 41-48). For the purposes of this paper we are using the term exclusively to refer to ways of 'making explicit the socially constituted character of knowledge, and asking in whose interests those 'knowledges' are thus constituted, legitimated and perpetuated.' (Lankshear, 1997, p. 44)

² Our focus on students whose first language is not English, and on the field of TESOL specifically, does not imply a special case for these students nor that the issues raised are irrelevant for students whose native language is English. Rather, TESOL is the field of our experience, our expertise and our debates.

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Discussions of discourse: LAS and the disciplines looking at language together

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Abstract

Some of the most interesting writing about writing looks at the ways in which the language of disciplines represents - and misrepresents - the process of making knowledge. Some of these insights may make us uneasy about our role, as teachers, in helping students learn how to cover their tracks with discourses that make the process of questioning, research, and reflection appear more purposive, linear, and objective than we know it to be. This paper looks at how the discourses work, what students gain and lose in the course of socialisation into academic discourse communities, and what teaching for empowerment might mean in this situation. It focuses on the role of teachers of language and academic skills (LAS), not just in mediating this process of socialisation for our students, but in working with their discipline tutors to make the discourse itself a focus of attention. Tutors who have learned the discourse of their disciplines by immersion are often interested in re-examining it from the perspective of a LAS teacher, and in sharing those insights with their students.

INTRODUCTION

There is a tension in our field between the idea that academic skills are most effectively taught in the context of the subjects that require them, and the feeling that students should be encouraged to maintain a critical distance from the discourses of power - a distance that is likely to be compromised if discussion of discourse is merged with induction into the disciplines. How can we both collaborate and criticise? This paper will look at this tension and at the potential for developing a program of integrated skills based on the critical apprenticeship already present in the disciplines. I will outline an experiment of this sort in my Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at La Trobe University, discussing both its usefulness and its current limitations.

Disciplines have traditionally been responsible for teaching research skills specific to the discipline, but not writing skills, which are often thought of as generic and not the business of the disciplines. Indeed, it is only recently that they have been considered the business of the universities at all. Before the expansion and diversification of universities in the middle of this century, students were expected to learn "writing" at school, and academic discourses by "osmosis", that is, by immersion in the linguistic and cultural practices of their disciplines. This is analogous to the "acquisition" model of language learning, according to which people learn a language much more fluently by operating within it than they can by studying about it (Gee, 1990, p. xv; Freedman, 1994). Academic osmosis can work, moreover; but for many students it does not. When it does not work, students learn that academic thinking is "not for them", either in the sense that they are not equal to it, if they blame themselves, or in the sense that they have been excluded by it, if they blame the institution. To address this alienation, and even attrition, universities increasingly offer instruction in the mysteries of academic discourse. It is possible for language and skills (LAS) specialists to be more explicit about the skills required than subject tutors often are; on the other hand, we frequently find that these skills are not general and remedial, but context-specific and developmental (Lea & Street, 1998; papers in Chanock, 1994). If all students might benefit from explicit discussion of the nature of the discourses that confront them, it makes sense to move this discussion back into the disciplinary context to which it belongs.

Explicating the Discourse

There is, however, a problem with this approach: like so many things, when looked at under a microscope, academic discourse is often not a pretty sight. To know it is not necessarily to love it. We may not wish to be in a position where we seem to be endorsing uses of language that we consider "of dubious value" (Luke, 1990, p. vii). In this paper I would like to consider what kind of problem this is; how much of a problem it is; and what we might do to address it. As a way into these questions, we can look at an excellent paper by Tim Moore in the *Monash University Linguistics Papers* (1999).

Moore's article is an account of his work with a PhD medical student who consulted him because her supervisor thought that "her write-ups of several joint research projects were not of a publishable standard" (p. 12). The supervisor had felt compelled to rewrite her drafts for publication, and hoped that she could learn this skill herself - though not from him. Moore compared the student's drafts with her supervisor's revisions, using two ideas from Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1985) and one from Swales' work on genre analysis (Swales, 1990). Moore looked at the participants and processes in each version; the thematic structures; and the way each section, in each version, related to the typical features Swales has identified in his "move analysis".

This turned out to be a particularly fruitful approach, for while a "generalised grammar" would have allowed Moore to help the student with her errors of "accuracy", such as agreement, the "generic grammar" that Moore used enabled him to help her with "appropriacy" as well (p. 12). Although the student had assumed that her problems were "grammar-related" (p. 12), many of the supervisor's changes were not explicable simply as surface corrections; they went further, apparently in response to tacit criteria about what could be said in a research article. Many of these changes were in the area of participants and processes, that is, who does what in a sentence. General grammar tells us that these should agree in number. Generic grammar goes further and looks at what kinds of "who" are typically found in the sentences, doing what kinds of things, and it was here that the supervisor had made changes of a consistent kind. In the student's text, the researchers appeared as participants; so did "other researchers' work ... relevant to the research at hand" (p. 13). In the supervisor's text, these people had disappeared (except for bracketed references), and the participants remaining were "Objects used in the research" and "the research itself, including various scientific concepts - 'experiment', 'hypothesis', 'effects', 'results', 'data', 'statistical significance', 'findings', etc." (p. 13).

Moreover, the investigation of thematic structure showed that the supervisor's sentences began with these participants as the grammatical subjects, where the students' sentences had been more varied, often beginning with phrases that referred to the purposes of the procedures carried out, e.g., "In order to obtain a longer peak phase ...", "To determine the effect ...", "In order to find out whether ...". By replacing these phrases with a bare narrative of procedures, the supervisor had removed the sense of a research process that responded to unfolding events. In these ways, Moore found, the supervisor's version created "an impression of orderliness and precision in the scientific procedures used", including "suppression of agency ... which ... may be seen as a rhetorical method aimed at de-emphasising the 'interpretative' nature of scientific enquiry." (p. 19). The student's version was "more haphazard and individual" (p.16), allowing the reader to see the thinking that accompanied the research process - which had not, in fact, been the seamless affair presented by the supervisor. In his section analysis, Moore shows further how the supervisor's reworkings, more consistent with Swales' "moves", contributed to "the impression that the project was perfectly conceived" (p. 17). The student's account was more accurate, but less professional; and by studying the differences that Moore identified, she could see how to shape her writing to be more acceptable within her field.

Thus, she was given an accelerated start in a process that can be long and painful, as we learn from a case study by Knorr-Cetina (1981). This study follows the progress of a scientific paper through sixteen drafts, in the course of which it changes, from a narrative of research by people, to a report of results of procedures followed. What drove the successive transformations of the text - which are very similar to those that Moore observed - was the comments of colleagues and competitors on the work-in-progress, combined with pressure by the senior collaborator on his juniors. The youngest of the three co-authors, Knorr-Cetina tells us, had already published forty papers, and it is tempting to wonder whether he might have saved himself a lot of time and irritation by consulting a LAS advisor early in his career!

Although Moore's approach enabled him to help his student, however, he was uneasy about this result. He had wanted to offer her a descriptive rather than a prescriptive account of successful writing in the genre she was trying to learn. "As the analysis progressed however, this distinction became increasingly difficult to maintain"; the student came to look upon her supervisor's way of writing as "more adequate" for science than her own (p. 19). With empowerment, in a mechanical sense, came disillusion in a sense that possibly matters more: "disillusion that generic knowledge involves essentially being informed of the rules of the game and learning that one is obliged to go along with them" (p. 19). As Mitchell (in Street, 1996, p. 122) puts it, the power that is gained by such means may "simply [be] that of the cynic."

Empowering or Not?

Moore situates his unease about his student's learning within a context of contemporary discussions of critical literacy, and the term itself contains the paradox that causes problems for skills teachers. Literacy gives students access to powerful texts, and, we hope, the means to create powerful texts of their own. However, many of us are ambivalent about power, because it enables both freedom and domination (Daniell, 1999, p. 406); thus we wish to "empower" our students but we do not wish to reproduce inequalities, and to do no more than give particular people a leg up the ladder of opportunity (for a thoughtful discussion of this dilemma, see Kramer-Dahl, 1995). Universities' grading systems purport to place people on different rungs of this ladder on the basis of merit; but students must demonstrate their merit by controlling a particular kind of discourse. Further, many of us worry that the key to mastery is not intelligence, thoughtfulness, or effort, so much as ethnicity and class - that academic discourse is closest to the home dialect of middle class anglo people and that students from this background therefore have an unfair advantage in learning it (Martin, 1991, p. 334). Bourdieu and Passeron see this advantage as "linguistic capital": while they acknowledge that "University French has never been anyone's mother tongue", nonetheless "this...language is very unequally removed from the languages actually spoken by different social classes" (1990, p. 115) - and the same is true of university English. This anxiety has permeated, in Australia, the debates about genre theory (e.g., Reid, 1987; Woodward-Kron, 1999) and the development of critical literacy (Kramer-Dahl, 1995), and in the U.S.A., the debates about social constructivism in composition studies (for a useful survey see Nystrand, Greene & Wiemelt, 1993); bilingual education; cultural literacy; and the proper role of writing centres (Grimm, 1996; Bawarshi & Pelkowski, 1999; Vandenberg, 1999; Boquet, 1999). Bawarshi and Pelkowski (1999), for example, see writing centres as engaged in cultural imperialism, in their efforts to change not the writing so much as the writer, as North declared in 1984. We tend to think of our project as an emancipatory one (Freeman & Medway, 1994, p. 2); but if helping our students to succeed means showing them how to discard their own ways of thinking and writing in favour of the ways of the dominant class, then we are collaborating in the reproduction of a culture of inequality (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1984; Hewlett, 1996; Lillis, 1997).

Re-Examining the Discourse

There are various views on how we might resolve, or at least live with, this paradox. It has been argued that we should not teach the genres required of our students because they are "mind-forged manacles" (Dixon, 1987, p. 9) that regulate what can be said and how. It has been suggested that we should nonetheless examine them closely with our students, because they do more harm if unexamined. "It is not the serious attention to disciplinary discourse that restricts our intellectual options", writes Bazerman, "but the refusal to attend that fosters the hegemony of narrow discourses" (1992, p. 66). It is even possible, in this view, that our students may be able to change restrictive literacy practices once they know what these consist of, for genres are open to creative uses and in fact do change and develop over time (Bizzell, 1986; Christie, 1987; Bazerman, 1992, p. 63; Kramer-Dahl, 1995, p. 22; Mitchell in Street, 1996).

To enable this, Moore feels that "a more critical descriptivism" is needed, "one that not only helps students to identify the characteristic features of writing in their field, but also encourages them to consider why high status texts are constructed in the ways they are, and to what ends - epistemologically, rhetorically, even ideologically" (1999, p. 19). There is already a considerable literature on the kinds of transformation to be found in scientific writing: financial interests represented as intellectual imperatives; contingency represented as design; human activities represented as natural processes; and so on (e.g. Knorr-Cetina, 1981; Latour & Woolgar, 1986). (It is worth remembering, however, that research articles are only one mode of communication in a discipline, and that less formal communications in science, including oral forms such as seminar presentations, are often personal and even dramatic narratives of laboratory life (see, e.g. Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Rosse & Prince, 1999).

Writing in the humanities and social sciences, with its "I"s and "we"s, its thinking, suggesting, arguing and urging, may appear far more congruent than scientific writing, and therefore, perhaps, more honest, less artificial. It is likely, however, that further investigation will show this to be an illusion (cf. Bazerman, 1981; Nelson, Megill & McClosky, 1987; Nash, 1990; MacDonald, 1990; Bazerman and Paradis, 1991). The "I" who speaks is always a discursive "I" (Lillis, 1997, p. 196; Chanock, 1997), and even when it seems most personal, as in feminist discourse, its use is as much a means of establishing authority as is its suppression in scientific discourse (Howes in Street, 1996, p. 115). And when it comes to the grammatical realisation of ideas, we find in Arts, if to a lesser extent than in Sciences, widespread use of grammatical metaphor to achieve abstraction (Woodward-Kron, 1999). Nominalised processes stand in for human actors; ideas, not people, contend with one another (Eggins, et al., 1987; Wignell et al., 1987; Martin, 1991; Gerot, 1992). "Excessive nominalisation" is one of the features that MacDonald (1990, p. 35) identifies as making "vanguard writing" in her field of English

literature “relatively unreadable” (p. 59). Others are “excessive clause length” (p. 34) and several types of “terminological difficulty” (pp. 42ff.), which she analyses in detail. The result, she says, is a style that violates English departments’ own advice on writing for clarity and coherence, and that places too much burden of inference on the reader, when responsibility for clear communication should lie with the writer. That the discipline rewards a style which excludes so many readers leads MacDonald to suspect that “vanguard writers are ...involved in an elaborate ritual of gamesmanship to position themselves in an elite and to maintain the boundaries of the circle against those outside it” (1990, p. 59).

In Arts as in Science, the apparatus of authority, the formality of diction, and the language of abstraction create a distance between writer and reader that students may experience as disdain, and by which they may feel silenced. As a student told Mary Lea, “I thought I could write until I came here!” (1994, p. 64; cf Lillis, 1997, pp. 194-5) The frustrations of students like Lea’s resonate with the doubts that many of us feel in our role as guides to the culture of academic study. Are we in fact helping students towards something worth doing? We worry, not so much that the emperor has no clothes, but that the clothes have no emperor. One student complained to Lillis (1997, p. 186) that “some of these rules are made up for no reason whatsoever ... That’s why it’s difficult to learn, you see, because sometimes there’s no reason why.” We would probably not agree that there are no reasons for them, but we may question whether the reasons are good ones. Are academic literacy practices a necessary embodiment of useful ways of thinking, or are they merely about display?

Is academic discourse, as Bourdieu and Passeron have it, no more than “the manipulation of words...[the] scholarly mastery of scholarly language” (1990, p. 72), characterised by “verbal acrobatics, hermetic allusion, disconcerting references or peremptory obscurity” (1990, p. 125)? These features of academic discourse are certainly familiar, and vastly irritating. But I cannot agree with Bourdieu and Passeron that they are all there is. Their view of higher education is one in which an “explicit pedagogy” designed to enable students of all social classes to understand academic discourse would never be proposed “because it expresses the contradictions of the system and contradicts its fundamental principles” (1990, pp. 100-101). The fact that all of us are employed in the very enterprise that Bourdieu and Passeron consider unthinkable, however, should at least make us wonder whether universities are in fact so exclusive, so culturally conservative, that a critical engagement with academic discourse can only be undertaken from the outside, as a “guerilla rhetoric” in Wilden’s (1980) memorable phrase. Programs for “reading and writing against the grain of academic discourse” (Kramer-Dahl, 1995, p. 21) present themselves as transgressing against what Lillis calls the “regulative nature of academic writing conventions” (1997, p. 182). They are, however, presented in academic publications, according to those regulative conventions, by people in academic jobs. The view that “education should be dialogic in nature and should constitute a space for challenging and critically examining established fields of knowledge in the light of new ideas and approaches ... sits uneasily”, says Lillis, “within an institutional framework where the dominant model is one of transmission” (p. 182). Yet, sit there it does; indeed, as she notes, it is “widely voiced by practitioners and writers in higher education” (p. 182).

This must lead us to wonder, I think, about one of the paradoxes of our profession. While critical educators complain about the transmission model of education, with its picture of learners as passive, “empty vessels” into which lecturers pour received wisdom, at the same time it seems that the deficiencies that lecturers deplore in students have to do with inability to think critically and to construct arguments. No tutor has ever referred a student to me for help with regurgitation. The co-existence of these complaints within our discourse is an interesting problem, though it may mean no more than that both models of education operate side by side, and that different writers hail from different disciplines or different local situations, with different experiences of learning.

With the Discourse, Against the Grain

My own observations suggest that reading and writing against the grain is not an act of resistance to academic discourse; it *is* academic discourse, or at least one element within it, and university education is designed to get students to do it. This may occur at different stages in different institutions, and in different disciplines, but it is a model towards which much of university education is directed. We see it in the structure of the texts our students read, which begin by establishing the context of received knowledge and then proposing to do something more or less different. This structure - which Swales calls “Creating a research space”(1990), and which is mirrored in interpretative articles that begin by “creating an idea space” - is one of those constraining forms we may not like because they are constraining. Its function, however, is to ensure that what is published will be the result of thinking critically about what has been said before. Furthermore, when we look at some of the other constraints of academic discourse - for example, attribution and referencing; criteria of relevance and reliability of evidence

- we find that they function not only to restrict what can be included in a piece of writing, but also to enable new things to be said. We can be open to new ideas because we can be confident that they have been arrived at - or tested - by a method that is open to inspection and criticism. The conventions of referencing give us access to the sources the author has used, if we want to see whether we would make of them what this author has made. Finally, the author's conclusions are not allowed to rest on authority or opinion, but must be seen to emerge from sound evidence. Knowledge is unstable, in our system, but its mode of reasoning is stable; it is the "yes, but" mode that both ensures instability of knowledge and allows us to live with it, mediating its uncertainty.

This is not to say that all that is written is useful or interesting, or even comprehensible; nor that everything useful or interesting will get published; nor that only academic knowledge is useful or interesting. With all the pretensions and limitations of academic life, the claim I want to make is a very limited one, but still enough for us to be going on with in our teaching. It is that thinking against the grain not only is not suppressed by academic literacy practices, it is actually mandated by them. It follows that if we want to encourage it, we should be able to develop it in ways that are complementary to students' normal work in the disciplines, not as a guerilla action from the outside.

For, just as we find that thinking against the grain is routine in academic publications, it often forms a core activity of student learning as well. I am in a position to argue this only for my own area, which is Humanities and Social Sciences, but others are invited to consider whether it is also true of other disciplines with which they are familiar. In a typical first year subject in the Faculty where I work, the focus is as much on methods and the forms they give rise to, as it is on content. Students are taught to examine primary sources of information to see what can be concluded from them, and also what cannot, so that they begin to be in a position to see how the authorities have arrived at their interpretations, and to consider whether those interpretations are justified. Their next exercise, often, is to read a book or article and describe its purpose, its thesis, the structure of its argument, and the nature of its evidence, and to evaluate it, before they tackle an assignment in which they will produce their own argument on some topic. For some, this is a tedious piece of disciplinary navel-gazing; they would rather harvest the knowledge than focus so closely on how it is made. For that, however, they would not need a university course, just a library. What is on offer in my Faculty is an insider's look at how knowledge is made in the disciplines, and for the majority who are not going to remain in that discipline beyond their BA, that focus should enable them to go into whatever career does interest them and think about how knowledge is made in that context.

LAS in the Disciplines

The role of skills teachers, in this situation, is complementary to the purposes of the disciplines. Subject tutors teach students how knowledge is made in their discipline. Skills teachers teach them how to hear what is being said about this; how to identify arguments and evidence in their reading; how to use the scholarly apparatus that connects their efforts with the conversations of the discipline. These skills are both generic, in the sense that they are needed in a range of subjects, and discipline-specific in the sense that the "what" of each of these activities looks very different in different disciplines. Because they are generic, it is our business to teach them; and because they are discipline-specific, it should be possible to teach them in the context of subjects in the disciplines.

The question arises, if these skills are not just the black tie and tails that enable an essay to get into polite society - if they are actually what the work of the disciplines is about - why are they not routinely taught by the tutors in the disciplines themselves? This comes back to the distinction with which we began, between learning by osmosis and learning by instruction. Most people who teach in universities learned these skills by "osmosis" or enculturation (Woodward-Kron, 1999, p. 2), which no more enables them to turn what they know into instruction than being a native speaker enables one to teach a language. As Judith Langer found when interviewing teachers about their requirements of students' work, "the closer teachers' comments get to their actual work in classrooms, the greater the emphasis on specific content at the expense of the rules of argument and evidence that represent the ways of thinking unique to each discipline ... notions of discipline-specific ways of thinking were mostly implicit. They had a more or less well established vocabulary but not a systematic way to think about it, and so their talk about ways of thinking came and went - unnoticed and unmarked" (1992, pp. 83-84).

Telling students that they must be critical, analyse, and argue is not the same thing as showing them what those things mean and how to do them (cf Lea & Street, 1998, pp. 161-163). Many tutors do break down what they want their students to learn and devise activities that focus explicitly on the skills involved; but many tutors

don't. In my Faculty, we have introduced a program to foreground the skills our students need and enable the tutors in the disciplines to reflect on these and to teach them, with very minimal adjustments to the curricula they already follow. Having done a trial run this year, most of the tutors involved responded enthusiastically to this initiative, and decided to continue with it next year.

The La Trobe Project

The project has been successful, I think, precisely because it has sought to find out what first year subjects were already doing, and make that more explicit to the students (Chanock, 1996, 1998; Chanock & Tyrrell, 1996). The observations on which it is based cover the thirteen years I have been teaching in the Faculty. I sit in on lectures in a range of subjects early in the first semester, to see how each subject is introduced to the students. I collect the subject guides and read through them to discover the design of each subject: the main questions it asks, the methods it teaches, the kinds of sources the students will work with, the sequence of assessment tasks, and how the various components - the lectures, tutorial readings and questions, and assignments - are related to each other. It is not possible to do this for every subject every year, but over several years I cover a wide range. This gives me an idea of what the subjects are designed to teach students how to do; but I find, when I work with individual students on their own writing, that often they have not formed the same ideas about this. Many of their difficulties with assignments stem from not having understood how particular tasks relate to the methods they should be learning, because they are focussed on content rather than on method.

Most of my work of interpreting the purposes of assignments is done in individual tutorials, but I have also tried to reach more students with this kind of discussion because the need for it is not remedial, but common to most of the first year cohort. First I developed a series of open lectures dealing with the things I thought everybody needed to know. Foremost among these is that university is for learning how knowledge is made. That is, I explain the design of first year subjects in terms of its relation to the professional activity of university teachers. When I talk about how knowledge is made, I am speaking ethnographically rather than normatively; this is a descriptive, not a prescriptive project, and I take Moore's point that this is a difficult distinction to maintain, and needs to be spelt out as we go. What I describe to students is the spiraling process of questioning, consulting primary sources, selecting from these and interpreting them to form conclusions, which give rise to further questions, and so on. First year assignments focus students on each stage of this process, teaching them both how it is done and how it is evaluated: from practising with primary sources to criticising secondary sources, and eventually to producing some themselves. The mysteries of first year study - why students have to read confusing, disorderly primary sources when scholars have already been there and done that; why the secondary sources don't agree; why the subjects are so largely about argument and opinion when they might be expected to be about information; why students have to reference everything in their work; why straightforward reporting of the reading is rarely adequate; why students must adopt a scholar's, not a student's voice in their writing for assessment - these things make sense only in terms of the effort to teach students simultaneously how to use and how to criticise the methods of their discipline.

From lecturing on these ideas, I have moved to trying to collaborate with first year subject coordinators to integrate such a focus into their subjects, so that all the students will get some explicit discussion, not just about what skills they need to develop, but why (cf Bawarshi & Pelkowski, 1999, p. 54). The first step in this was to develop materials for use in one subject whose coordinator was interested in piloting the approach, and at the end of this pilot all the students in the subject were surveyed for their views on the materials. Eighty-nine percent of those responding thought the focus on discourse had been worthwhile (and 43% would have liked it extended). When asked "If this is proving helpful to you, does it help only in your work in [this subject], or in other subjects also?", 67% thought it was helping them across their range of subjects. On the strength of this assessment, I asked the Faculty to try it out more widely.

I developed a series of five weekly readings and tutorial activities, dealing with the areas of confusion I had found to be common: Transition to university study (with its new purposes and questions); Primary sources (as unprocessed information); Secondary sources (as processing via argument); Note taking (as acknowledgement of the disciplinary conversation); and Critical Reading. The materials are designed to be used during the first few weeks of the semester, each topic matching up with the work already scheduled in each subject. Each of the readings, which orient the students to the purpose of that week's work, is very brief (between half a page and two pages), so these do not place an extra burden on the students. Similarly, the tutorial activities take little extra time because they use whatever readings the tutorial is focussing on that week anyway. For example, in the first week, when tutors normally go through the subject guide in tutorials, the students are asked to colour highlight all the questions they find there, including those posed in the introductory materials to the course, the tutorial

questions, and the assignments. This leads to a discussion of the design of the course and the way in which its components relate to each other and each assignment builds upon the ones before. Similarly, when students are going to discuss the argument in a secondary reading, they are asked to colour highlight its thesis and topic sentences, and look together at the way the argument is structured. The activities ensure that students get explicit modeling and practice in the tasks they have to do for their subjects, and get to talk about why they are doing them. The last bit is important because, as Lillis says, "making explicit [should] not mean giving handouts at the beginning of courses, ... but rather, setting up a framework for dialogue" (1997, p. 182).

In the months leading up to this trial, I met with the first year coordinators who wanted to be involved, and talked about how they wanted to use the materials. A few wanted only to adopt the general principle of incorporating more explicit signposting into their lectures and tutorials. More chose to use the materials as I had written them, in whole or in part, and others asked me to help them adapt the materials more closely to their subjects. Having done this, I handed the project over to the subject teachers to trial in the first semester of 1999.

Benefits of the Project

When I surveyed all participating staff at the end of the semester, to evaluate the trial, all those who had used the ideas or the materials in any form felt that they were useful, and wished to continue using them next year. None had encountered any problems with the materials, but some asked me to develop more to deal with particular needs they had become aware of as a result of focussing explicitly on skills. Some had extended the focus themselves, using the materials as a model to generate further activities throughout the semester. A number of kinds of benefits were noted for both tutors and students: the materials helped the tutors to remember what was confusing about starting out at university; they oriented new tutors to the subject and ensured a unity of approach across tutorial groups; they made the course design and expectations clearer for both tutors and students; and they explained to the students what was required in dealing with the readings each week.

While staff felt it was "really important that the skills are geared to their specific reading for the subject", the students seem to have been able to see what their subjects had in common, for "A number of students reported on the benefits of the weekly skills exercises, and said that once they'd done them in this subject, they then knew what was expected of them in other subjects." This would seem to support the idea that, for all their diversity of subject matter, the disciplines in the Faculty are putting students through a similar kind of apprenticeship to academic study. This is important, because it is so difficult to see in first year. As a student elsewhere told Lea and Street (1998, p. 164), "The thing I'm finding most difficult in my first term here is moving from subject to subject and knowing how you're meant to write in each one. I'm really aware of writing for a particular tutor as well as for a particular subject. Everybody seems to want something different" (cf. McCarthy, 1987).

At this stage, we have not surveyed the students because the range of ways in which the initiative was administered, in different subjects, would make comparisons difficult. Next year more disciplines will be involved, and as adoption is consolidated, students can be asked for evaluations in the subjects that have integrated the skills focus most thoroughly.

What I would like to emphasise about this program is that it does not just tell students what they have to do, but explains those requirements in terms of the culture of academic study: its purposes, its procedures, and its values. The emphasis is not on regulating what may be said, but on explaining why the conventions are as they are.

Limitations

What this project does not address, however, is the problem of voice, and especially, of high and low prestige dialects. Discourse is a complex weave of many things: purposes, methods, forms, values, markers of status and markers of taste. I have pulled out of this weave the parts of academic discourse that I think are worth learning - the aim of critically examining how knowledge is made, and the method by which that is done - and devised a way of focussing staff and students' attention on these. I am aware, however, that it may be objected that discourse is not divisible in this way: that communicative competence is an all or nothing affair. Is it possible to be enthusiastic about the aims of academic discourse and at the same time to resist its voice?

I do not think it is possible to refuse to use an academic voice, just as it is impossible to wear a tracksuit to many jobs. Every social setting has its norms of propriety, and there is no reason to expect that universities will be any different. It is possible, however, to adopt a stance towards these, something like rendering unto Caesar. If I speak with an academic voice, it does not have to be my only voice. I am aware, however, that none of my voices has ever been stigmatised as inadequate for intellectual purposes, and I do not wish to try to speak for

those who have had this experience. American academics from minority backgrounds have movingly debated this issue, without resolution. Richard Rodriguez, who lost his childhood voice in Spanish to acquire another in English, feels this loss as "grievous" but worthwhile in view of what was gained (1982, p. 6). Keith Gilyard, an African-American linguist, rejects this acquiescence in the loss of culture, asserting that "the eradication of one tongue is not prerequisite to the learning of a second" (1991, p. 160).

I would like to be able to address this in the program of integrated skills, but have not yet taken any steps to do so. It seems possible, however, that the program is creating opportunities to look more closely at how language works with staff and students. As a result of working with the subject teachers on this project, I have been invited to visit classes and talk about reading and writing during regular lecture or tutorial times, and have talked about things like the effect of nominalisation in creating abstract - and potentially baffling - discourse. I have shown a Politics class, for example, how actions are turned into trends by nominalisations such as industrialisation or urbanisation. I pointed out that the use of such terms assumes common understanding and thereby closes off questions about what they mean; and suggested that this was a likely source of confusion and that students should feel free to ask tutors to go back, behind these terms, and explain who was doing what. The tutors, too, were interested in this, and have generally welcomed my attempts to open up discussion of the features of discourse that are opaque to students. It may be possible, therefore, to add a topic on "Voice", and invite the subject teachers to engage explicitly with the language that their disciplines use to construct subjectivity and objectivity, involvement and distance, and, more often than some of us would like, the sheer display that students should not have to think of as inseparable from the making of meaning in academic contexts.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the question of how far inculcation of academic discourse can be compatible with critical literacy, and outlined an initiative to bring the two together. This is empowering, I think, in that it demystifies a process that too often remains obscure to many students because it operates at an unarticulated level of culture. Our integrated focus on discourse does not hold up academic writing as the pattern of "good" writing and thereby devalue other forms and other voices, but identifies the most important elements of academic literacy and explains them in terms of the purposes and values of academic culture. For some, it may not go far enough, as it is not about resistance to the culture or its institutions; but I have tried to show that, inasmuch as a critical approach is already part of academic culture, it should by possible, by highlighting that approach, to encourage critical distance without personal alienation.

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Learning support in South Africa obscured and marginalised through ideological and historical baggage

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Vista University, South Africa.

Abstract

The South African debates around learning have been complicated by a number of important factors. First, the Apartheid legacy which has confounded the issues of culture and race which, in turn, has impacted on the perceptions of learning support. Historical precedents have been set for the approaches to learning support. Some of these approaches have been invalidated because of the ideological perspective that informed them. Second, the speed of transformation of higher education between 1994 and 1999 has forced institutions to adopt models of support which are not necessarily well researched or take multiculturalism seriously. Third, students classified as advantaged or disadvantaged have merged into a blurred group needing support to deal with new issues in addition to traditional academic support issues. This paper compares the educational environment of the eighties with that of the nineties and attempts to trace the notions which informed the debates surrounding learning support then and now. The South African debate on Academic Skills vs Academic Development shows how perceptions and ideological practices have impacted on the field of work. Current debates arising from the emergence of the African Renaissance are discussed, as these point to the emergence of a new cultural identity which will have to be taken seriously by all involved in education. The paper concludes with suggestions for bridging the ideological perspectives and the needs of students within institutions working towards quality delivery. The use of the MSL questionnaire with first year Geography students is discussed as a method to determine the types of support students need. The method of research for this paper includes both a literature review, interviews, and a case study using the MSLQ at the Welkom Campus of Vista University, a traditionally disadvantaged institution.

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines learning support in South Africa as it is currently experienced. The factors that marginalise learning support are discussed in the sections dealing with the historical impact of Apartheid policy, the ideological expectations and the impact of the African Renaissance on student aspirations. The paper highlights the debate between Academic Support and Academic Development in South Africa. A case study, using the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) with a group of students at Vista University, indicates that learning support is vital in South Africa 2000, and an appeal is made on behalf of students that academic development be taken seriously.

ACADEMIC SUPPORT VERSUS ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Apartheid policy of separate education led to the establishment of Vista University, an Historically Disadvantaged Institution (HDI). Vista has seven contact campuses placed next to the traditional townships, with a distance campus being the eighth component administered through the central campus in Pretoria. The idea was to provide higher educational institutions for Black students who would then not need to apply at Historically White Institutions (HWI) for further studies. The apartheid ideology was thus served.

Historically, Academic Development (AD) referred to practices within Black institutions, whereas Academic Support occurred in open White institutions (Stewart, 1991, p. 124). The terminology changed and in the 90s HWIs began using the term AD as the scope of their work increased. Despite similarities in the structures of the programmes offered, qualitative differences in educational objectives and pedagogies existed.

Academic Support programmes had been introduced in the HWIs initially to support Black students studying at these institutions who had come from severely constrained educational backgrounds - constrained financially with few having school libraries, laboratories or even ablution blocks, and constrained educationally with poorly

trained teachers. In developing learning support programmes, many historically White institutions focussed on what they believed were skills students needed to "bridge the gap" between their educationally disadvantaged background and university. Academic Support programmes were needed to "assist Departmental staff to bridge and support under prepared students into fulfilling academic experiences and careers" (Blunt, 1993, p. 96). Blunt (1993, p. 96) identifies, in addition to bridging, the following concepts, activities and projects, which are associated with AS: language across the curriculum; cognitive skills; peer group learning; mentoring; holistic support and counselling, bursaries, and role models; giving support for accommodation and travel; study orientations; meta-learning and learning styles; problem solving; computer-based education; study skills; and critical thinking. The list provides a spectrum of the needs lecturers and academics identified their students as having. (At the same time the list cannot be confined purely to students coming from deprived educational backgrounds since these problems are currently experienced by most students, especially so as more students have access to higher education.)

The basic assumptions underlying AS as noted by Lazarus (ISHE, 1995, p. 1) are that:

- The "problem" is located in the student.
- The "problem" primarily manifests in communicative, cognitive and subject specific deficiencies.
- The "problem" can be cured through academic support programmes such as additional tutoring, language courses, foundation years and slow streams.

AS has been marginalised in its aims to address and successfully support the majority of students by its positioning within an institution. AS is limited in terms of resources, finance and structural effectiveness, and is not effective in addressing student and staff needs. In accepting the above aims of AS, an institution such as Vista University has to transform its teaching and learning processes, which includes curricula redesign and effective staff development programmes.

Academic Development (AD) was seen to be the answer to the criticism levelled at AS programmes that they had become "... the buffer between the university and Black community - a kind of academic group area ..." (Mehl, 1988, p. 52). AD, as promoted by the South African Association for Academic Development (SAAAD) from its establishment in 1986, represented a shift of emphasis from the student to the curriculum as a whole (Walker & Badsha, 1993, p. 5). AS programmes were then seen to be passively part of the educational "state ideological apparatus", while the problem of student difficulties was seen to lie solely with the "... social structure, power structure, and collective personality of the university itself" (Vilakazi & Tema, 1985, p. 3). These views point to the suspicions and mistrust that existed in the eighties as a result of the ideological differences people subscribed to. Although the term "support" is viewed suspiciously in South Africa by some - since it implies something outside the mainstream of academic work - it is still widely used as a term (McLean & Surtie, 1995, p. 75) and may have wider meanings than that ascribed to it in South Africa.

Academic Development is particularly about "... institutional change and capacity building, as much as individual development ... first order change improves current practice without altering the basic organizational arrangements, or changing the way lecturers and students perform their roles. Second order change, however, challenges the way the institution is put together, its goals, structures and roles, including collaborative work cultures ... academic development is second order change. It aims to bring together student learning, staff development, and organizational development in an integrated process at departmental and faculty level." (Walker & Badsha, 1995, p. 2).

The short-term aim of Academic Development programmes (Agar et al., 1991, p. 5) in the early nineties was the facilitation and enrichment of teaching and learning. The medium-term aim was to increase the number of Black students who graduated, succeeded in chosen professions and who reached leadership positions. The long-term aim was in the contribution to structural change, in terms of the vision of a non-racial, democratic, post - Apartheid South Africa through changing institutions, attitudes and structures within the wider society. Years later, the first aim is still relevant in achieving the second aim. How effectively the long-term aim has been achieved within the institutions has been dependent on the structural positioning; either central, as in a unit or centre, or peripheral, as in a department. Further research is necessary to establish the outcomes of these short, medium and long-term goals. Other factors in terms of the leadership and funding of units or the departments contribute to the effective achievement of institutional change, but are material for research.

The rapid changes within the very complex social structures of South African higher education (referred to by Pusey) has resulted in the fulfilment of some of the aims of Academic Development, such as greater access to institutions in 2000. At the same time the changes emphasise the need for AD to develop and rethink its aims, practises and direction as articulated by Agar (1991, p. 5), precisely because not all the consequences of AD could be anticipated. In this regard the following factors have had a major impact on AD within the period following 1994. The factors are as follows:

- The election of the majority party to government;
- The rapid transformation of education allowing for massification and access to all higher education institutions by all students;
- Financial crises within higher education.

For example, in 1991, due to state policy on a quota of Black students allowed at HDIs, a small number of Black students started to emerge as leaders from HWI. AD contributed a platform through which transformation at institutional level could take place (Mehl, 1992, pp. 5-6). This view is similar to the idea that AD contributes to institutional change as expressed by Drewett and others (1991, p. 122).

Certain institutions faced with financial losses have closed AD units as part of crisis management, in order to save money. The repercussions of such actions on student retention rates is open for further research. Scott (1996, p. 36) points to the importance of distinguishing between student development activities that have become recurrent (such as AD tutorial programmes) and innovative developmental work which is aimed at producing lasting improvement in approaches and systems. Once such programmes or approaches have been established, they ought to be funded from recurrent resources in order to be sustained. "Bridging" or "foundation" courses which were initially developed as AD initiatives become recurrent and indispensable to a department, faculty and institution and should be resourced as such. The mechanisms whereby institutions fund such programmes or units differ greatly. Where funding was provided by alternative routes to state subsidies it has often been the case that units have been formed. However, where state subsidy was relied upon, and staffing levels related to, the number of students within a department - as in the case of Vista University - Academic Skills Programme co-ordinators could not access the state funding and so were originally funded by grants from the International Development Trust (IDT) or through other funds raised by the director of the department. Study skills appointments became part of the University's payroll in 1995.

Important questions have been raised in recent debates across AD boundaries relating to the function of AD in the nineties. It seems significant that as long as AD in South Africa is used as an instrument to achieve a goal other than focussing on educational needs and principles it is going to be at the short end of the stick. In taking cognisance of cultural aspirations of the majority of people in SA, it seems prudent to test trends through rigorous research rather than using programmes to fight for causes. The African renaissance is a very significant ideal and will be briefly discussed, but it would seem foolish to use AD to promote the renaissance instead of fostering the values and principles involved in respecting the emerging cultural movement alongside sound educational programmes/ principles.

AFRICAN RENAISSANCE

Adding to the sensitivities of the legacy of apartheid is the growing awareness of the need to value African Culture. Apartheid separated people and offered disparate opportunities for separate groups of South Africans. Programmes that ignore the issues of multi-linguism and multiculturalism, or that try to separate students into ability groups will fail. The paradoxical situation exists that all eleven languages are valued equally by the SA constitution, although the medium of instruction at institutions is predominantly either English or Afrikaans. Furthermore, paradigm shifts are needed in developing courses/ programmes that foster both national and international standards and values. All those involved in learner support should be aware of the trends highlighted by the African renaissance movement, which tends towards fostering national pride for cultural traditions and practices.

The emphasis in the African renaissance is on valuing culture. African culture is defined as the product of African philosophy and ideas, of moral, ethical and aesthetic values and of a spiritual and material (artefacts and behaviour) ontology which gives Africans their unique world view (Mthembu, 1999, p. 2). Language plays a very important role in culture. Mthembu gives the example of a discussion taking place between friends, in

which the merits of using a few words to express a concept clearly are juxtaposed against the traditional Zulu style of using a long phrase to say the same thing with more words. The argument is used that the longer Zulu form is preferable as "the Zulu language should be spoken in less haste and brevity, and in an artistic way. This is done to establish a cordial relationship with the person one is conversing with. To a Zulu person, speaking in a few words (like in Latin) creates communication barriers which impede openness and mutual appreciation" (Mthembu, 1999, p. 11).

The implications are enormous for AD practitioners working within traditional Western perceptions of academic writing where one gets to the essence of an argument through concise and precise language. As African languages are oral by nature, the implications of written African languages in academe have not been explored fully. Complaints by lecturers often revolve around students' poor usage of the English language, which is often a second or third language. It is not only the use of language or choice of language that is an important element of the cultural debate; the very perceptions and concepts expressed become significant. A high degree of sensitivity and understanding of the represented African cultures on a campus is needed. This is illustrated in the remarks made in response to the MSLQ presented later in this paper.

The African renaissance needs to be taken seriously by AD and higher education institutions, as it conceptualises the aspirations of the present and future generations of South Africans. In a "global society" pressure is intense to produce students who are skilled to perform globally in all fields. Yet in SA where national skills are being identified and needs are being assessed for the smooth running of the country, focus is needed. Two masters cannot be served simultaneously.

VISTA UNIVERSITY IN THE CONTEXT OF SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Within the Vista University context, the majority of the student body is Black and comes from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. According to Jenkins (1996), the tuition model originally drafted for Vista, which should have made Academic Support programmes redundant, was not successful in practice. This tuition model, the Vista Guided Self Study Model, was based on the supposition that all the students were coming from the same background (Department of Education and Training, or DET) and that academic support should not be "added on", but integral to the mainstream teaching of the University. One of its principles was that large lecture halls were impersonal and did not cater for student needs. The number of formal lectures was reduced to two per week. Small tutorial classes complemented the more formal, larger lectures. Study manuals were designed to prepare students for interactive learning during lectures. Students were supposed to engage with these before coming to formal lectures and tutorials.

For a variety of reasons this tuition model failed. At that point Vista introduced the AS programme in 1992. Vista University experimented with Science and English foundation courses in 1993, but neither were successful. In the case of English, the course was integrated into the first year general course after an initial pilot study was conducted (Smith, 1992, p. 34). At most historically Black universities it was considered more relevant to include the aspects of foundation courses into a first year curriculum. The majority of students needed the skills offered by these support courses. At the historically Black universities, a greater emphasis was placed on staff development in order to review approaches to teaching and to develop teaching methods that would reach large groups of students in classes. Group learning was one strategy developed to cope with the large number of students (Nyamaphene & Letseka, 1995, p. 165).

Since the restructuring of education in 1994, Vista has seen a dramatic decrease in student numbers because students prefer to study at HWIs, which are perceived to offer 'better' qualifications. The Vista Welkom campus has, however, remained stable in student numbers. The students are predominantly Sotho speakers from the neighbouring rural areas.

Part of the criticism against Vista University's academic support programme (Patel, 1996) has its roots in the historic perspective of these programmes in South Africa. Stewart (1991) argues that the philosophy underlying AS is non-revolutionary in character, aimed at changing students and not the structural characteristics of the system. Stewart (1991, p. 122) contends that, unlike South Africa, the United States of America's student population was more representational of a diverse population, and thus the challenge to change the structural status quo in South Africa was greater. Mhlane (1994, p. 288) maintains that the trend in South Africa was more towards integrating AS within departmental mainstream teaching in the HWIs. At HDIs the types of support

programmes offered by AS was expanded to include staff and curriculum development, access and selection of student procedures. At HWIs this work often resided in separate units or centres. The term Academic Development (AD) was used more widely where units or centres were established. The Universities of Cape Town, the Orange Free State, the Witwatersrand, the Western Cape, Fort Hare, Transkei, North West and Zululand are examples. Where the field of work was incorporated within departments such as the Research and Development department at Technikon Northwest, and Student Development at Vista University, it followed a specific AS programme for students. One of the benefits of a unit is that it can research a programme in consultation with a faculty and then recommend that the faculty adopt the programme or not. A department, on the other hand, is limited in that it has a set curriculum it budgets for and is expected to deliver as efficiently as possible. The structure of AS as a division of the Department of Student Development at Vista University limits its scope.

Student expectations have increased, as more opportunities become available to them. There is a growing trend toward recognising that all first year students are in need of support. Programmes such as Supplemental Instruction have been introduced to HWIs (it was initiated through the university of Port Elizabeth) as well as HDIs. The result of this growing demand for quality education and educational opportunities have forced Vista to reflect upon its service delivery. The university has been involved in restructuring its curriculum and programmes offered. Part of this service is the support that it gives to students. In the department of Geographical Sciences, new study guides have been written and new laboratories built on the Welkom campus. The Department of Student Development expanded its service from offering workshops under the auspices of AS to include staff development. The pace of institutional change is slow and the match between student expectations and level of preparedness of students to achieve that which they may be capable of is often not found. The usefulness of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) in ascertaining the motivational and other factors impacting on student performance will be discussed below in depth.

CASE STUDY OF GEOGRAPHY STUDENTS AT VISTA UNIVERSITY: MSLQ

In order to facilitate effective support by the Department of Student Development it is necessary to identify the specific needs of the students in terms of motivation and study skills. The aim of this study was to attempt to highlight specific areas that students on the Welkom campus identified as problem areas that hampered success. The Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) was the main tool used to attempt to identify the needs of the students.

METHOD

The MSLQ consists of two sections: a motivation section and a learning strategies section. There are 81 items, which are scored on a 7-point Likert scale. The motivation section consists of 31 items that assesses students' goals and value beliefs for a course, beliefs about their skills to succeed, and test anxiety. The learning strategies section has 50 items assessing cognitive and metacognitive strategies and management of learning resources.

The method used to evaluate the students was two-fold: firstly the MSLQ was administered during a normal class period. Students were each given the questionnaire with a covering page that explained the aims of the study. An additional page with demographic questions was added to the MSLQ. Students were informed, both in writing and verbally that the completion of the questionnaire was voluntary. Secondly, the participants were asked to write an assignment in which they were to explain the problems that they have encountered at the university in relation to their culture and background of learning. They were given one week to complete the assignment. Their responses to the assignment were discussed with them together with the results of the MSLQ.

The participants were seven males and two females attending a first year Geography class. This constituted a 90% participation rate. Four of the students were school leavers and the other five were non-school leavers with no other tertiary experience.

RESULTS

The means and standard deviations, as well as results obtained by Barker & Olson (s.a.) for comparison, with calculations based on the total sample (9), are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics.

	Mean(SD)	Mean(SD)
		Barker & Olson
Motivation scales		
Intrinsic goal orientation	5.25(1.57)	5.83(.79)
Extrinsic goal orientation	6.63(.62)	4.99(1.11)
Task value	6.29(.62)	6.62(.47)
Learning beliefs	6.19(.79)	5.93(.70)
Self-efficacy	6.25(.79)	5.64(1.00)
Test anxiety	4.35(1.59)	3.27(1.06)

Cognitive learning scales

Rehearsal	5.05(1.27)	5.33(.91)
Elaboration	5.74(.99)	5.31(.85)
Organization	5.16(1.45)	4.71(1.26)
Critical thinking	5.06(1.1)	4.23(1.17)
Metacognition	5.49(.77)	4.94(.81)
Time and study environment	5.22(.77)	5.66(.87)
Effort regulation	5.00(.95)	5.65(.85)
Peer learning	4.55(1.84)	4.34(1.25)
Help seeking	5.05(1.17)	4.68(1.27)

Using students' exam marks, Pearson bivariate correlations were computed to determine the association between each of the scales and academic performance in Geography (Table 2). All the correlations were significant at the 0.05 level except for critical thinking and time and study environment, which were significant at the 0.01 level. The latter two were also the scales that showed the strongest correlation with students' exam marks.

Table 2. Scale correlation with exam mark.

Motivation scales	Correlation factor
Intrinsic goal orientation	0.552
Extrinsic goal orientation	0.629
Task value	0.408
Learning beliefs	-0.511
Self-efficacy	0.359
Test anxiety	-0.594

Cognitive learning scales

Rehearsal	0.494
Elaboration	0.623
Organization	0.33
Critical thinking	0.82
Metacognition	0.314
Time and study environment	0.817
Effort regulation	0.584
Peer learning	0.133
Help seeking	0.017

Assignment

Students were encouraged to freely express their opinions on the problems they encountered with the university system, methods of teaching and/or any other problems that they felt were impeding on their academic performance; especially in relation to their own cultural background. The students handed in these written assignments, and their comments were discussed with them on an individual basis together with their MSLQ scores. The students' comments can loosely be grouped into three categories: culture, religion and language.

Culture

- Universities are used to introduce Western culture, norms and values to Africa; language and religion are the main tools used.
- Universities focus on the transfer of Western culture and language rather than local culture and language.
- Lack of respect for different cultures and attitudes.
- The aim of universities is to establish a culture of learning and participation.
- Individual culture focuses strongly on social cohesion whereas the university system leads to individualism.
- Group discussions of problems are part of the African culture - at university individual problem solving is the norm.
- Information and knowledge is seen and taught from a Western perspective.
- Cultural practises still take place in schools but not at university.
- The purpose of university is to guide the individual to become a better member of their clan.

Language

- Content is not Africanised.
- Mixture of cultures leads to neglect of one's own language and culture.
- Only English is used as medium of instruction.
- Due to the use of English, graduates cannot write scientifically in their own language.
- The use of English creates a barrier between students and their friends who are not students.

Religion

- Christianity is seen as the dominant religion with no reference to other religions - this is seen as an attempt to eradicate traditional religion.
- Students would like to do courses on traditional religion.
- Traditional religion cannot be practised due to class times, which leads to conflict between students and parents.
- Ancestral rites and prayers cannot be performed on campus.
- Specific times must be set aside for cultural practises.
- Religion is a tool to discredit and alienate traditional cultures.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to attempt to identify the needs and possible areas of improvement for Geography students in terms of learning strategies and study skills. To achieve this aim the MSLQ was used and the results correlated with first term exam marks.

Due to the small population size the results may be skewed; however, they do give an indication of areas that can be improved. Motivation scales were generally high, with the exception of test anxiety (negative relationship). Senior students who were only taking the course to fulfil the requirements for their degree or diploma experienced lack of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Of importance to the Department of Student Development are the cognitive learning scales. The areas of concern are rehearsal, organization, and critical thinking. The strong correlation between critical thinking and time and study environment should also be noted. Discussions with each student on individual results revealed that the students generally felt that they did not know how to change their study methods from school to university. The

tendency is to attempt to learn information off by heart rather than trying to understand concepts and applying them.

An interesting observation is the low level of correlation between peer learning and help-seeking and exam marks. The reason for this could be the way in which study material is presented. The Geography department makes use of study manuals and readers - rather than study guides - which form the basis for all work done. The manuals are further written for distance education as well as contact tuition students. The need for peer learning and help-seeking is therefore not as great as would otherwise be the case.

The results of the study may point to the need for a compulsory, general study skills course to be introduced for all first-time tertiary students. Such a course would introduce students to various study methods and techniques. This could aid the student in making the transition between secondary and tertiary education. No such program currently exists at this institution.

The students' response to the question of problems they were experiencing was both interesting and unexpected. It was expected that language would be a major concern; none of the geography students are English first language speakers and in this particular case, neither are any of the lecturers. The main concern for the students is that they do not understand the written work or questions based on the work. They further find it difficult to express themselves. The surprising issue raised was the strong feeling in terms of religion, specifically ancestral worship. Further explanation from the students described it as a belief in both God and their ancestors. Further study is needed to investigate the impact of religion and religious practices on the motivation and learning strategies of students.

CONCLUSIONS

The huge divide between secondary and tertiary education needs to be addressed, especially in the case of students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds. This may be done partially through the introduction of a compulsory, general study skills program integrated into particular faculties or at foundation programme level. The cultural and religious needs of students need to be addressed on campus and adequate provision made for the practice of these beliefs on campus. Multiculturalism and diversity should be encouraged and acknowledged. The study of the MSLQ needs to be expanded to investigate whether or not a similar trend exists on all the campuses, rather than just the one under investigation. Similarly if the MSLQ is used widely across institutions in SA it may provide substantial results which could inform curricula.

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE CHALLENGES

In designing new curricula it is essential to consider the following;

- What is an African? President Mbeki (in Mthembu, 1999, p. 1) and Terblanche (1999) imply that someone born in Africa is African, whilst Mthembu (1999, p. 8) indicates that only Black South Africans are African. Definitions need to be clarified.
- Is what is "African" specific to Africa or universal?
- Can students compete globally if only given an African perspective?

In teaching in South Africa staff need to understand and appreciate the impact of the following issues on the lives of their students:

- Age: mature aged students or not;
- Financial circumstances: poverty stricken or financially moderately well off;
- Accommodation: adequate or bare necessity;
- Educational background and preparedness;

- Motivation for study;
- Expectations from students of their lecturers, course and eventually degree.

The best way to achieve a measure of sanity is to start with respect for the students being taught, their values and their beliefs. Staff need to be very clear what their own values, philosophies and beliefs are in order to accommodate or respectfully disagree with those of their students. In order to Africanise a curriculum, co-operation between Africans and curriculum planners needs to inform the process.

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Japanese students and their cultures of learning

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Abstract

Various claims are made about the educational backgrounds of Asian students, and sometimes specifically of Japanese students in Australia and elsewhere. In this paper we will briefly outline some of the discourse themes found in the literature and identify certain problems therein; in particular, the disregard of inter-national, intra-national and individual variation, as well as the perpetuation of certain stereotypes concerning Asian students' educational experiences and styles of learning. Furthermore, we will discuss some reasons for the occurrence of this stereotypical discourse. In the following section, we introduce some general features relating to undergraduate study in Japan and then briefly compare study genres in Australia and Japan. Even though Japanese university students have a range of different educational experiences in their home country in comparison with Australian students, the actual situation is not well understood and hence we aim to provide a general introduction to some important differences. Finally, we discuss some implications for Australian educators.

INTRODUCTION

The proportion of international students studying in Australian higher education institutions has risen considerably over the past one to two decades and, since Asian students currently comprise approximately 85% of this group (DETYA, 1999), it is not surprising that there is a concentration of attention on them. We would like to examine some issues relating to these students, particularly the kinds of discourse which describe them. Some of the literature on Asian students emanates from the language and learning (here used as a generic term) sector and is either descriptive or empirical in nature. Descriptive training material may be directed to the students themselves but more commonly it is written for those teaching or supervising the students. Other research contributions concerning Asian students overseas are continuing to emerge from a variety of disciplines, including education (Chan, 1999), applied linguistics (Marriott, 1999a, 1999b) and sociology (Hawthorne, 1999).

Our experiences and interests relate to Japanese students and, accordingly, this paper focuses upon them. Japanese students constitute only a small percentage of the international students in Australia, totaling just 1,589 in 1998 (DETYA, 1999, p. 148). However, given the much greater numbers that travel to other overseas destinations for study, growth potential has been identified (Dobson, 1997). A larger number of Japanese students study at Australian ELICOS centers but only some of these students subsequently proceed to enter Australian higher educational institutions. The proportion of Japanese students who possess permanent residency status in Australia seems to be increasing, thus country of birth is a better indicator than is international student status.

The description of Japanese students and their experiences at universities in Japan given in this paper is based upon data drawn from an ethnographic study conducted by Marriott (1999a, 1999b). Marriott's study sampled 25 Japanese students (12 postgraduates, two undergraduate and 11 exchange students) who were mostly enrolled in the humanities/social science fields at Monash University in the late 1990s.

Leaving aside those Japanese students who come to study only short-term English courses, Japanese students who study at Australian universities appear to fall into three main categories:

- a) Those students enrolled in a full undergraduate degree. These are a mixed group: some may have completed a two-year college course or else a regular four-year university degree in Japan; others may have spent some years abroad during their secondary schooling, for various reasons; and occasionally some will have completed only secondary school in Japan;
- b) Those students enrolled in a full graduate/postgraduate diploma, MA or PhD. Normally, they will have graduated from university in Japan and sometimes have already completed a higher degree overseas; many will have worked in Japan prior to deciding to study overseas; and,

- c) Exchange students who are enrolled at their home Japanese institution and who spend one or two semesters in Australia, typically during their second or third year of university.

The educational backgrounds of the students in these three categories thus differ considerably, in addition to there being considerable variation within the respective groups. Their motivations for studying abroad may also vary significantly, with most individuals actually possessing multiple motivations (Marriott 1999a).

SOME DISCOURSE THEMES IN THE LITERATURE

One conspicuous feature in the literature is the tendency to treat Asian students as a monolithic whole and to disregard inter-national differences in students' previous learning environments and experiences (Burns, 1991, p. 62). This is hard to accept, given the variation in the development of the educational sectors in different Asian countries and regions. At a national level, this variation is very significant. Japan, for instance, has a well-developed and extensive educational sector, and participation in tertiary education is high. It has been estimated that more than 3 million students participate in Japanese higher education (universities, colleges and colleges of technology), with the participation rate of 18-year olds reaching approximately 46% in 1996 (compared with approximately 23% of 18-year olds participating in higher education in Australia, and another 29% in vocational education and training) (Kakuta, 1999).

At the inter-national level, there is also significant difference in relation to the role of English, both within the particular Asian community and within the various educational sectors. While English is the major foreign language taught in Japan, it is decisively a foreign language in the educational sector and in society as a whole. It does, however, have particularly high status value and this partly accounts for the interest shared by young people in even short-term study of the language in an overseas country.

A second prominent feature of the literature is that intra-national variation is ignored. There are two perspectives on this issue. The first concerns the relationship between the primary, secondary and tertiary levels in a particular country. The model found in Ballard and Clanchy's (1984, 1991b, 1997) writings, for instance, describes a dynamic process for Australia where students become more analytical and critical over time, in contrast to a static educational process in Asian countries, which, to say the least, is highly questionable. A second aspect of intra-national variation concerns the variability between higher education institutions in any one country. In Japan there is a strong private sector as well as national and local government sectors, but of course, issues of quality cut across these divisions and are difficult to measure and discuss objectively.

A third feature of the accounts concerning Asian students is that they appear to pay little attention to individual variation in the students' academic abilities and performance. Of course, the academic quality of students is extremely difficult to describe or evaluate, and, furthermore, it is impossible to compare their quality in relation to those students who do not study abroad. We cannot assume that all students are equal and it may be that some of the Japanese students who study in Australia are below the average of Japanese students in Japan. There are, in fact, considerable constraints operating against Japanese studying abroad, and thus we need to be wary of making generalizations about Japanese students as a whole on the basis of the sub-sample who study in Australia (Yamada, 1996; Nishimura, 1998).

A fourth, and most serious issue is the perpetuation of certain stereotypes concerning Asian students' educational experiences and styles of learning. These stereotypes or negative images relate to (a) the learning and teaching behavior in the students' home countries, (b) the reasons for these learning/teaching behaviors, and (c) the theoretical explanations for different conceptions of learning.

Examples of stereotypes concerning the students' previous educational experiences include their focus on rote learning and their role as passive recipients of knowledge, their high regard for the teachers' or writers' authority (Bradley & Bradley, 1984, pp. 269-270; Samuelowicz, 1987; Ballard & Clanchy 1991b, p. 18), and their inability to critically evaluate (Kember & Gow, 1991, p. 118; Yap, 1997, p. 55). Stereotypical interpretations concerning such learning and teaching behaviours are also problematic. As an example, consider the following, written in relation to education systems in China, Southeast Asia and Japan:

the flavour of each society and of its education system does flow from earlier traditions and continues to influence the behaviour of teachers and students in the classroom. If a society

places emphasis on respect for the past and for the authority of the teacher, if age is generally synonymous with wisdom, then classroom etiquette will reflect this emphasis. The classroom will not, therefore, be a setting in which it is appropriate to question what is taught, to raise objections, to argue a different view. The Taoist saying 'A good man does not argue' underlines the point that behaviour has moral as well as social connotations ... (Ballard & Clanchy 1991b, p. 15-16).

In relation to such dubious interpretations, we can also find attempts to theoretically account for cross-cultural differences in learning and teaching. For instance, in their model of cultural attitudes to knowledge, Ballard and Clanchy (1984, p. 12; 1991b, p. 13; 1997, p. 12) outline learning approaches and associated teaching and learning strategies, and apply these differentially to the Australian education system and to Asian educational systems, as noted above.

Ballard and Clanchy's stereotypical model has a number of problems. Importantly, the sources upon which the model is based are not clearly explained. With regard to the model's theoretical foundation, only once does Ballard (1989, p. 52) refer to a 1960 publication by Hajime Nakamura, suggesting that this is her principal source. Her claim is as follows:

Students coming to Australia from other countries, however, bring their own cultural attitudes to knowledge as an unconscious part of the baggage. ... Among most of our Asian students there is a strong tradition of the conserving approach, which is not merely a reflection of inadequate teaching resources, crowded classrooms, few textbooks, poor library and laboratory facilities and other disadvantages endemic in many developing countries. It is an attitude more deeply grounded in the cultures from which they come. Nakamura's UNESCO study *The Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples* (1960) provides a meticulous introduction to traditional Asian cultural systems of knowledge, and it is clear that the conserving attitude informs both education and the whole fabric of social behaviour in this region. In such traditions learning is based on the wisdom of accepted authority. Traditional knowledge has been passed down over generations, and modern learning likewise is to be acquired through equally faithful reproduction of the words of teachers and texts. Of courses [sic] there is also room for analytical and speculative approaches in some areas of learning, but they are less apparent and are less likely to have come within the experience of new undergraduates - they may even be relatively rare among postgraduate students from these countries (Ballard, 1989, p. 52-53).

A revised English translation of the above-mentioned monograph of Nakamura reveals that it is a translation of his original Japanese text, which was completed in 1947, covering India, China, Tibet and Japan. As an Indian and Buddhist scholar, Nakamura attempted to analyse the thought-patterns of the people in these four Asian countries, though some revisions in his thinking were apparently included in the revised English edition published in 1964. Not only the time period in which Nakamura's text was written, but also the nature of his description of Japan are such that few contemporary scholars would pay much credence to his views. It is thus unfortunate that Ballard has drawn upon this source to explain major cultural differences between Australian and Asian students.

The other source of input to Ballard and Clanchy's model seems to be their experiences in meeting Asian students with learning and studying difficulties. As such, the cross-societal comparisons are of non-parallel universes (populations); whereas the authors draw their generalizations about Australian students in relation to average (or better) students and also upon their own perceptions of the goals (or ideal goals) of learning and teaching in Australia, their observations of Asian students, together with their collection of self-reports from the latter, come from a self-selected group who attend language and learning centres because of the problems they experience in managing academic tasks during their Australian university courses. Another criticism of this model is that it has not been tested, yet it has been repeated by the authors over a considerable duration of time, outlined, for example, in 1984 (Ballard & Clanchy, 1984) then extended in 1991 and subsequently repeated (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991b, 1997). This model is also often quoted by others.

In the past, a number of empirical studies have criticized some of the above stereotypes relating to Asian students and have found them deficient in various ways (Kember & Gow, 1991; Kelly & Shing Ha, 1998; Chan, 1999). However, much more work is needed, especially in view of the seemingly widespread acceptance of Ballard and Clanchy's view of learning and how this applies to Asian students.

Reasons for the occurrence of stereotypical discourse

At times, some of the stereotypical generalizations concerning the learning and teaching behaviours of students and teachers in Asian countries can be heard from a variety of personnel, for example, from language-and-learning teachers, academics and even Asian students themselves. It is important to question why such a phenomenon occurs. Firstly, we can argue that students may have a way of speaking about their academic experiences at home and abroad. In the case of Japanese students, for instance, this talk is sometimes in line with some of the stereotypes outlined above. Just as Neustupny has noted with regard to how individuals often talk about personal motivations (Marriott et al., 1994, p. 81), it is possible that perceptions regarding learning experiences are also subject to certain speech constraints, so that individuals verbalize them in a way which is generally accepted in the society in question. This important topic about ways of talking requires more investigation in the future. (Coincidentally, while the descriptions of Asian students' previous educational experiences seem to be at least partly based on their own talk, the contrastive descriptions of the Australian system is not. It would thus be interesting to compare the way in which Australian students as well as students from various Asian countries talk about their learning experiences.)

In addition, some stereotypes may be reinforced by those personnel with whom the students interact, for example, their teachers in Australia. It is also possible that Japanese students come into contact with some of these stereotypes through textbooks and English teachers in Japan, though such a claim requires verification. In this way, negative images may be perpetuated through the discourse idiom. Furthermore, the reinforcement of images which do not accord with reality by the students themselves may be inevitable to some extent. When describing their earlier experiences, we can expect that they will over-generalize, especially in view of the elapsed time and the difficulty of accounting for variation (Foddy, 1993). It thus should not be surprising that at times students adopt certain stereotypical discourse themselves.

While we therefore need to display caution in interpreting some of the discourse concerning Asian students' learning behaviour, there may be some degree of truth contained within it. We can hypothesize, for example, that there are, indeed, some shared communication patterns among students from some Asian countries. These shared patterns will relate to sociolinguistic components of the language, not linguistic ones, which of course vary immensely across the different languages. Similarly, there may also be some shared sociocultural patterns, that is, patterns outside the sphere of communication, and which in this case concern behaviour in the educational domain.

At this stage, although we do not have systematic empirical evidence upon which to base a claim concerning the sharing of certain communication and sociocultural patterns, some theoretical work has been formulated which provides a framework for future enquiry. According to this view, there is the possibility of the existence of groups of languages in contact which may influence one another, regardless of any genetic relationship. Neustupny has coined the term speech union or communication union in reference to groups of languages and cultures that share communication rules, that is, common communicative features (Neustupny, 1978; Clyne, 1994, p. 28). Accordingly, East Asia may be seen as a speech/communication area where, despite great variation at the linguistic level, sociolinguistic patterns display less variation.

From a different perspective and mainly in relation to written discourse, Galtung has suggested the existence of four different intellectual styles - saxonic, teutonic, gallic and nipponic - which have arisen out of the cultures of Britain, the USA, Germany, France and Japan, respectively (Galtung, 1981; Clyne, 1994). Galtung's approach does not accord with Neustupny's speech/communication union notion, but it is a challenging idea in that it seeks to identify some main styles found across different cultures. Neustupny, on the other hand, claims that differences in intellectual styles are a matter of macro-level paradigm phenomena. Accordingly, he attributes differences in academic styles in Japan and Australia to differences in national styles and to differences in developmental stages (Neustupny, personal communication).

THE LEARNING CULTURES OF JAPANESE STUDENTS IN JAPAN

Much more in-depth inquiry is needed into the previous learning environments and experiences of students from individual countries. This should enable us to better evaluate the validity of some of the perceptions held about these students, including those mentioned in the first part of this paper. More importantly, we need to introduce alternative approaches to inquiry related to student diversity, including cultural diversity. At least three issues deserve our attention regarding Japanese students. These concern the students' educational experiences at

university in Japan, and their English training - both in Japan and in Australia. Only the first issue will be mentioned here.

Apart from Japanese students who come to Australia as part of an exchange scheme for one or two semesters (usually as undergraduates, but sometimes as postgraduates), we will assume that the majority of serious Japanese students will complete an undergraduate degree in Japan and come to Australia to undertake postgraduate study. In attempting to describe the background educational experiences of these students, we run the risk over-generalizing and so emphasize that the points described below will be subject to variation. The source of our data comes from interviews and surveys conducted by Marriott (cf. 1999a, 1999b) with Japanese students studying in Australia, and research by Sprague (1996) and Neustupny (1999). Although this section is brief, our aim is to begin to construct an ethnographic description of study in Japan, offering this as an alternative to the kind of descriptions and explanations for the study behaviour and experiences of Asian students, as found in such writings of Ballard and Clanchy.

Some basic features of undergraduate humanities/social science faculties of Japanese universities are as follows:

1. Undergraduate degrees are four years in length; there is no pass/honours distinction.
2. An undergraduate degree consists of a large number of subjects. (cf. Appendix 1: Example of a student's course of study in primary teaching in an Arts Faculty at a leading private university: 52 subjects) Students are able to choose subjects to some extent, though often they must include subjects from certain categories. The number of subjects taken on an annual basis by one student is shown in Appendix 2. This student attended classes for approximately 15 hours or more per week for the first three years and less in the final year.
3. A degree typically includes up to two years of study of subjects described as "general education" subjects (though this varies with the university); the remainder of the degree consists of subjects relating to the students' specialty area (major) (20 and 32 respectively in the case of the student mentioned in Appendix 1). Although the system officially changed in recent years with regard to the division of general education and specialized education, in practice students continue to take a wide range of subjects over the duration of their degree.
4. English may be compulsory for students for two years in some faculties at some universities, for longer in some courses, or there may be no obligatory study at all.
5. Students often write a graduation thesis as part of their fourth year.
6. Most subjects/classes are independent of each other and consist of one weekly 90-minute lecture. Some subjects are arranged sequentially (for example, language subjects). In classes with a lecture format, the teacher naturally assumes the leading speaking role.
7. Often (though not necessarily) in conjunction with writing their graduation thesis, students may attend a weekly seminar (*zemi*) in their final year (for one or two semesters) or during their last two years. This may be their only participation in a small class; individual student presentations seem to be the common feature of this genre.
8. There seems to be less rigorousness (in comparison with the Faculty of Arts at Monash University, for example) in the assessment requirements and the way in which assessment is conducted. Tests are common at the end of each subject, but fairly lenient marking seems to be the norm.
9. Students may write one or more short "reports" (a genre which replaces our essay) for a subject, but the topic will often be set by the teacher in an impromptu manner, and, not infrequently, work which is submitted at the end of the semester is not returned to students. This report may often be a summary of a textbook section.
10. There do not seem to be strict written presentation rules for writing reports nor rules for documentation of sources. Neither does writing instruction appear to be a main part of university training (though sometimes it exists in relation to writing the graduation thesis).
11. There appears to be fewer reading requirements for each subject (in comparison with Monash University, for instance), though this may vary somewhat with the university. Use of one textbook per subject may be more common but students may be introduced to readings to pursue following their classes, rather than beforehand. More generally, however, if reading is set it is likely to cover a whole subject (either one semester or one year in length) rather than to be related to a specific class.
12. Graduates from earlier years, in particular, may not have received training in computing or accessing data from the internet.

Study genres in Australia and Japan

As a means of studying the educational experiences of students from a cross-comparative perspective, the concept of study genre, referring to patterns of discourse types found in educational contexts, is useful. Mauranen (1994, p. 1) argues that study genres are central in an institutional culture and that these embody socially appropriate ways of expressing and transmitting knowledge and learning. Accordingly, study genre within the academic context are accompanied by particular communicative and socio-cultural practices with which the participants need to be familiar. Just as study genres may develop and change over time, these may also vary significantly cross-culturally, as Mauranen demonstrated in her comparison of a Finnish and a British university.

In the Japanese system, the undergraduate degree is comprised of a large number of independent subjects, a few of which may be sequentially arranged. In terms of spoken genre, the lecture occupies a central position and it is not accompanied by a related genre, such as a tutorial, as in Australia. Consequently, Japanese students will be unfamiliar with the tutorial genre, as found in Australian universities. In Japan, students who attend a seminar (*zemi*), most likely in their last year, may have the opportunity to give fairly formal presentations on the topic of their graduation thesis. This oral presentation, which is usually accompanied by a written text as well, seems to vary somewhat from other genres found in Australia.

As for written genres, the amount of writing during a course appears to be less than in Australia; any written piece seems to be shorter in length, typically involving a summary of some material and labeled a "report", and feedback may or may not be given by the teacher. The main assessment is generally a final examination at the end of each course, but attendance and reports may also be taken into consideration. Individual teachers have much greater power over course content and method of teaching than at Monash University, for instance, where Faculty rules are fairly rigidly implemented (Neustupny, 1999). Some reading may be allocated as a follow-up activity to class work, but the amount seems to be lower compared with classes in Australia. However, as described above, the number of subjects studied concurrently by a student is higher. Strict writing rules and conventions do not seem to be applied in the case of student report writing.

IMPLICATIONS FOR AUSTRALIAN EDUCATORS

The different educational experiences of the Japanese students who come to study in Australia, together with their levels of English academic competence, carry a number of implications for the design of pre-university courses, language and learning programs, and academic programs, as well as for the students themselves who need to implement appropriate self-management strategies. A few suggestions are as follows:

1. Given that there is less overall face-to-face teaching in Australian programs in comparison with their previous experiences in Japan, Japanese students will need to develop more independent learning approaches and will probably need to receive guidance and training in this regard.
2. Students will need training in those study genres which involve them taking speaking roles, such as tutorials and seminars, in order to acquire turn-taking, content and other rules. The pace of the class may remain a problem.
3. They will need to develop familiarity with the kinds of written genres found in their disciplinary areas. This can be done at the group level in pre-university courses but it is probably most effective in disciplinary groups that are organized concurrently with academic subjects, where the focus can be placed on the kinds of written tasks which are actually included in those subjects.
4. They will benefit from guidance on how to utilize source material in their written essays.
5. Given their previously predominant contact with the lecture genre and their lack of experience in handling multiple source material, training in the collation of material and the critical evaluation of it will be beneficial.
6. As the students will not have undertaken long written tasks before (apart from a graduation thesis, if written), a lot of practice is necessary, including a focus on structuring and argumentation.

7. Students will not be familiar with the strict written presentation rules which characterize academic English and thus this training should be given pre-university, with concurrent tuition throughout their university course also available.
8. Despite taking advantage of group tuition in English academic writing and other study skills, it seems that nearly all Japanese students require individual assistance with their written English, both at the linguistic and sociolinguistic levels. Who should provide this assistance and in what form remains a significant issue.
9. Perhaps language and learning staff could take a more active role in advising academic staff on teaching strategies, including the setting of suitable written tasks, the provision of feedback and so on.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Our observation is that most Japanese students, especially postgraduates, come to Australia with strong motivation, a willingness to be challenged and an interest in acquiring new communication and study patterns appropriate in the new overseas situation. When they arrive, however, they are often unaware of the mammoth task ahead of them and that universities can differ so much cross-culturally. As teachers we accept that Australian students continue to improve their approaches to learning, and develop their learning styles and skills throughout their tertiary programs, yet the task for the Japanese student is far greater and consequently they will benefit from support and guidance throughout their enrolment period.

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APPENDIX 1
AN EXAMPLE OF AN ACADEMIC TRANSCRIPT

RECORD OF ACADEMIC GRADES

RIKKYO UNIVERSITY
TOKYO, JAPAN

Name Family(Last), Given Kaneko, Aki	Sex Female	Date of Birth May 4, 1965
Department/ Education	Matriculated April 1, 1985	
College Arts	Graduated March 31, 1989	Degree Bachelor of Arts

Key to grades:A(100-80);B(79-70);C(69-60);P(Pass for courses, and the like, taken on a pass-fail basis);
G(Credit granted for courses taken at another university or college)
Rikkyo University does not give ranking or class standing to its students.

Subject	Yr.	Cr.	Gr.	Subject	Yr.	Cr.	Gr.
<<< General Education Courses >>>				Review of Teaching Materials:			
Christian Ethics	85	04	C	Home Economics	86	02	C
Literature	85	04	B	Music: Vocal and Instrument 2	87	04	A
Music Appreciation	85	04	B	Painting and Handicraft 2	88	04	A
Political Science	85	04	B	<<<<<< Other Courses >>>>>>			
Sociology	85	04	C	Field Work in Primary Education	88	04	P
Physics	85	04	B	***** END OF TRANSCRIPT *****			
Chemistry	86	04	A				
Biology	85	04	C				
Anthropology	86	04	C				
Psychology	86	04	B				
Communications 5	85	04	A				
English 1	85	02	B				
English 2	85	02	B				
English 3	86	02	B				
English 4	86	02	B				
German 1	85	02	B				
German 2	85	02	B				
German 3	86	02	C				
Physical Education 1	85	01	B				
Physical Education 2	86	01	A				
Theory of Physical Education	86	02	B				
<<<<<< Major Courses >>>>>>							
Basic Readings 5B	85	02	A				
Modern Societies and Cultures 9	86	04	A				
Pedagogy	85	04	B				
Schools: Their Character and Function	86	04	B				
Psychology in Education	86	04	C				
Sociology in Education	86	04	B				
History of Modern Education 1 (Japan)	87	04	A				
Audio-Visual Education	87	02	B				
Education Technology	87	02	B				
Adult Education	87	04	B				
Counseling	87	04	C				
Education and Social Welfare	87	04	A				
Cultural Environment for Children	87	04	B				
Developmental Reading	87	04	B				
Seminar in Pedagogy 6	87	04	A				
Seminar in Thesis Writing	88	02	A				
Thesis	88	08	B				
Lecture on Eng. & Amer. Literature 8	87	04	A				
Introduction to Japanese History	86	04	C				
Moral Education 1	87	02	A				
Introduction to Japanese Linguistics	86	04	A				
Mass Communications	86	04	B				
Review of Teaching Materials: The Japanese Language	87	02	B				
Review of Teaching Materials: Mathematics	86	02	B				
Review of Teaching Materials: Science	87	02	B				
Review of Teaching Materials: Music	87	02	B				
Review of Teaching Materials: Painting and Handwork 2	86	02	A				

Minimum number of credits required for graduation: General Education Courses 54; Major Courses 72
This record is certified to be a correct transcript of the academic grades of the student named above.

Date
September 19, 1995



Official Seal

Takaaki Hattori

Takaaki Hattori
Registrar, Rikkyo University

95060180

APPENDIX 2
EXAMPLE OF SPREAD OF SUBJECTS IN ONE STUDENT'S UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE

	Number of courses	Unit value
Year 1	14	43
Year 2	13	41
Year 3	10	40
Year 4	8	28
Total	45	152

Providing learning support for Pacific Island students

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Abstract

This paper will outline and discuss a learning support programme for Pacific Island students at the University of Auckland. The programme, *Fale Pasifika* (FP which translates into Pacific House), was established nine years ago to meet the learning needs of a growing population of Pacific Island students at this University. It offers workshops, one to one consultations and drop-in hours to students. The success of the programme lies mainly within its autonomy and ability to deliver its service in culturally appropriate ways. *Fale Pasifika* provides students with a learning environment that recognises their cultural heritage. Results obtained from a follow up study of first year students who used *Fale Pasifika*, as opposed to those who did not use *Fale Pasifika*, will also be discussed.

BACKGROUND

In 1998, the University of Auckland had a student population of approximately 26,110, 6.2% of which was Pacific Island (PI) students. PI students are located in Faculties such as Law, Science, Performing Arts, Engineering and Arts. Over the past few years there has been a gradual shift of these students from Arts to the other noted Faculties. Although the reasons for this shift will not be discussed in this paper, it is worth recognising the wide variety of academic backgrounds that the learning support programme covers.

Pacific Island students are made up of students from Pacific Island countries such as Tonga, Samoa, Niue, Cook Island Maori and Fiji. These students have been admitted for study at the University under a number of different categories; for example, New Zealand University Bursary, Special Admissions and International Students. In the early nineties, PI students at the university tended to take longer to complete their degrees and their retention rate was considered to be a 'problem'. Because of these findings and the fact that this was an increasing student population, the Student Learning Centre was therefore provided with funds to establish an academic learning support programme to address the learning needs of the PI students. Hence, the inception of *Fale Pasifika*, although it was not known as such until a few years later.

Today *Fale Pasifika* has a co-ordinator, a tutor, and five teaching assistants working in the programme. It works closely with departments such as History and Anthropology, School of Education and the Centre for Pacific Studies to provide support that PI students need in order to pass their courses and complete their degrees. In the last few years *Fale Pasifika* has also developed a postgraduate component to cater for the needs of the growing numbers of PI graduate students.

For PI students it is an achievement in itself to be admitted to the University of Auckland. One must view this achievement within the context of each student's culture, life experiences and the obstacles they have had to overcome in order to qualify for entry into the university. The challenge that the University of Auckland poses for these PI students extends beyond that of improving one's academic skills. For example, Orientation Week for first year PI students is a traumatic experience in itself. For most it is (initially) a process of learning to navigate through the university and its resources. The students must adapt to this new learning environment and redefine their understanding of learning and their relationships with their communities and cultures. More importantly, PI students must endeavour to develop a sense of identity within an institution that their parents, grandparents and members of their communities did not have access to. *Fale Pasifika* as a learning support programme is sensitive to this fact and recognises the specific needs of these students.

Fale Pasifika therefore works with students to ensure their academic success by building on their own life and cultural experiences. This enables students to make sense of the world of academia and its culture. *Fale Pasifika* provides a service that is comprehensive and oriented towards long term academic success rather than remediating immediate problems.

For a long time *Fale Pasifika* was viewed by many of the PI students as a programme for 'dummies' and for remedial purposes only. Consequently, the tutors involved in this programme have had to work hard in order to change the perception of students. This involved networking with both staff and student groups/organisations; advertising the programme throughout campus by word of mouth and the use of flyers and posters; and asking academic staff to endorse the programme.

In 1995, the overall pass rate of first year PI students was 62%; this compares to an overall rate of 75% for all first year full-time students in the same year (Liaison Office, 1995). In response to the above results, *Fale Pasifika* organised and taught a Study Skills Day for first year PI students in April, 1996. The purpose of the course was to provide students with strategies on effective learning, discuss any difficulties they might be facing and provide them with strategies for how to overcome them. Twenty-eight students attended the course and at the end of the course they were given an evaluation form to fill out. Students gave the course a satisfaction rating of 6.21 on a scale of 1-7 (1=poor, 7=excellent). An analysis of these students' examination results showed that they obtained an overall pass rate of 71%, which is slightly higher than the documented pass rate of first year students at the University of Auckland (Student Learning Centre, 1996). While the results are not conclusive, it is possible to argue that *Fale Pasifika* made an important contribution to the exam results of those students who attended the course.

As stated earlier, the success of this learning support programme lies mainly within its autonomy to operate in culturally appropriate ways. This provides *Fale Pasifika* with an opportunity to work with students using a pedagogical approach that is culturally based. Basic pedagogical theory offers two factors that are important in creating a learning context that is effective for learners. Firstly, it is important to acknowledge and recognise what the learner brings into the learning context. Secondly, it is important to provide an educational experience that is relevant to the students' needs rather than the needs of the educators (Lake, 1997). This has an important implication for both students and educators. For example, if issues of familiarity and relevance are ignored, then students' educational experiences will tend to be irrelevant to their lives.

Fale Pasifika recognises that PI students come from a different learning environment, one that, from early childhood, places particular emphasis on practical rather than theoretical skills (Metge & Kinloch, 1984). Wolfgramm (1991) studied the book reading activities of a group of Tongan preschoolers and their families. The results of this study showed that these families read books regularly. Furthermore, it showed that a particular style of reading and teaching had been adopted by these families. Caregivers and older siblings were using a distinctive form of pedagogy to teach these Tongan pre-schoolers to read. Emphasis was on rote learning the text and eventually the child would be able to perform much of the text on his/her own. Rote learning also has a very important role in these families' church life. Children are expected to rote learn and memorise bible texts and then recite during church functions such as 'White Sunday'. The above findings have important implications in terms of the learning styles adopted by PI students and the learning styles encouraged by the university.

Ethnographic researchers such as Schwartz (1992, cited in Tan, 1999) and Spindler (1974, cited in Tan, 1999) pointed out that culture and education are closely linked and that one cannot be separated from the other. Furthermore, education according to Spindler (1974) is seen as a process whereby individuals are recruited to be members of a particular culture. Therefore, it is important for educators to have a clear understanding of how cultural values can affect students' study approaches. This enables educators to not only use culturally appropriate resources that will assist students with their academic progress, but also allow them to function successfully within their own communities and cultures.

Thomas (1984) noted that Tongan children acquired correct behaviour, culture and occupational skills through participation in family and village activities. *Fale Pasifika* works with PI students in such a way that allows students to relate theory to their life experiences. Students are also given sufficient time during workshops and one-to-one consultations to discuss their concerns with a tutor. This leads to a better understanding of what they are studying and better application of the study skills they acquire from the Centre. The tutors also endeavour, when appropriate, to explain workshop contents in students' mother tongue or relate the contents to students' cultural experiences.

Power (1992) and Thaman (1992) have argued strongly for the application of culturally based teaching methods as opposed to traditional forms adopted by the university. Students tend to perform better within a culturally based framework. A survey in 1996 of PI students' use of student services indicated that a high percentage of PI students on campus found *Fale Pasifika* to be very useful and a 'good place to study' as it made them 'feel

comfortable' (PISSAC, 1996). Students also noted that *Fale Pasifika* tutors were friendly and provided a "familiar cultural environment, talking was free cause the others understood what I was talking about" (PISSAC, 1996, p. 13).

FALE PASIFIKA LEARNING SUPPORT PROGRAMME

Workshops

Fale Pasifika runs workshops throughout both Semester 1 and 2. In 1998, for example, *Fale Pasifika* offered a total of 197 workshops with a total student attendance of 1995 (SLC, 1998). These workshops ranged from one-hour sessions to whole-day workshops, depending on the topics to be covered. Weekend workshops are also offered as they may be more suitable for students who have a very full schedule during the week. *Fale Pasifika* also works very closely with various departments (as stated earlier) by teaching workshops specifically for PI students who are enrolled in the various departments.

The Centre has a policy that requires students to enrol for workshops. However, PI students often 'turn-up' for workshops on the day without prior enrolment. Adhering to the above policy is therefore a problem for PI students. *Fale Pasifika* workshops are advertised in the SLC's brochure.

Workshop Content

Fale Pasifika offers a variety of workshop topics, such as goal setting, essay writing, reading skills, notetaking skills, time management, exam skills, motivation, stress management and many more. Each tutor is responsible for planning his/her own workshops, and regular meetings are held to discuss workshops plans and contents.

Each workshop begins with the tutor introducing him/herself, and providing students with information, such as name, ethnicity, degree enrolled for and degree already obtained (if applicable). This is a very important part of the workshop, as students need to identify with the tutor and be confident in the tutor's ability and the credibility of the programme. They need to appreciate that the tutor is qualified to teach the workshop. Moreover, failure to state and 'walk one's ethnicity' will most likely encourage comments from students such as 'fie palangi', or wanting to be a European.

Students who attend the FP workshops are further encouraged to take part in group discussions, to ask questions and to be actively thinking about what they are taught. Discussion and questioning are an important part of academic learning and a common part of the lives of most Pakeha (European) students. In contrast, PI students have been raised by their parents on the cultural belief that questioning is disrespectful and that the knowledge of teachers should not be questioned (Lay, 1996).

As Lay's (1996) research indicates, Pacific Island parents are also more likely to place less emphasis on the development of speaking skills and thinking processes (Lay, 1996). The Western education system, however, is embedded within theoretical rather than practical skills. It encourages students to articulate their thoughts and ideas and to be active participants in classroom activities (Lay, 1996). Similarly, FP tutors encourage PI students to articulate their thoughts and ideas and to take part in class discussions. However, tutors are very careful to point out to students that this is a valuable skill to master in the academic world and that their own cultural values should not be in any way threatened.

One-to-One Consultation

Students are also encouraged to make appointments with *Fale Pasifika* tutors when they need further assistance. Appointments are half an hour to an hour and can be made either directly with the tutors concerned or with the office staff of the Centre. In 1998, *Fale Pasifika* tutors saw a total of 402 students on an individual basis, 22% of which were PI students (SLC, 1998). The mere fact that PI students make an appointment with a PI tutor indicates faith in the ability of that PI tutor.

It is also interesting to note that many PI students seeking assistance are being helped by PI tutors who are significantly younger in age. This is indeed the experience of *Fale Pasifika*. Coming from a culture that teaches respect for one's elders, the roles of the students are reversed, and although it creates a sensitive situation, both students and tutors have learned to adapt and accept their respective roles.

Individual consultations are mainly used by PI students to obtain feedback on their written work and to seek advice on topics such as time management, reading skills and exam preparation skills. A good number of PI students, however, do not make appointments. As is the case for workshops, they prefer to 'turn up' whenever they are free. It is important therefore for tutors to keep a flexible schedule to meet with these students. Failure to meet with students often results in a loss of contact with them.

Drop In

The SLC has a drop in service from 11am - 2pm daily. Students do not need to make an appointment to see a tutor, however tutors are only available for 10-15 minutes per student. A number of *Fale Pasifika* tutors are available for consultation during the above hours. PI students, however, tend to drop in continuously from 9am-6pm. *Fale Pasifika* is created in such a way that it is able to accommodate the unpredictable drop-in times of PI students.

Study Support Group

This year, for the first time, FP began offering support for students who are learning a Pacific Island language. A Samoan FP tutor was able to meet twice a week with a group of students (approximately 6-8) who were learning the Samoan language. Feedback from this group was very positive and as a result plans are in place for this part of the programme to expand next year into other Pacific Island language courses such as Tongan and Cook Island Maori.

Orientation for First Year PI Students

This year is the fifth consecutive year that FP has joined forces with the Centre for Pacific Studies to offer an orientation programme for first year PI students. FP tutors taught a half-day study skills course that was attended by approximately 102 students. Students were given an evaluation form to fill out at the end of the course; the majority of them found the course 'extremely helpful' in their preparation for entry into the university. FP tutors are also responsible for following up the progress of the above students and providing further support when required.

Postgraduate Courses

As mentioned earlier, FP has developed a postgraduate programme for PI graduate students. This has received widespread support from academic staff members throughout campus. Workshops topics include writing literature reviews, thesis writing, motivation, stress management, and other related topics. In 1998, FP offered over 10 different courses for graduate students. Students who attended these courses found them 'very helpful' for their studies. In 1999, FP further offered a number of its courses together with the learning support programme for Maori students, Te Puni Wananga.

CONCLUSION

It has taken FP a few years to develop and evolve as an academic learning support programme for PI students. Looking back, *Fale Pasifika* has indeed expanded into a programme that not only enhances academic performance but also encourages students to undertake graduate studies. FP is guided by a philosophy that seeks excellence from its PI students and promotes learning and academic achievement in an appropriate and culturally sensitive manner. It presents students with an alternative to the traditional approaches to learning in higher education and creates a framework within which both PI tutors and students can work together on familiar terms.

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Section 3

Flexible Learning

Keynote paper: Flexible learning

Flexibility: Focus, fears and fantasy

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Abstract

In this paper, I will try to define flexible learning in a way that *focuses* on the learning needs of students. Flexible learning environments must provide much more than just broadening access to learning resources in time and place. They must enable teachers to meet the learning needs of an increasingly diverse group of students who have a wide range of skills and *fears*. New environments create possibilities and challenges for both teachers and learners. I will examine how Australian universities are providing (or not providing) suitable infrastructures to enable us to take advantage of technology as part of a movement towards flexible learning. For example, new communication modes give us new possibilities but effective use of these possibilities means that we need new skills - skills in designing learning experiences and skills in effective use of technology. Both teachers and learners need to develop these new skills in ways that enables growth and avoids fear. The *fantasy* part of my paper will be a play on words - an exercise in language and learning! (I hope)

FOCUS

Educational design as the key to successful flexible learning

What is the business of a university in 1990s/ 2000s? Quantity and quality are both important considerations in modern universities as they seek to maintain important intellectual and physical spaces for their staff to pursue creative research and development, while at the same time needing to provide teaching for escalating numbers of students in all courses in order to shore up funding. These student cohorts have become increasingly diverse (McInnee et al., 1995) with more part-time students, and students from a greater variety of backgrounds. Flexible modes of delivery have been widely viewed as the prime way of meeting the challenges posed by this diversity. There has been a fair amount of naive equating of flexible delivery with production of online materials ('Plug them into the web') and insufficient attention to the relationship between flexible modes of operation for students, the use of communication and information technologies, and the design of educationally sound learning environments (Kennedy & McNaught, 1997; Reeves & Reeves, 1997). However, there is no doubt that communication and information technologies will be a major part of future university planning, as several recent reports make clear (e.g. Yetton et al., 1997).

Discussions about using technology for flexible learning often centre around variation in the time and place of access to learning experiences. But it must mean more if we are to believe that technology can meaningfully enhance students' learning experiences. For example, let's consider the implication of the work of students' varied approaches to learning.

There is a well-developed collection in the general higher education literature on students' approaches to learning - for example, the work of Biggs and others about students' adoption of surface, deep or achieving approaches to learning. In surface or reproductive learning, understanding is limited in scope and is not integrated into students' existing knowledge frameworks. Deep learning involves the refinement and assimilation of understanding; this can enable students to feel confident in applying knowledge and/or to be critical in evaluating new ideas for themselves. An achieving approach is a pragmatic approach where working within the prevailing system to maximise achievement dominates students' decisions about study. An achieving approach does not preclude deep learning; rather it reflects students' dominant concerns about learning in higher education. These approaches have been identified in several studies (e.g. Biggs, 1979, 1987, 1989) and are described in Table 1.

We must take seriously the need to cater for a diversity of students with differing learning styles and approaches; for example, by offering a variety of learning activities and a variety of assessment strategies.

Table 1. Three prototypical approaches to learning (from Biggs, 1989, p. 12).

Approach	Motive	Student learning strategy
Surface	Extrinsic: avoid failure but don't work too hard	Focus on selected details and reproduce accurately
Deep	Intrinsic: satisfy curiosity about topic	Maximise understanding: read widely, discuss, reflect
Achieving	Achievement: compete for highest grades	Optimise organisation of time and effort ('study skills')

Not only do we have a greater diversity of students, we have a much greater diversity of learning contexts. These curriculum options cover:

- problem-based learning courses; for example many medical and para-medical courses use this model;
- workplace learning, common in TAFE courses and now increasingly used in higher education;
- studio-centred learning, a traditional model in fine arts and architecture;
- intensive block teaching, often used with part-time students, but also increasingly in off-shore teaching;
- cross-sectoral courses covering both TAFE and higher education with clear articulation pathways; and
- tailored full-fee-paying industry-related courses - a must for many Australian cash-strapped universities.

Good educational design is the key to successful flexible learning. Here at RMIT University we offer staff a set of online tools to assist them in refurbishing their subjects and courses. We explain the functionality of each of the tools in terms of student learning activities. Table 1 matches some student learning needs *with* examples of the design of suitable student activities *with* components of the online toolset. Several of the tools could be used for most of the activities; examples are used for simplicity.

Table 2. Functions of the RMIT DLS toolset.

Student learning need (Laurillard < http://www2.open.ac.uk/LTTO/internal/tsaa.htm >)	Examples of student activity	Example of current RMIT benchmark Distributed Learning System (DLS) toolset component. See < http://www.online.rmit.edu.au/main.cfm?code=olcr00 >
information handling skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • web searching; • using electronic Library databases 	
developing understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • building links between information from various sources; • problem solving exercises 	<i>CourseInfo/ BSCW</i> <i>Question Mark</i>
linking theory to practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • working with embedded media and simulations in course material; • tutorial programs with feedback 	<i>CourseInfo</i> hybrid systems with CD-Roms
practising discussion and argument	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • online debates using a threaded discussion 	<i>WebBoard</i>
practising articulation of ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • role playing using a threaded discussion; • sharing essays online 	<i>WebBoard</i> <i>BSCW</i>

rehearsing skills and procedures	● online quizzes with feedback	<i>Perception Question Mark</i>
practising teamwork	● group projects	<i>BSCW</i>
learning professional practice	● all of the above!	

How can online strategies enable flexible learning?

Figure 1 illustrates the promise that online education might be able to combine the interactive, communicative benefits of face-to-face education with the time/place independence of distance education. Of course, the nature of interaction is different in an online environment. Our experience at RMIT is that part-time or mature age students find online communication satisfying. The traditional younger full-time students feel a stronger need for face-to-face learning situations. Mixed-mode experiences often work well. We are in a time of experimentation but the promise is still real to those of us who work in designing online learning experiences.

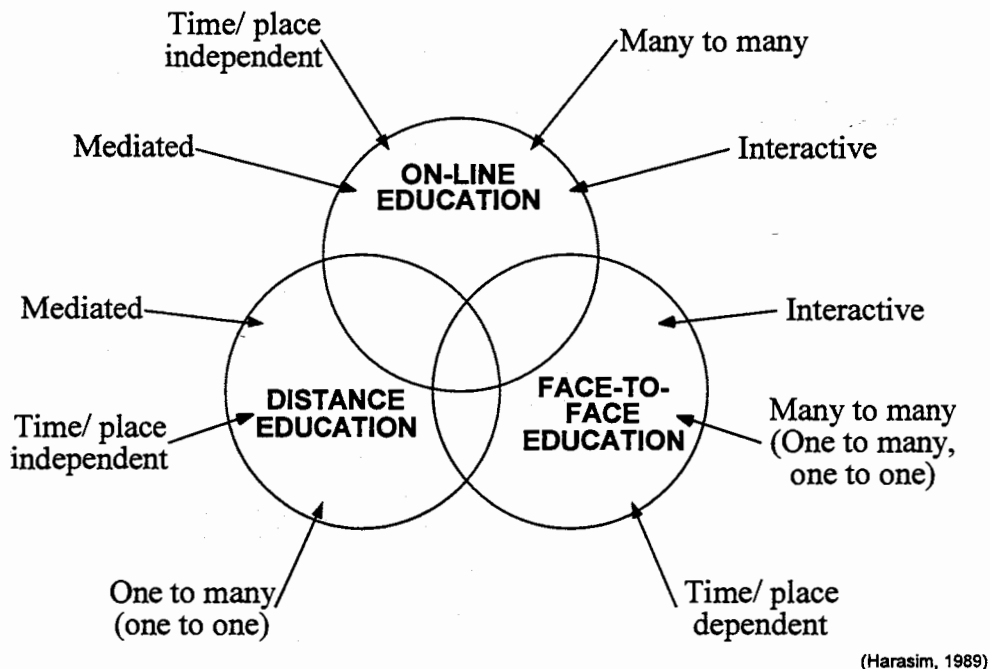


Figure 1. The promise of online education (after Harasim, 1989).

Universities as organisations which support or hinder innovation in flexible learning

Flexible learning involves much more than offering a set of technological tools. We need to look quite broadly at the nature of our universities. In a recent investigation into the factors supporting the adoption of computer-facilitated learning (CFL) at Australian universities (McNaught et al., 1999), three major themes emerged. These were *Policy*, *Culture* and *Support*. The considerable overlap between and within these themes is illustrated in Figure 2. There needs to be a congruence of policy, culture and support factors if significant adoption of CFL strategies is to occur.

The *Policy* theme looked at specific institutional policies, such as equity and intellectual property, the alignment of policy throughout the organisation, the direction of policy change (bottom-up or top-down) and a number of strategic processes which flowed on from policies such as grant schemes.

Culture incorporated factors such as collaboration within institutions, and personal motivation of staff to use CFL, as well as particular aspects of funding, staff rewards and time, leadership, teaching and learning models, and attitudes such as 'not invented here'.

Support incorporated a whole gamut of institutional issues including IT, library and administrative infrastructure, professional development for staff, student support, educational and instructional design support for academic staff, funding and grant schemes, and IT literacy.

Several universal factors in relation to widespread use of CFL were identified:

- coherence of policy across all levels of institutional operations and specific policies which impact on CFL within each institution;
- intellectual property, particularly the role of copyright in emerging online environments;
- leadership and institutional culture;
- staff issues and attitudes: namely, professional development and training, staff recognition and rewards, and motivation for individuals to use CFL; and
- specific resourcing issues related to funding for maintenance or updating of CFL materials and approaches, staff time release and support staff.

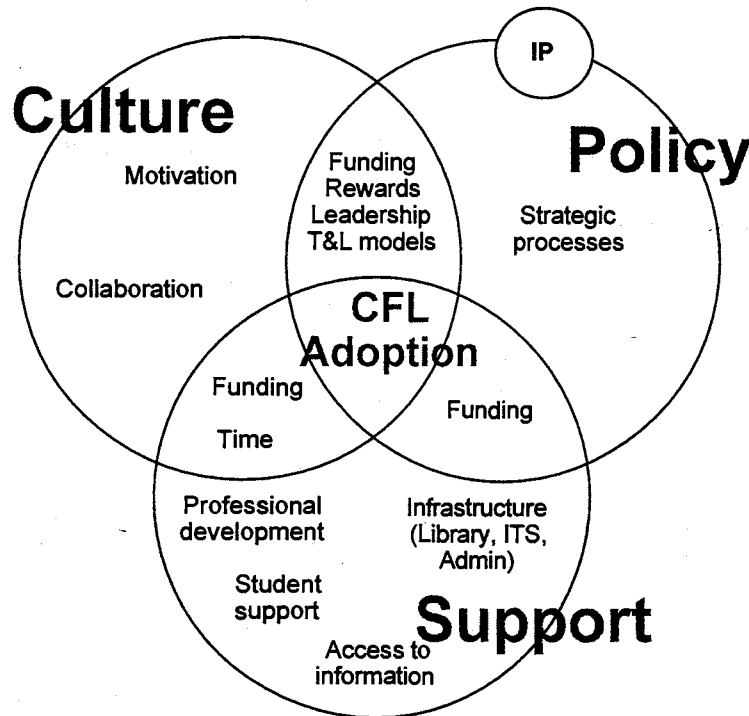


Figure 2. Themes and relationships affecting the adoption of CFL.

FEARS

All Australian universities are investing substantial capital resources in developing their capacity to deliver online courses. University administration are also seeking a clear return on this investment. New modes of operation require support in terms of staff development, technical support, educational design support and media support. These support needs increase the investment levels substantially and, in doing so, generate higher expectations of return on the even larger investments. This is just the sort of scenario which generates stress and a fear of failure - which militates against working comfortably with change. If we are not careful Australian universities will fall into an unproductive vicious circle of fears and unfulfilled expectations.

Are all staff being supported?

A recent survey of ASCILITE (Australasian Society for Computers in Learning in Tertiary Education) members (McNaught et al., 1999) showed interesting data about the perceptions innovators or early adopters have about their colleagues. Most of the 73 members surveyed regarded themselves as innovators or early adopters (Figure 3) and many had developed significant projects single-handedly with little support from faculties or their university. These members were able to see the need for a well-supported environment for development. They were asked to categorise themselves on the scale:

- innovators,
- early adopters,

- users when technology is mainstream, and
- very reluctant users.

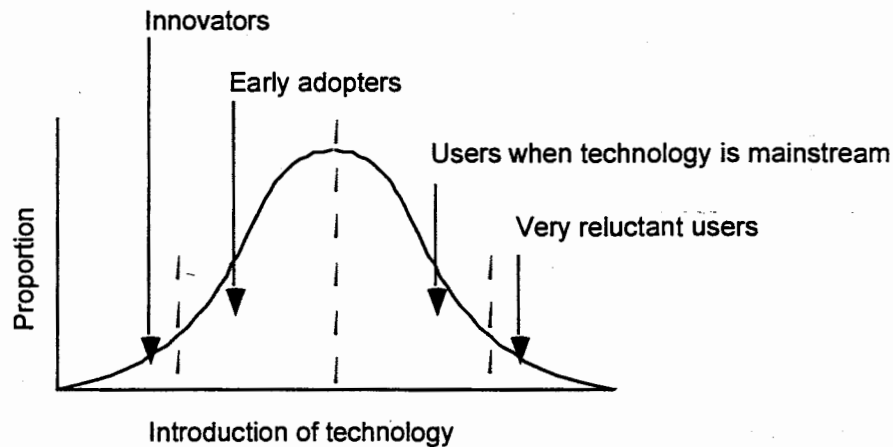


Figure 3. Schematic diagram of phases of technology take-up (after Rogers, 1995).

We also asked them to consider where the majority of staff in each category of department/ faculty/ university were on this scale. The results are shown in Figure 4. The data collected from the survey was in four categories. For the purposes of analysis the data has been collapsed into two categories - innovators/adopters and users/reluctant users in order to see trends more clearly. It is striking how isolated in many ways these innovator/ early adopters are. The majority of respondent ASCILITE members considered themselves to be innovators or early adopters while they perceived that the majority of staff at their institutions only used technology when it was mainstream or were very reluctant users. They did not perceive there to be an environment where the majority of staff feel supported and eager to engage with technology to create flexible learning environments.

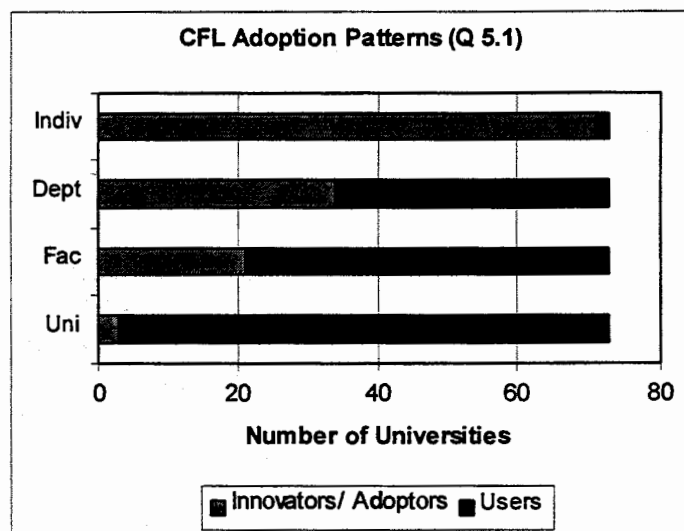


Figure 4. ASCILITE members' perceptions of CFL adoption patterns at their universities.

How big are the staff development needs?

Data obtained from Information Technology Services units at Australian universities provide insight into another issue relating to staff using computer-facilitated learning strategies. Figure 5 illustrates software support available to staff and their usage thereof. Note that while the respondent universities were all able to provide data about university infrastructure software support, many did not comment on staff and student usage. It is clear that staff do not use the full range of technologies available to them. There are complex issues relating to culture, staff development, adequate provision of facilities at a local level, and so on, that relate to the fact that the

majority of Australian academics use their computers mainly for email, web browsing and possibly basic web teaching, and Office applications like Word, PowerPoint and Excel. Also, it may be that some technologies will not be considered appropriate by the majority of staff and will not be used widely. Of course, it is heartening to note that many universities have set in place useful infrastructure for software support but, as indicated above, staff will use technology in their teaching when culture, policy and support structures are congruent.

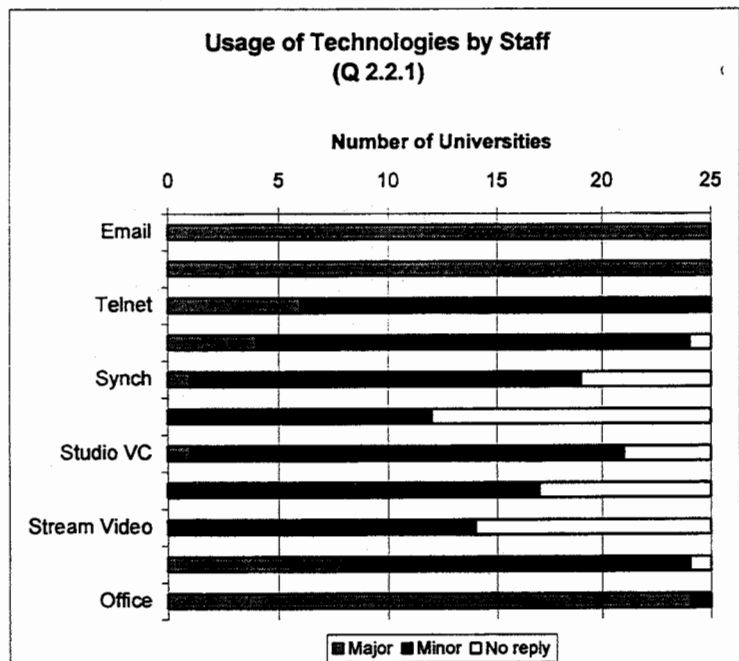
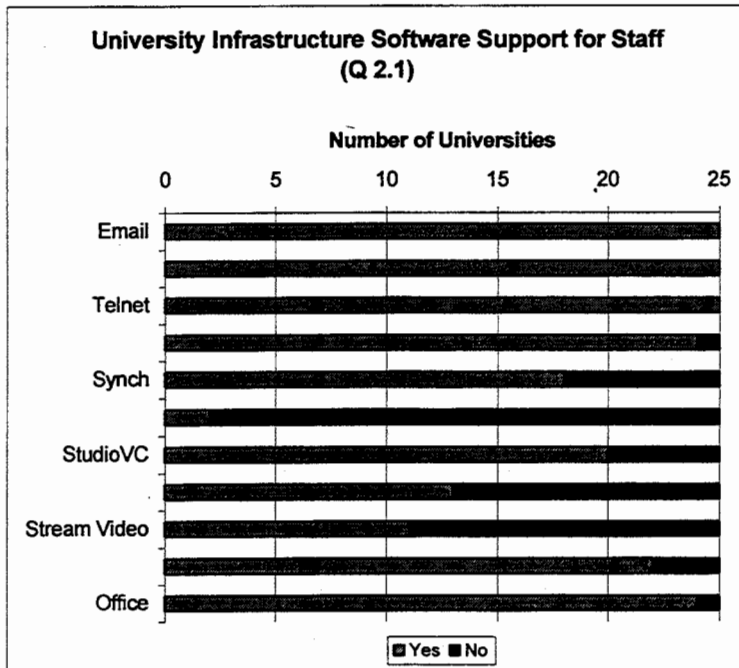


Figure 5. Software support available to staff and their usage thereof.

Key: email, web, telnet, ftp, synchronous chat, desktop videoconferencing, studio videoconferencing, streaming audio, streaming video, dial-up access, general Office applications.

FANTASY

This rather unusual end to a paper came from my wonderings about the meaning of the word 'transformation'. We often speak of student learning as being a process of transforming students' understanding of the concept or phenomena under consideration (see, for example, Laurillard, 1993). What do we mean by transformation? What is it that changes? Some exterior form or behaviour only - which can be measured? Or some underlying essence - some probably unmeasurable change in the deep psyche or being of the learner? Surely we are seeking these deep changes when we discuss higher order thinking skills such as problem-solving or discuss attributes such as creativity.

Playing with words is an essential part of coming to understand what the terms we use mean. Table 3 comes from making associations related to my own background (all Australian Carmels were brought up as Catholics!) Hence the playing with the words transubstantiation (bread and wine looking the same but being new substances) and transignification (the Anglican version with the change in meaning being a signifier but not a fundamental change). How could we know the difference between transubstantiation and transignification anyway; faith is not measurable, though it may well be real. My background as a chemist creeps in with my reference to transmogrification, of which alchemy is an example. Come to think of it, is this such a strange term? There are many graduates who are barely recognisable as the same folk who entered university some years before!

Table 3. Some playful associations in unpacking the meaning of the word 'transformation'.

Term	Meaning	Comment
transformation	new form, new essence??	The word we use so glibly - what does it mean?
transubstantiation	same form, new essence	We would like to think there are inner changes in our students.
transignification	same form but signifying a new meaning	Can we tell the difference between a change in essence and a new signifier?
transmogrification	utter change, no associated forms	Alchemy!

The point I am making is that playful word associations may indeed be a valuable strategy to use as we continue to grapple with the meaning of flexible learning and how it might change the ways in which students learn and what they learn. Let's enjoy this exciting time of experimentation and change. We need to be creative and well as critically rigorous in these endeavours.

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Flexible delivery of tertiary enabling programs into prisons: Creating a learning environment from the inside

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Abstract

This paper provides an overview of prisons education, highlighting the political, educational and administrative challenges that are presented by the unique nature of the prisons environment. The USQ Tertiary Preparation Program is discussed as an example of an educational program taught by flexible learning to prisoners. The paper concludes with a consideration of the meaning of flexible delivery in the context of prisons education and the most appropriate flexible learning strategies, given the particular challenges posed, are identified.

OVERVIEW OF PRISONS EDUCATION

The need for prisons education.

Providing educational opportunities for prisoners is an important consideration from a wide range of perspectives. From the most basic perspective, Article 1 of the *World Declaration on Education for All* has proclaimed education as a basic human need and as a fundamental human right (Inter-Agency Commission, 1990).

It can therefore be argued that imprisonment, even if it is viewed as justified punishment, should not bring with it additional deprivation of civil rights, which include education (UNESCO, 1995, p. 1).

Corrective service organisations and the various stakeholders tend to perceive the principal benefits of education in prisons differently depending on their particular views on the purpose of a criminal justice system overall. A more traditional view of prisons and punishment may focus on the place of education in keeping prisoners 'meaningfully busy', hence relegating education to a tool to assist in prisoner control. More informed attitudes may see the identical activities as improving the quality of life in custody; having as their basis a concern for the welfare of the prisoners. As most countries, including Australia, base their criminal justice systems on the notion of rehabilitation and re-integration into society, a prevailing view is that education enables the prisoner:

... to achieve something useful (skills, knowledge, understanding, social attitudes and behaviour) that will last beyond prison and may lead to employment or further training. This may or may not reduce the level of re-offending (UNESCO, 1995, p. 13).

From yet another perspective, prisons education can readily be justified on equity and social justice grounds. Contrary to commonly held beliefs in our society, the inmates of prisons are not a homogeneous group, they are not all unredeemable and they do have a wide variety of needs, including educational needs (Senate Committee, 1996). However, if we do wish to categorise the prisoner population, the following generalisations about prisoners as a group are more or less valid:

- It is well recognised that a large proportion of prisoners have been victims of abuse and neglect throughout their childhood and adolescence (Bull, 1993). As a result many have been unable to access and achieve a reasonable level of education.
- Many prisoners have limited experience in the formal employment market. Many were unemployed immediately prior to entering custody and they are often drawn from the ranks of the long-term unemployed.
- Many identified disadvantaged groups in society are over-represented in prisons. Indigenous Australians in particular are very significantly over-represented in the prisons system, making up 19% of Australian prisoners, over-represented some seven-fold compared with their proportion of the Australian population as a whole (ABS, 1999).

- Levels of low self-esteem and a feeling of marginalisation in society are high in this group - imprisonment is typically the end result of an extended period of alienation experienced by individuals in this group.

As with any other disadvantaged group, equitable educational opportunities are viewed as important in enhancing the individual's ability to take greater control of their own circumstances and in broadening their range of life opportunities.

The need for prisons education is becoming all the more critical with the current trend in prisoner numbers in Australia. National statistics highlight the dramatic rate of growth of the prisons population. From just over 12,300 in 1998, the number of prisoners has risen to almost 20,000 in 1998, a rise of some 62% in a single decade (ABS, 1999). Whereas the imprisonment rate was just 103 per 100,000 adult population in 1988, in 1998 some 139 out of every 100,000 Australian adults were in prisons, a rise of 32% (ABS, 1999). This trend aligns with the 'law and order' political agenda of recent years where politicians see votes in supporting harsher sentencing legislation and the building of more prisons as a panacea for society's fears of perceived rising crime rates. Such a trend is also evident elsewhere, most notably in the USA (Center on Crime, Communities & Culture, 1997). The natural alternative to this trend is to attempt to address the social problems that contribute to crime and the pressures for imprisonment. Improving educational opportunities and promoting greater integration into society are major strategies supporting these goals (UNESCO, 1995).

Challenges to prisons education.

Although it is generally accepted that prisons education is inherently worthwhile (UNESCO, 1995); real challenges exist to providing such programs effectively. Kinnear (1999) considers the challenges common to education and training delivery within a prison environment as falling into three main categories:

Political challenges: prison education has historically held a tenuous status in the minds of policy makers, politicians and some correctional authorities;

Educational challenges: there is a fundamental conflict between adult educational principles and the objectives of correctional strategies; and

Administrative challenges: problems associated with prison administrative procedures (Kinnear, 1999, p. 20).

The **political challenges** facing education in prisons typically arise because policy makers and prison authorities can fail to embrace education in the way that perhaps they should. These problems typically relate to the differing views held with regard to the purpose of a criminal justice system - as retribution, or as a basis for rehabilitation (Byrne, 1990).

Fundamental to this issue is a consideration of whether education is a privilege or a right for prisoners. Considering education as a privilege serves to establish educational programs as a vehicle for inmate control, thus providing a basis of keeping prisoners 'meaningfully busy' and ensuring that offenders are beholden to a system that has the power to remove privileges as a form of punishment when this is considered necessary. Viewing education as a right, on the other hand, puts the tool of education in the hands of the offender - giving them greater power to improve their own circumstances and broaden their life options (UNESCO, 1995).

In 1996 the Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee under the Chair of Senator John Tierney recommended that education and training be promoted as a right of prisoners, not as a privilege. However, as yet only Victorian legislation explicitly states the right of prisoners to an education - clearly reflecting a continued reluctance of State prisons systems to accept education as a part of their core business (Kinnear, 1999).

With regard to the **educational challenges**, it is clear that prisons represent: "a difficult environment in which to take up education" (Senate Committee, 1996, p. 14). The conditions that generally pertain in prisons are inimical to study. Noise and disruption by other inmates are major problems, along with the general lack of facilities and resources for private study; difficulties in gaining individual and tutorial assistance; and the inability to access a peer support network. The study environment is typically harsh with poor seating and work areas, poor lighting and generally uncomfortable conditions (Thomas, 1995; Senate Committee, 1996; Tiltmann, 1999).

Adding to all this is the general mental state of the prisoner - coming from a position of alienation and marginalisation within society associated with chronic low self-esteem, isolated from family and support networks, often harbouring unresolved grievances, resentment and general frustration, and having to exist within an often unnatural, inhumane and violent environment (Senate Committee, 1996).

The **administrative challenges** to education in prisons relate to the fact that:

Prison policies and university policies do not exist harmoniously. The regimentation and tightly controlled nature of prisons often conflicts with the flexibility required for effective pedagogy (Thomas, 1995, p. 38).

Other factors include: the high level of 'mobility' of offenders (through transfer and release); the incompatibility of study timetables with the administration of security regimes (such as the frequency of 'lockdowns' imposed as a security measure); the high turnover rates of education officers in correctional centres; the lack of program continuity from prison to prison and from prison to the outside world; and the competition between the time required for prison work and prisoner participation in education. These all represent significant barriers to study. The restrictive practices and routines within a prison include the denial of such things as internet access, access to interactive study activities such as telephone tutorials, or even prohibiting direct telephone contact with academic staff - all imposed for security concerns. This has obvious implications for the delivery of educational programs, particularly through flexible delivery. Policies governing general computer access also vary between prisons (Thomas, 1995; Kinnear, 1999; Tiltmann, 1999).

Furthermore, university bureaucracies operate on the premise that students are sufficiently mobile to contact universities to resolve problems, to use the telephone to obtain information, and otherwise are free to navigate through bureaucratic entanglements. For prisoners, these premises do not apply (Thomas, 1995, p. 38).

USQ'S TERTIARY PREPARATION PROGRAM TO PRISONS

The University of Southern Queensland (USQ)'s Tertiary Preparation Program (TPP) provides a useful example of an educational program offered in prisons through flexible delivery (Bull, 1993).

For many years it has been possible for prisoners in Australia to enrol in tertiary education by external studies through normal entry requirements and policy. However, given the nature of the prisoner population, exhibiting as it does high levels of educational disadvantage, post-secondary education would appear the immediate domain of only the most capable of prisoners unless appropriate preparatory programs which bridge the Year 10-to-tertiary level gap are made available. Again, the advent of flexible delivery has served to ensure that such programs are available to prisoners - including programs offered through TAFE such as the Certificate in Adult Tertiary Preparation in Queensland, and the Tertiary Preparation Program (TPP) offered through external studies at USQ.

TPP arose out of an initiative begun in 1989 when USQ received a three-year Innovations grant from the Commonwealth to provide Access and Equity Bridging Programs to a wide range of persons who could demonstrate that they met certain conditions of disadvantage. In 1991, this program was extended to the corrections system with the cooperation and assistance of the Queensland Corrective Services Commission. This was initially piloted in correctional centres as a Youth Offenders' Program. It has however subsequently been made available to all offenders in custody who can demonstrate a disadvantaged background.

The Access and Equity Program was replaced in 1993 by the broader and more comprehensive Tertiary Preparation Program which is accredited with the USQ Academic Board and guarantees entry to the USQ undergraduate program, generally of a student's choice, upon successful completion of the program.

TPP is a semester-long bridging program offered exclusively to students studying part-time and externally. As such it is ideal for mature aged students returning to study as 'second chance' learners. It is designed to provide students with the necessary knowledge, learning strategies and skills for them to effectively undertake undergraduate studies. The program is made up of modularised units covering communications, mathematics and self-development, with additional options available in areas such as literature, human development, physics and chemistry. Offering a program that takes into account individual circumstances is seen as a critical factor

contributing to the success of the program - and represents an important aspect for its role in prisons education. A great deal of flexibility in approaches are offered. For example, amended assignment deadlines are readily negotiated, across semesters where necessary.

The program materials are based on elaborate print, audio and video instructional packages. On a day-to-day basis the program is supported by educational officers based in the prisons supplemented by some visits from university academic staff who provide tutorial assistance and encouragement. Prisoners are required to complete identical assessment and attain the same levels of academic success as is expected of mainstream entry students to the program.

Students in the program are classified as 'enabling', a government provision that enables these students to be included under a university's funded load, but to study in the program HECS-free. This allows the program to be provided to prisoners free of charge using Commonwealth funding, overcoming another major barrier to study for the prisoners.

Tables 1 and 2 highlight the performance of the TPP in prisons. (These statistics do not include indigenous students as these are managed by USQ's Kumbari/Ngurpai Lag Higher Education Centre. Details on the Centre are available at: <http://www.usq.edu.au/kumbari/>)

Over the period 1991-1999, 310 non-indigenous prisoners representing 687 unit enrolments, participated in the TPP at USQ. The overall unit completion rate has been 36.8%. This should be seen in context and recognised as quite a successful outcome given the difficult personal situations of these students and the institutionalised conditions under which they are required to study. A lot of students are also lost upon release or transfer, although it is pleasing that several students in this program have remained in study after achieving release, which in itself reflects a particular kind of success. Up to the commencement of Semester 2 1999, some 23 prisoners have gone on to enrol in USQ undergraduate programs. This represents a little under 25% of prisoners who completed the TPP. These enrolments cover the full range of undergraduate disciplines available - including Arts, Science, General Studies, Nursing, Information Technology, Business and Engineering.

Table 1. (Non-indigenous) Prisoners Enrolled in TPP.

Enrolment Period	Prisoner Enrolments	Progressed to USQ U/g
Semester 1, 1991 Youth Offenders Program	2	
Semester 1, 1992	0	
Semester 1, 1993	2	
Semester 1, 1994	2	
Semester 1, 1995	12	1
Semester 2, 1995	3	1
Semester 1, 1996	16	1
Semester 2, 1996	28	2
Semester 1, 1997	28	1
Semester 2, 1997	15	0
Semester 1, 1998	55	4
Semester 2, 1998	30	7
Semester 1, 1999	59	6
Semester 2, 1999	58	Not yet available
TOTAL	310	23
	252 = 100%	9.1% overall
	93 = 100%	24.7% of those who completed successfully

Table 2. Outcomes of TPP (Non-indigenous) Prisoner Program 1991-99.

Total Unit Enrolments	Incomplete (1999)	Grade 'HD'	Grade 'A'	Grade 'B'	Grade 'C'	Grade 'P'	Grade 'F'	
687	30	7	34	51	65	85	415	
657 = 100%		1.1%	5.2%	7.8%	9.9%	12.9%	63.2%	
							36.8%	63.2%

The apparently low transfer rate of inmates into USQ undergraduate programs is somewhat disappointing. It must be appreciated, however, that the advantages of TPP and similar educational programs offered within prisons extend beyond their role in providing tertiary pathways to prisoners (UNESCO, 1995) – ranging from providing a simple break in prison routine, the improvement of general life skills and personal confidence, and forming the basis for prospects for gaining employment upon release - which is a major factor in reintegration and rehabilitation (NBEET, 1992). Some prisoners also freely admit that involvement in the education program serves to impress a parole board or enables them to 'reduce points', which sees them move down a security level in their confinement. Also, as with any bridging program, it should be considered as a benefit if students use this experience as a basis for being able to decide that higher education is not for them. A very positive aspect is that students are able to be empowered to make such decisions themselves, rather than having society and circumstances make the decision for them. However, the low completion and transfer rates also provide scope for improvements to the program performance, and as will be discussed later, there is probably more that the program can do to improve the quality of delivery to this end.

FLEXIBLE DELIVERY IN THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION PROGRAMS TO PRISONS.

There is considerable confusion about the relative meanings of terms such as 'distance learning', 'open learning', and 'flexible learning' in the context of Australian higher education and the terms tend to be used inconsistently in the literature. Taylor et al., (1996, p. 6) make the following distinctions between 'open', 'distance' and 'flexible' learning' which will be used for the purposes of this paper:

... 'open learning' alludes to an approach that places student learning, needs and choice at the centre of educational decision-making. 'Distance education' refers to practices that allow off-campus participation in educational programs, largely through the provision of print-based resources.

The term 'flexible' is used to refer to practices which utilise the capacities for learner-learner and teacher-learner interactions made possible through recent developments in communication and information technology to provide increased 'openness' in both on- and off-campus delivery of educational programs. ... we use the expression 'flexible modes of delivery' to capture [a] ... combination of philosophy and technology, [recognising] ... that this combination frees the provision of educational programs from both geographical and time constraints.

Hence, 'openness' implies student-focussed learning, which has always been a central theme of distance education. The paradigm of distance education from the beginning has been based on an appreciation of the need to overcome the barriers created by distance - an inherently student-centred approach in stark contrast with the traditional university teaching practices that see pedagogical approaches set up more for the convenience of academic staff (White, 1982).

Despite the attempts in the literature to flag flexible learning as a major new issue, 'flexible learning' is actually no more than an extension of the distance education concept - continuing to embrace the openness that has categorised distance education, but utilising the growing inventory of educational technologies that have become available. One significant change is that flexible learning is now equally as applicable to enhancing on-campus study as it is to a consideration of distance learning (Taylor, 1995), but of course this is of no relevance to prisons education per se. The overall aim of flexible learning is to create a learning environment independent of time, place and pace. Some authors attempt to distinguish between 'flexible learning' and 'flexible delivery' but no such distinction is necessary. Whatever it is called, the approaches used need to be adapted for the particular student body being targeted. Such fundamentals of good teaching have not changed.

Taylor (1995) published a useful structure on which to trace developments in flexible learning (Table 3). Several points need to be made regarding a consideration of these new educational technologies:

- Taylor’s ‘First Generation’ model sees print materials - which can now be quite sophisticated - becoming increasingly supplemented through the use of emerging technologies.
- What might be thought of as the ‘Second Generation’ of flexible learning - the Multimedia Model - involves videotapes, audiotapes, computer conferencing and computer-based courseware; each of which provide the opportunity for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning.
- With the further development of educational technologies there has been a trend to move towards the ‘Third Generation’ Telelearning Model. This involves communications technologies that provide the scope for interactivity but, which are grounded in synchronous teaching / learning experiences, such as audio-teleconferencing and video-conferencing.
- The emerging ‘Fourth Generation’ model is referred to as the Flexible Learning Model. This combines the benefits of high quality CD ROM-based interactive multimedia with the enhanced interactivity and access to the growing range of teaching-learning resources offered by connection to the Internet. Increasingly there is talk of the ‘virtual campus’. This is a metaphor for the electronic teaching-learning and research environment created by the convergence of powerful new information and instructional technologies (van Dusen, 1997).

Table 3. Flexible Delivery Technologies-A Conceptual Framework (from Taylor, 1995).

Models of Distance Education and Associated Flexible Delivery Technologies	Characteristics of Flexible Delivery Technologies				
	Flexibility			Highly Refined Materials	Advanced Interactive Delivery
	Time	Place	Pace		
First Generation - The Correspondence Model • Print	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Second Generation - The Multi-media Model • Print • Audiotape • Videotape • Computer-based learning (eg CML/CAL) • Interactive video (disk and tape)	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes Yes Yes	No No No Yes Yes
Third Generation - The Telelearning Model • Audioteleconferencing • Videoconferencing • Audiographic Communication • Broadcast TV/Radio and Audioteleconferencing	No No No No	No No No No	No No No No	No No Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes Yes
Fourth Generation - The Flexible Learning Model • Interactive multimedia (IMM) • Internet-based access to WWW resources • Computer mediated communication.	Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes Yes	Yes Yes No	Yes Yes Yes

But what relevance does all this have to education in prisons?

USQ’s perception of its flexible delivery model is epitomised in the following statement taken from the Vice Chancellor’s Home Page:

The University believes that flexible delivery is about giving people WHAT they want, WHERE they want it, WHEN they want it, in THEIR style, in THEIR place, in THEIR time (Swannell, 1999).

Applying this principle to education in prisons leads to a few inevitable conclusions. Firstly, the trend in flexible learning towards employing high-end technology would appear to have limited relevance to education in prisons as it currently stands. Difficulties arise both because of the severe limitations in the resources available in the prisons, and the practical limitations imposed on prisoners in terms of their 'contact' with the outside preventing the use of strategies such as audio- and video-teleconferencing and access to the internet. However, if flexible learning is perceived in terms of a focus upon delivery modes which are able to transcend the time / place / pace determinism of most educational programs (Taylor, 1995), then the relevance of the concept to education in prisons is clear. Flexible delivery enables an individualised and self-paced approach to education, as well as the potential for portability and transferability of the education program upon prisoner transfer or release.

That education within prisons may be based in what Taylor (1995) referred to as the 'Multi-Media' or 'Second Generation' Model poses few inherent problems; it is a matter of pitching the use of technologies available as appropriate for the use being contemplated. It must be said though that if the 'resources gremlin' could be appeased and computer access policies standardised across the prisons system, then strategies such as the use of CD-ROM-based interactive approaches included in Taylor's Fourth Generation model could well have a place in prisons education. Similarly, if security concerns could be met, then Third Generation technologies enabling audio-teleconferencing and video-conferencing could prove extremely valuable in prisons education.

What is critical at present is the nature and level of student support that is provided to prisoners as part of their flexible learning experience. The government has continually tried to promote flexible learning as a basis for providing 'cheap' higher education based on programs such as Open Learning Australia which rely on low levels of student support (Atkinson et al., 1995; Kinnear, 1999). This concept simply does not work effectively in situations where disadvantaged students or first-time tertiary learners are involved (Postle et al., 1995; Kinnear, 1999). In particular, in targeting educationally disadvantaged students lacking highly developed learning skills and studying in a demanding environment, flexible learning in prisons generally requires significant levels of student support.

This is the area where greatest effort is now needed on the part of USQ. The TPP prisons program has expanded considerably over the past three years, rising from just 15 inmates in 1995 to nearly 120 in 1999 - an 8-fold increase (Table 1). Unfortunately, the level of individualised support has not been able to keep pace with this development. The programs are heavily reliant on the education officers in prisons and these individuals do a remarkable job generally under quite difficult conditions. However, the need is for an increased level and greater regularity of academic visits into prisons to support the program. Such moves are naturally expensive and logistically difficult given the number of prisons now involved all across Queensland, but it is the direction that the program needs to move if the program's performance is to be maximised. It is worth noting here though, that a characteristic of the TPP offered to indigenous prisoners, a program managed by USQ's Kumbari/Ngurpai Lag, is a higher level of tutorial support through more on-site visits by tutorial and support staff.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has given an overview of prisons education. Arguments have been developed to support the benefits of education in prisons. The political, educational and administrative barriers to providing educational opportunities within the often harsh and unnatural corrections environment has been discussed.

The role of flexible delivery approaches within the context of prisons education was discussed using the USQ Tertiary Preparation Program as a case study. The conclusions were that flexible delivery approaches provide the basis for individualising the educational experience for each inmate student, and allow the potential for the educational program to move with the prisoners if they transfer between correctional institutions or are released.

Taylor's Multi-Media or Second Generation model of flexible learning was seen as the most appropriate for the special requirements of prisons education with appropriate levels of student support being a critical requirement.

Finally - and this is a message that the government bureaucrats don't want to hear - flexible learning will not provide cheap alternatives for effective prisons education. The levels of student support required to make these programs truly effective will significantly contribute to the cost of these programs.

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Language and learning in 'the late age of print': Situating a web-based essay writing project

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Abstract

In 1999, the Language and Learning Services Unit at Monash embarked on a 'Strategic Innovations' project aimed at providing online web-based learning to students. One of the main components of the project has been the creation of a series of online tutorials in a range of academic skill areas. This paper provides a description and a critique of one of the first tutorials developed - an essay writing tutorial. In evaluating this resource, our aim is to give a sense of the processes of learning and reflecting we have been engaged in on the project and also to situate these within broader debates about the new technologies and their impact on language and learning practices. We shall argue that the success of web-based language and learning resources is contingent on recognising the implications - both textual and pedagogical - of the technology used.

The Language and Learning Services Unit (LLS) at Monash, like many other academic support units at Australian universities, has in recent years begun to adapt its practices to the exciting, but also sometimes daunting, world of the online technologies. In 1999, the Unit was fortunate to be the recipient of a generous Strategic Innovations Fund (SIF) grant from the University and embarked on a project designed to provide an electronic gateway to our services and resources, the Online Student Resource Centre. One of the main components of the project has been the provision of online web-based learning for students who are unable to draw on the benefits of face-to-face academic skills teaching. This has mainly involved the creation of a series of online tutorials in a range of academic skills areas including: essay writing; report writing; lecture listening and notetaking; academic reading; seminar presentations and grammar.¹

In the present paper we provide a description and a critique of one of the first tutorials developed - the essay writing tutorial (http://www.monash.edu.au/lls/sif/LLS_Tutorials/Writing/writing.html).² For most of us at LLS, the reconceptualisation of our work for an online environment has represented a significant challenge, one requiring a good deal of learning and re-orienting of our thinking. Our aim in what follows is to situate these reflections within broader debates about the new educational technologies and their impact on language and learning practices. In relation to the specific learning resource described here - the essay writing tutorial - we shall argue that, whilst the materials have the advantage of being widely accessible to students, their online effectiveness may be constrained somewhat by certain difficulties we found in attempting to translate modes of classroom instruction to the new environment. We argue further that the design of any future web-based learning materials needs to take into account the special 'modular' structure that characterises the key technology of hypertext.

AN ESSAY WRITING TUTORIAL

Of the range of language and academic skills teaching the Unit is engaged in, clearly it is the teaching of essay writing and related skills that occupies most of our energies and resources. Whilst the essay as a genre is more integral to certain discipline areas (i.e. the humanities and social sciences), a recent survey of writing requirements across the university (Moore & Morton, 1999) found that this assignment type continues to be the main generic currency in a majority of subject specialisations. The development of a set of online essay writing materials with broad applicability was thus a priority for the project.

A benefit of our work as language advisers is that the needs of our students are well understood. We know for example that students have difficulty with understanding and critiquing references, with interrogating assignment topics, with structuring their work. With the online environment, though, it was necessary to imagine a variety of students all at different points in their progress. The same personalised attention could not be given. The 'attention' itself had to be different. Increased student access was clearly an advantage, but to what? The aim had

to be, as Thomas, Carswell, Price and Petre (1998) suggest, not only to increase accessibility of the materials, but also to improve practice. In the following sections, we discuss briefly principles that guided us in the development of the essay materials. These were in three broad areas: writing pedagogy and self-directed learning - with which we were already familiar - and web design which was new.

PRINCIPLES OF WRITING PEDAGOGY

The first challenge in developing a set of essay writing materials for mass consumption across the university was negotiating between the 'generic' and the 'discipline-specific'. This related in the first instance to the problem of identifying a suitable content base for materials - one that was both academic in nature, yet comprehensible and potentially of some interest to students from a range of disciplinary backgrounds (see Swales, 1987). Another related difficulty concerned the need to generalise the genre, as it were; that is to deal in some purposeful way with the sorts of discursive variations in essay writing across the disciplines noted by many analysts (see for example, Taylor, 1988; Ballard & Clanchy, 1988).

For the content-base of the essay writing tutorial, we chose to rely on a 'thematic' model, one from a range of content models proposed by Brinton, Snow and Wesche (1989). As Brinton et al., suggest, the choice of model will depend on the relationship one envisages between language skills and content in the particular learning context to hand; that is whether, in crude terms, language is thought to be working in the service of content, or content in the service of language. In our context, with a focus on the teaching of a 'generic' skill to a non discipline-specific group, clearly the latter obtained. For a 'thematic' approach, Brinton et al., recommend content of a broad sociological, political or cultural nature, one that will be schematically familiar to students. (For a more detailed rationale for using sociology as the content base of EAP courses, see Gaffield-Vile, 1996). For our tutorial, we chose the sociological theme of 'divorce in society', believing this would be of broad interest to students. However, one might just as easily have chosen from other themes outlined by Brinton et al., viz 'environmental problems', 'culture shock' and so on.

With respect to the essay itself, the tutorial aimed to include a genre sample that had disciplinary authenticity (that is, was identifiable as a 'sociology' essay), but that would have relevance to essay writing practices in other discipline areas. To ensure the latter, we sought to use a type of writing that was constitutive of certain 'canonical text structures' (Johns, 1988) - with clear cross-disciplinary application. The sample essay topic used (see below) was chosen, in part, for its prescription of a range of these structures - 'explanation'; 'critical analysis', 'application of theory to practice'.

In the last 20 years, rates of divorce have risen significantly in Western countries. Critically analyse some of the different explanations given for this phenomenon. In your discussion you should consider what implications these explanations might have for social policy.


It needs to be acknowledged, however, that the 'generic - discipline specific' tension in any form of academic skills teaching can never be entirely resolved, only mediated in some way. As Taylor (see this volume) suggests, the struggle is always to try to draw the two tendencies into 'some fruitful relationship'. Throughout the essay tutorial, the tension between the generic and the discipline-specific is manifested in various ways, but none is as explicit as the 'each way bet' expressed in the following information to students on the opening screen (see Figure 1):

In this tutorial you will learn about approaches to essay writing at university level. The tutorial applies especially to writing in the arts and social sciences, but is relevant to other study areas as well.

For the actual design of the essay writing materials, we were influenced strongly by the push in recent years to achieve a sensible synthesis of 'process' and 'product' (or genre) approaches to the teaching of academic writing, which until not so long ago, represented two distinct and adversarial theoretical positions (see Candlin, Gollin, Plum, Spinks & Stuart-Smith, 1998). The essay tutorial was intentionally 'synthetic' in its design. The materials are organised in the first place around the various stages of the writing 'process' (see Figure 1, left hand column) including: topic analysis; provisional essay planning; selecting of readings; note taking; drafting.

Essay Writing

<p><u>Table of contents</u></p> <p><u>The essay topic</u></p> <p><u>The essay plan</u></p> <p><u>Selecting readings</u></p> <p><u>Taking notes</u></p> <p><u>Drafting the essay</u></p> <p><u>Sample essay</u></p> <p><u>Analysing citations</u></p> <p><u>The conclusion</u></p> <p><u>Essay references</u></p> <p><u>Tutorial summary</u></p> <p><u>More help</u></p> <p><u>Feedback</u></p>	<p>Introduction</p> <p>In this tutorial you will learn about approaches to essay writing at university level. The tutorial applies especially to writing in the arts and social sciences, but is relevant to other study areas as well.</p> <p>The materials in the tutorial are based on the topic of 'divorce in society'. Materials include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>a sample essay topic</u> • <u>a sample essay plan (provisional)</u> • <u>a sample essay plan (elaborated)</u> • <u>reading passages related to the topic</u> • <u>a sample student essay</u> <p>You are recommended to work sequentially through each of the tutorial sections by entering the Essay Writing module now. Total time needed is approximately 1 hour.</p>
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Please give us your feedback when you have finished

Figure 1. Introductory screen from essay writing tutorial.

For the 'product element', a number of authentic and semi-authentic texts were selected (an essay topic; sample readings; a sample essay), serving both as generic exemplars and as the basis for interactive tasks. A key element of genre pedagogy is the use of activities which draw students' attention to various linguistic and rhetorical features thought to be critical to a particular genre. In the earlier days of the genre approach, this type of activity tended to operate as a crude prescriptivism, with a focus arguably more on genre conformity than on the producing of good writing (Freedman, 1994). Recent genre-based pedagogies have sought to apply a more 'descriptivist', 'discourse analytic' approach, with students encouraged to conduct their own research into 'texts, genres and the literacy practices of others' (Johns, 1997, p. 92). Elsewhere this approach has been described as a 'critical descriptivism' (Moore, 1999), the aim of which is not only to help students identify the characteristic features of writing in their field, but also to 'encourage them to consider why high status texts are constructed in the way they are and to what rhetorical ends' (p. 19).


There was an attempt to incorporate this 'critical descriptivism' into the tutorial. To take one example, in a section on *Analysing citations* (see Figure 2), students are asked to identify variable citation forms in the sample essay - 'information-prominent' citations (in example 1) and 'author prominent' citations (in example 2) - and then to consider on what basis these different rhetorical choices might have been made by the writer.

Different citation forms

Look at the following citations taken from paragraphs 1 and 3 of the sample essay . Do you notice any difference in the way these two citations are set out? Can you think of any reason why they would be set out differently?

A consequence of this change has been a substantial increase in the number of single parent families and the attendant problems that this brings (Kilmartin, 1997).

For example, Bilton, Bonnett and Jones (1987) argue that increased rates of divorce do not necessarily indicate that families are now more unstable.

 [Comments](#) [Next Task](#)

[Top](#)

Figure 2. Sample task from essay writing tutorial.

SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

A distinctive feature of our work is that we commonly work closely with students to support their learning in a personalised way, whether this takes the form of individualised support, small groups or larger classes. The best learning of any kind, we agree with Laurillard (1993), is in the form of a conversation - a dialogic relationship - between teacher and student, ideally on a one-to one basis, centring on variations of the goal-action-feedback cycle. How, then, were we to deal with a situation at odds with this approach - the replacement of the teacher, as it were, with a web browser. For guidance here we relied on the framework provided by 'self-directed learning' (SDL).


Self directedness as an approach became especially popular in the language field during the 1980s, marked by the proliferation of self-access and resource centres, including those within university study skills units. The broad philosophy has also seen a parallel development in the burgeoning area of university distance education. SDL has been driven in part no doubt by certain economic imperatives, but also by enlightened notions of 'autonomy' (Holec, 1980) and 'learner centredness' (Nunan, 1988). With the advancement of online computer technology, the possibilities for self-direction appear almost limitless.

Dickinson (1987) in his well-regarded manual on 'self-instruction in language learning' makes a broad distinction between 'learner-centred' and 'material-centred' approaches. Learner-centred approaches are characterised by modes which place greater responsibility on the learner to assess their own learning needs and to act upon these, while material-based approaches build the teacher's role more deliberately into self-instructional resources. In the latter approach, resources are organised so that decision making and the management of the learning are predetermined to a greater degree. The model for the 'materials' approach is very much the language classroom. As Dickinson explains: 'materials [in this mode] should ideally contain the help and information which a teacher would normally supply' (p. 9).

The essay tutorial is based to a greater extent on the 'materials' approach to self-instruction. Our thinking on this issue was guided in part by equity considerations, believing that the online materials should be able to provide a fair alternative for those students, who for whatever reasons, would be unable to attend our face-to-face courses.

In the online tutorial, we therefore hoped to create an experience for students that would have the same value for them as participating in a university writing class.

Task

 **Read the following essay topic from a sociology subject:**

In the last 20 years, rates of divorce have risen significantly in Western countries. Critically analyse some of the different explanations given for this phenomenon. In your discussion you should consider what implications these explanations might have for social policy.

1. Which words or phrases do you think are particularly important in working out what the topic is about? Enter these into the text box below.

rates of divorce have risen significantly

critically analyse

Comments

The essay topic

In the last 20 years, rates of divorce have risen significantly in Western countries. Critically analyse some of the different explanations given for this phenomenon. In your discussion you should consider what implications these explanations might have for social policy.

Critically analyse

To *critically analyse* is a common instruction in essay topics. In broad terms, *critically analyse* means to assess the **value** of some entity with respect to its strengths and weaknesses. This entity may be a theory, a policy, an argument, a piece of research etc. In the case of this essay topic, what needs to be **evaluated** are the *different explanations* given for rising divorce.

Link from the next highlighted phrase above to find out its meaning in the context of the whole topic

Or, move to the next task


 **Task** [Different interpretations](#)

Figure 3. Sample interactive task and feedback.

A key element in the design of self-instruction materials is the concept of 'task', derived in part from the move in recent years towards task-based learning (TBL) in language learning and in other fields. The task-based approach finds its rationale in the uncontroversial view that 'learning takes place most effectively when students are actively involved, and in the context in which knowledge is to be used' (Boud & Feletti, 1991, p. 6). Whilst the efficacy of this approach is undisputed, there is within the applied linguistics literature, some dispute about what the principal focus of language tasks should be. For some like Candlin (1987), tasks should always have a problem-solving element to them and be concerned primarily with issues of content. For others like Swales (1990), there is room within the approach for a focus on form, in particular those related to particular genre formations. Elsewhere, these latter activities have been referred to as 'noticing tasks' (Ellis, 1995).

In the essay writing tutorial we sought to make 'task' central to the design of the materials, not only believing this to be pedagogically appropriate, but recognising it also as an opportunity not to be missed with the new technology. We found the tutorial lent itself to the inclusion of both task-types - the 'problem-solving' and the 'noticing' kind - with the former relevant more to those sections concerned with the processes of essay writing (as in Figure 3a) - and the latter relevant to those later sections dealing with the written product (Figure 2).

PRINCIPLES OF WEB DESIGN

At the commencement of the SIF project, one area of pedagogy that was new to us was the design of instructional materials for a web environment. For directions here we relied on the array of design resources available on the web itself, including Jakob Nielsen's comprehensive materials - *Writing for the Web*. Some of the key design issues that needed to be considered for the essay tutorial - discussed here briefly - were: screen readability; navigability and interactivity.³

Much is made in the web design literature of how screen reading differs from the reading of print - characterised more as scanning than reading. This has led to the formulation of a number of stylistic strictures including the need to make one's web texts considerably more succinct than they would be in a printed form; to use dotpointing to a greater extent; and to write in a more inductive style with summaries at the beginning of text sections. Despite some initial resistance to this type of stylistic adjustment - somehow at odds with the type of discursive forms we were seeking to teach - we were able, during the course of the project, to recognise these parameters as an opportunity to experiment with a less formal spoken-like instructional style, one more characteristic of classroom discourse.

A second important consideration was navigability. With the often complex hypertext structures of web resources, there is the potential, as commentators have pointed out, for a good deal of confusion and disorientation. As Foertsch (1995) explains: 'the screen reader may have difficulty recalling items because the same retrieval cue is linked with too many pieces of information'. In the same way that students attending a series of essay writing sessions often need to know about the organisation of the syllabus (along with their progression through it), in the essay tutorial we needed to provide clear navigation signals to help users identify where in the tutorial's macro-structure they were currently working. Following an early focus group session, we added a site map in response to student comments.

Whilst screen readability and navigability might be seen as problematic for the design of materials, the third area - interactivity - clearly offered immediate opportunities. In the interactive capabilities of web-based technology, we saw the opportunity to implement in a quite elaborate way some of the principles of task-based learning discussed above. The essay tutorial contains a variety of tasks with associated forms of feedback, including the following sample shown in Figures 3a and 3b. In this task students are asked to identify key words in a sample essay topic; they are then provided with teacherly feedback on their responses.

In the preceding discussion, we have outlined the more salient principles that informed the development of the essay materials. In summarising these, we can refer perhaps to a single overarching principle, one that functioned as the cornerstone for most design decisions for this tutorial - this was that the online tutorial should seek *to simulate, as far as possible, the types of procedures, materials and interactions that occur in the classroom*. But herein, we suggest, lies a *problem*. To understand why this otherwise sound approach should be problematic, we need to consider the special characteristics of the main technological tool used for the tutorial - hypertext.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TEXT AND HYPERTEXT

Of the various developments in online technologies over the past decade hypertext is regarded by many as the most significant. For a number of writers, hypertextuality is not simply an alternative way of organising a text, but a fundamentally different mode of communication, one which is thought to be creating a new set of 'literacy practices' (Snyder, 1996). In line with this, Bolter (1991) suggests - somewhat extravagantly- that we are living in the final days of one era - 'the late age of print' as he dubs it - and entering a new era of electronic literacy, with new ways of writing and reading and ultimately of thinking. Whilst we need to be a little circumspect about such grand predictions, it is clear that texts in an online environment are different in many respects from those in a traditional printed form and that understanding these differences is necessary if our efforts to bring language and learning activities online are to be successful.

As a technology, hypertext is not conceptually complex - simply 'a structure composed of blocks of texts connected by an electronic link' (Snyder, 1996, p. x). This feature, however, has an important effect on the way that texts are structured - both in terms of their authoring and especially in terms of their reading. The main difference between print and hypertext modes, as characterised in the literature, is between a 'linear, hierarchical and narrative' structure on the one hand, and a 'lateral, rhizomic and hypernarrative' structure on the other (Burbules, 1997). In printed text, the flow of ideas is broadly a linear one, constructed by the paradigmatic choices made by the writer in the composing process. This linearity is manifest in the various structural units of the text - in the movement from one sentence to the next, from one paragraph to the next, from one chapter to the next and so on. Whilst a reader may choose not to read a printed text in exactly the same linear manner in which it is realised - indeed this type of reading may only apply to certain genres of printed text - it is reasonable to say that the broad linear narrative of *introduction-middle-conclusion* is a text's unmarked structure. In the terminology of computing, the default position for the reader is 'to continue reading on'.

In a hypertext, by contrast, text structure is considerably freer for the reader. On encountering a link, a reader must make a choice between activating or ignoring it. Once a link has been activated, there is then a further choice - whether to return subsequently to the previous screen with its associated set of additional links, or to pursue the orientation provided by the new screen with a whole new set of potential links. The processes of interacting with a hypertext mean that a text's structure is effectively constructed in its reading. As Corbel (1997) states:

With hypertexts readers create the text, or a version of it as they go along. It has been suggested that rather than referring to readers and writers of texts, we should talk only about *users* of electronic texts (p. 119).

In an educational context, the student working with hypertext is a more active agent. Although the broad learning framework will be shaped by the teacher-designer, individual students will make their own choices about how they engage with materials. They can choose which sections of the materials they will work with, how quickly or slowly they will work with them and so on, all involving moment-to-moment choices different from those that relate to the print medium.

A number of terms are used to characterise the readerly structure of hypertext. In contrast to the 'linearity' of print, the reader's experience of hypertext is said to be 'lateral', involving not an orderly vertical movement through text, but a random horizontal movement across texts. Similarly, whereas printed texts are said to be organised hierarchically, the structure of hypertexts is seen as more arbitrary or 'rhizomic' (root-like). A final distinction is between 'narrative' and 'hypernarrative', the latter involving, as Kaplan and Moulthrop (1991) describe it, 'not a vectoring of the reader toward a single closure or solution, but enabling a multitude of outcomes' (p. 13). In Figure 4 below we represent in tabular form a number of the contrasts outlined above, along with several others discussed later in the paper. For us, these differences are significant, and need to be a consideration in the design of web-based language and learning materials.

TRADITIONAL PRINT TEXT	COMPUTER HYPERTEXT
Linear, hierarchical, narrative structure	Lateral, rhizomic, hypertextual structure
Author/teacher creates structure of text	Reader/learner creates structure of text
Structure is prescribed	Structure is arbitrary
Unmarked structure: <i>introduction-middle-conclusion</i>	Unmarked structure: <i>entry point-hyperlinked screens</i>
Text as product - fixed, permanent, bounded	Text as process - mutable, unstable, open
Unified, globally coherent - low modularity,	Fragmented, locally coherent - high modularity
Reading as progression	Reading as digression
Conclusion	Abandonment

Figure 4. Some differences identified in the literature between text and hypertext.

THE PROBLEM OF STRUCTURE IN THE ESSAY WRITING TUTORIAL

Reflecting on the essay writing tutorial, it is for us clearly more rooted in the linear structures of printed text. This is not altogether surprising, given the materials are concerned primarily with instructing students in a range of print-literacy skills. Nevertheless, it is interesting to understand from whence this linearity derives, and whether there might be other ways of constructing the pedagogy. One source of linearity is the tutorial's narrative of classroom discourse. As mentioned earlier, the overarching design principle was to simulate, as far as possible, the learning interactions of classroom teaching. As was also explained, much of the ordering of the material was derived from specific essay writing courses we have taught in face-to-face modes as part of the overall program of our centre. Artefacts from the classroom can be seen, for example, in the principled movement in the web materials from a discussion of writing processes to an analysis of written products (see Figure 5). A problem, however, with this approach is that it tends to impose the hierarchies and ordering of a teacher's programmed curriculum on to what will be in practice a randomly-created curriculum of the web user. This attempt to direct users' interactions with the materials is evidenced in the recommendation to students on the opening screen 'to work *sequentially* through each of the sections of tutorials' (see Figure 1). But whilst students are enjoined to engage linearly, the technology itself encourages a more lateral engagement. As Lanham (1993, p. 133) suggests, hypertext-based learning resources 'stand at odds with our heretofore unquestioned assumption that the curriculum ought to be linear, if it possibly could'.

Writing processes	1. Introduction
	2. The essay topic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 Interpreting the essay topic 2.2 Different interpretations
	3. The essay plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1 Thinking about the topic 3.2 Developing a plan
	4. Selecting readings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1 Assessing the relevance of a text from its title 4.2 Skim reading a text fro its relevance
	5. Taking notes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5.1 Sample notes
Written product	6. Drafting the essay <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6.1 Drafting an introduction
	7. A sample essay <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7.1 Analysing a sample essay 7.2 Analysing structure 7.3 Analysing the language of critique
	8. Analysing citations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8.1 Different citation forms 8.2 Direct quotes 8.3 Embedded citations
	9. The conclusion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9.1 Analysing conclusions
	10. Essay references <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10.1 Analysing lists of references 10.2 Referencing quiz 10.3 Identifying references quiz

Figure 5. Essay writing tutorial – Table of contents.

The other narrative structure at work is the writing process itself. Although, there was an attempt to depict this in a 'recursive' manner, the broad effect again is a linearity, derived from the chronologies of researching and writing an essay. This linear structure can be seen for example in the *Table of Contents* of the tutorial (Figure 5), with an implicit circumscription of the engagement from top to bottom. Again, however, there is arguably an element of disjuncture between the technology and the text - a student is able to move upward or even randomly through the sections of the tutorial, but in such a reading, elements of the text's internal coherence is lost. For example, an exercise that requires students to comment on the relevance of a set of reading passages (see Figure 5, 4.1) will be problematic if students do not first engage closely with the essay topic in a preceding exercise (see Figure 5, 2.1).

In understanding the problems of structure in the essay materials, we can refer to a useful distinction drawn by Balestri (1988) between writing for 'hardcopy' and writing for 'softcopy'. For Balestri, hardcopy is a type of writing geared towards the printer. In this mode, the computer is used primarily as an electronic typewriter to create fixed, linear paper text. Softcopy on the other hand is writing that is designed to exist on the screen only - not to be printed, but 'displayed', as Snyder (1996) suggests. Softcopy, according to Balestri, is a departure from a static and product-centred conception of writing to one that is dynamic, and process-centred. For Bolter (1992), a softcopy electronic text is 'fluid, adjustable right up to the moment of reading. Indeed [it] only exists in the act of reading' (p. 20).

The essay writing tutorial, it must be conceded, bears more of the qualities of hardcopy than softcopy. Indeed, in the instructions on the introductory screen (Figure 1), students are given the option of printing out the materials

and working from a 'hardcopy'. In terms of structure, there is not much to distinguish between the two versions. Our ongoing evaluation of the overall project has only recently commenced and is expected to take in a range of evaluative methodologies. One type of evaluation that we think worth pursuing, however, is learners' responses to working in the two different environments and whether they have a preference for one of these. Initial student feedback on the web version has been mainly positive, half the group wanting to work with a combination of online learning and printed essay. It is possible, however, that the print version of the tutorial - because its linearity is more in keeping with the writing processes being taught - is more likely to develop the desired print literacy skills.

A WAY FORWARD?

The problems we have identified in the essay writing materials arise, in short, from an attempt to apply the norms of print culture to an online context. In this section we will discuss briefly an alternative design approach and consider the extent to which it might be applied to the essay writing tutorial. Bernhardt (1993) in a useful piece - *The shape of text to come: The texture of print on screens* - outlines in a systematic way a number of 'dimensions of variation' between paper and screen texts. The 'dimension' that has particular relevance to the present discussion is what he calls 'modularity'. All texts, Bernhardt asserts, are modular to some extent in that they are composed of other texts - for example, books are made up of chapters, newspapers of articles and so on. The movement from paper to screen, however, encourages a far greater degree of modularisation. In screen text, the computer window becomes the 'structural unit of prose'; this unit or module, Bernhardt argues, needs to be considerably more self-contained than in a printed text.

Each module must to some extent stand on its own, interpretable without close logical cohesion with other screens. The writer must assume that a reader can arrive at a given screen from practically anywhere, so there can be no assumption that a reader has built up a model of the logical relations of the text from processing pages in a linear order (p. 160).

In the terminology of linguistic cohesion (Halliday & Hasan, 1976), we can say that a screen hypertext is of necessity, more 'locally anaphoric', in contrast anaphora in a printed text, is considerably more extensive (e.g. "In the previous section/chapter/unit, it was shown that ...").

In our regular surveying of language and learning materials across the world wide web, we are aware of just one resource that embraces thoroughly this principle of 'modularity' - this is the 'kibbitzer' material of Tim Johns from the English for International Students Unit, University of Birmingham (<http://web.bham.ac.uk/johnstf/timeap3.htm>). The term 'kibbitzer' (from central European chess culture at the turn of the century) refers to a person who did not *play* chess, but rather watched and commented on games in progress. In his web materials, Johns is not a 'kibbitzer' of chess, but of the sorts of language problems observed in students' work in one-to-one consultations. Provided on the site is a collection of discrete, 'stand alone' modules on some of these language points (lexical, syntactic and discursal) including for example: expressing academic modesty (Kibbitzer #32, see Figure 6); managing transitions in a text (Kibbitzer #36); distinguishing authorial voice in an essay (Kibbitzer #56).

The point about Johns' materials is that they are produced in a random and continuous way and are accessed by readers in the same manner. As Nicholas Groom, a lecturer at the Institute of Education London and regular user of the material, has commented:

What is distinctive about the site is its randomness ... there is no syllabus, no ordering of points from easy to difficult, no macro-view - just a range of material that students and teachers can make *their own sense of* (personal communication; emphasis added).

Kibbitzer 32		Academic Modesty
The following revision is taken from an Abstract by a Thai-speaking postgraduate student of chemical engineering:		
Original	Revision	
In conclusion, this study is a useful first step in the development of biodegradation techniques.	In conclusion, it is hoped that this study may be a useful contribution to the development of biodegradation techniques.	
Two principles of Academic Modesty are broken by the original drafting:		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do not praise your own work. As an academic writer, you may describe the work of other people as valuable, useful, interesting etc.; however, you may not describe your own work as valuable, useful, interesting etc. The closest you may come to such a statement is to express the hope that the work is valuable, useful, interesting, etc. (ie the judgement is for others to make, not you). 2. Show that you understand the limitations of your work. In the present case, even I, a non-expert, know that previous work has been done on biodegradation techniques: so clearly this cannot be a "first step" for science (though it was, clearly, a first step for the student). 		

Figure 6. Sample kibbitzer 'Academic modesty'.
<http://webbham.acuk/johnstf/revi032htm>

The modular structure of the 'kibbitzers' can be contrasted with the linearity of the essay writing tutorial (see Figure 7a and b). These contrasting structures also imply different modes of engagement - in the case of the 'kibbitzer' material, this engagement is controlled essentially by the reader/student; in the essay tutorial the preferred mode of control is with the author/teacher.

The question then is whether an intentionally comprehensive treatment of a skill such as essay writing could be adapted to the web in a manner similar to Johns' highly modularised materials. The answer is that it may be possible, though our discussion here of how this might happen can be in hypothetical terms only. Drawing on the configuration shown in Figure 7b, the design model envisaged would have the 'entry point' acting as an anchor for all subsequent sections. Cohesion would exist strongly between the entry point and each subsection, but weakly, if at all, between different subsections. Such a configuration, one imagines, would necessitate including a fair amount of material at the entry point (including for example the essay topic and sample essay). The subsections would then provide *short* and *discrete* coverage of a range of areas (e.g. reading for an essay, citations in an essay, writing an introduction etc.) for students to access whichever way they choose.

It is difficult to know whether out of such a structure, it would be possible to fashion a useful resource for students. One wonders, for example, whether the sorts of dangers of modularisation suggested by Bernhardt (1993) might apply here - namely that the resource would become excessively 'fragmented', and be inimical to any 'extended and engrossing transaction'. However, any judgements in this regard can only emerge out of processes of experimentation and evaluation.

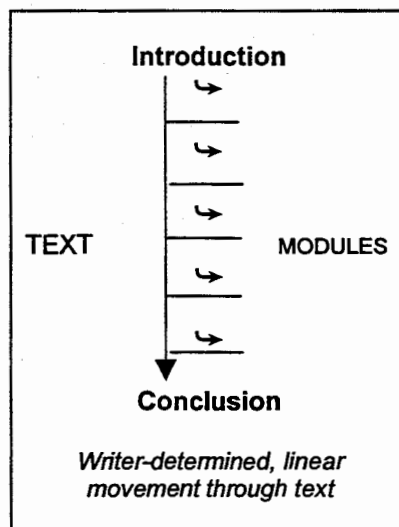


Figure 7a). Essay writing tutorial.

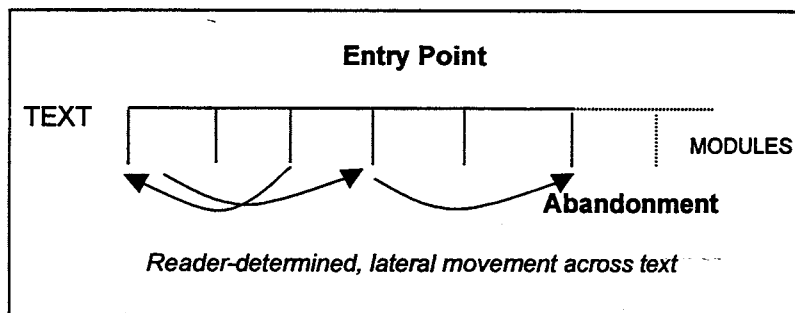


Figure 7b). Kibbitzer site.

Figure 7. Variable structure and mode of engagement in essay writing tutorial and kibbitzer site.

THE SHAPE OF ESSAYS TO COME?

Along with considering how the teaching of essay writing needs to be adapted to online technologies, we also need to consider how the object of our instruction - the essay itself - is likely to be adapted. In this area, there are already a few intimations of change. At our university, we are becoming aware of writing assignments that prescribe an 'html approach'. For example, in many computing subjects, students are required to submit electronically and to include hyperlinks in their work, particularly for citation purposes. This practice is being reported increasingly at other Australian universities (see Garton, 1997, for an early example).

On the world wide web, the most thoroughly hypertextual essay sample we are aware of is a provocative piece - *E-literacies: Politexts, Hypertexts, and Other Cultural Formations* (<http://raven.ubalt.edu/staff/kaplan/lit/>) - written (constructed) by Nancy Kaplan, a former literature lecturer, now 'communications designer' at the University of Baltimore. Kaplan's text, based on a conference address heralding the advent of electronic literacies, is made up of a labyrinth of connections - 'approximately 35 nodes and 180 links' on her estimate. The essay exhibits a number of the features of hypertext discussed above, distinguishing it so thoroughly from a traditional essay. First of all, its structure is non-linear and uncircumscribed for the reader. Kaplan makes much of this, revelling in the fact that readers will create their own version of the essay in an essentially random fashion:

There are a number of ways to read this essay, none of which will exactly replicate the text of the talk I gave. Take chances with your choices.

Another notable feature of *E-literacies* is its ongoing nature - a permanent 'work in progress', as Kaplan describes it. The author refers to a number of iterations of the essay, posted on the web at approximately six month intervals. The conclusion of the essay, if indeed one can be said to exist, is 'watch this space'.

E-literacies is also interesting for the variety of functions given to the hyperlinks used. Some serve as extended digressions, in the manner of a footnote in a traditional print text; others are elaborated citations which not only refer to full bibliographical information, but also bring up chunks of the original cited text. Another function, perhaps the most interesting, is the participation of other writers in the essay, making it a genuinely dialogic discourse. For example, in the essay, Kaplan recounts how in response to an earlier iteration, an adversary in the computer literacy debate, Myron Tuman, takes issue with Kaplan's representation of his views. Tuman is then granted his own hyperlinked 'writing space' on the site. A spirited, at times acrimonious, dialogue ensues, all within the framework of 'an essay'.

E-literacies is an intriguing but ultimately frustrating document. There is the feeling that one is doing a good deal of navigating around ideas, without ever quite getting to the nub of them. Tuman is not being unfair when he asserts in his contribution that:

[the essay] confirms some of my worst suspicions concerning hypertext: that it is ideally suited for the storing and accessing of diverse information, not for sustained, critical analysis. It takes

considerable energy - and anxiety - to reach the point of feeling that one has finished reading the essay, or enough of it to feel as if one can fairly comment on it.

It is worth noting, too, that it is very hard to imagine a hypertext essay as structurally intricate as Kaplan's *E-literacies* being written on any subject other than 'the nature of hypertext' itself. Whilst Kaplan and other devotees might marvel at this perfect semiotic fit in the work, there is an element of gimmickry here. One wonders in fact whether this extreme example of hypertextuality will in time be seen not so much as a milestone in the development of 'e-literacies', but as a mere artefact from the polemic of the 'late age of print'.

But these reservations aside, one has to acknowledge that out of the new online environment, new genres and textual formations will emerge. Snyder (1996) suggests for example that there is evidence of the once archetypal structures of 'narrative' and 'exposition' being superseded by a much looser rhetorical form - 'collage'. Kress (1997) points to a more fundamental development - a hegemonic struggle, as he sees it, between the verbal and the visual. For Kress, the outcome of this struggle is not too difficult to predict:

The screen is the new space of representation. How it will be organised - as a largely visual entity or as a largely linguistic entity - will have far-reaching repercussions. It is too early to know, though my money is on the visual (p. 72).

Clearly, as language and learning practitioners, we need to keep a watching brief on these sorts of developments and ensure that in our work we do not seek to rely too much on past textual certainties. For Tuman (1992, p. 5), in a less combative mood, the question is not whether the essay will disappear altogether, but whether it may become 'marginal to the central project of literacy education'. For the more hyperbolic Lanham (1993), if we fail to keep abreast of developments and do not embrace the new online literacy, we run the risk of teaching our students to be what he pejoratively calls 'the clerks of a forgotten mood' (p. 136).

CONCLUSION

As the content of Kaplan's *E-literacies* suggests, there is a good deal of fractiousness in discussions about the new communication technologies and their likely impact on literacy practices and pedagogy. On one side of the debate are the 'brave new worlders', including Lanham, Bolter and Kaplan, who see a great liberating potential in hypertext - a potential to create a new literary culture that is 'dynamic rather than static, open-ended rather than self-contained, participatory rather than authorial' (Lanham, 1993, p. 132). On the other side are the 'techno-skeptics' including Birkerts (1994) and Postman (1993) and sometimes Tuman (1992), who see naught but ill coming of it. Among the concerns of this latter group is the fear that the revered practices of intensive and contemplative reading will be supplanted by some kind of superficial variant - 'texting' or 'word-piloting', as Birkerts scornfully suggests (p. 164). As in most debates of this nature, there is between these polarities a broad middle ground, one that is happily occupied by teaching practitioners like ourselves who must find sensible ways of dealing with these exigencies. This position has been described by Snyder (1996) as a 'post-critical' one, involving on the one hand an acceptance that the new communication technologies are ineluctably a part of our educational future; but on the other a recognition that the technology needs to be understood fully and with due circumspection to ensure it is used in ways that enhance - and do not derogate - our broad educational objectives.

For 'middle-grounders' attempting to negotiate the types of changes occurring in this 'late-age of print', the prudent approach we believe is not to think in 'all or nothing' terms, of one mode of literacy or another. As Bernhardt (1993, p. 163) sensibly suggests about the future of reading:

[We] will continue to engage with extended, lengthy, integrated text *for certain purposes, under certain conditions*. And all of us will be exposed to increasing quantities of textbits - bits that are skimmed and scanned, compiled and com-positioned ... [emphasis added].

Applying this type of thinking to language and learning work, we need to be ever mindful of our 'certain purposes' and our 'certain conditions' and to adapt our practices and materials accordingly. This suggests to us several broad principles that might be applied to the design of web materials. The first is that we should seek to understand as fully as possible the nature of the technology we are looking to employ, and importantly to understand the implications it has for the key elements of our enterprise - that is for language, for teaching, and for learning. This we would suggest involves, among other things, avoiding being too easily seduced by the more

surface and ephemeral properties of the technology; but to look beyond these and to try to grasp what types of interactions are likely to be created and to what ends. A second principle, which follows on from the first, is the need to be judicious about the design of materials and the selection of the media in which they are to be presented. As was suggested in our discussion of the essay writing tutorial, an important objective should always be to achieve a good fit between technology and text, realising also that these are not separate entities but are inextricably related. And finally, we think it important not to forget about one of the great *non*-hypertextual capabilities of the computer - namely its ability to transfer, in an instant, printable text from one place to another. In other words, we must allow for the possibility that 'for certain purposes' and 'under certain conditions', Balestri's 'writing for hardcopy' will be the optimal design solution. Thus, whilst we need to engage with and embrace the new online literacy, there will be times when we will also do well to remain the thoughtful servants of the once 'great age of print'.

ENDNOTES

¹ For broad coverage of the overall project, including the pedagogical and design rationales for the online tutorials, see Clerehan, Turnbull, Vance, Brown & Moore (1999).

² A future paper will analyse the student evaluation of the tutorials.

³ For a more detailed discussion of design issues for the project, see Clerehan, Turnbull, Vance, Brown & Moore (1999).

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In a Nutshell:
A Buddhist postmodern discourse?
(the middle path) (simultaneously new and old)

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Abstract

This paper documents a collaborative student support project between a learning centre and an engineering school. Previous support initiatives within the School of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering at the University of New South Wales were usually targeted at students identified with low English language levels, and had limited success due to problems of student compliance, attitude and ability to attend. In response a supplemental study guide titled '*In a Nutshell*' was developed which integrated both generic and discipline-specific information. All first year Mechanical Engineering students received a copy in their first few weeks of university. Evaluation showed that students referred frequently to sections that directly related to their assignments and that they were satisfied with these sections. Future efforts will be directed towards improving *In a Nutshell* based on student and staff feedback, and encouraging its use throughout the school.

ABOUT THE TITLE

The title reflects a philosophical shift in how we have aimed to support our students. We traditionally favoured direct intervention, identifying students at risk and compelling them to undertake additional programs. We did this because we believed this would assist these students to develop their language and communications skills so they could successfully compete with other 'language-abled' students, and successfully graduate. However, we began to feel like 'bullies' and began to believe that the majority of students were responding in the only way they could - non-compliance. On the other hand, in avoiding this 'aggressive' approach, we did not want to abandon our students. We still wanted to offer support by giving students choices about how and when and where they could seek support for their language and study skills development. We decided to try another approach. In Buddhism 'the middle path' is preferred and this is the option that we have pursued through developing the study guide *In a Nutshell* (IAN).

We looked at what had been done before and realised that our 'new' idea of a study guide was not totally 'new', but was different in its style and intent. There were already many published study guides on the recommended reading list and many forms of learning and language support also available on the campus. Also, many study guides for sciences and engineering are substantial text books typically ranging from 400 pages (e.g. Northedge et al., 1997) to 800 pages (e.g. Huckin & Olsen, 1991). A busy student with language problems would probably be daunted by the task of reading an additional text book of this kind on his or her own. In addition, while most study guides are very practical, they are also generic and do not reflect all the specific tasks our students were required to do. We thought we could present the immediately useful essence of this information in a way that was more accessible for students, did not 'overload' students already struggling with language and study, and pointed students towards additional resources and support services available on campus.

PREVIOUS SUPPORT PROGRAMS

The School of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering's response to students who need help with English language has been to collaborate with the support organisations on campus. The primary support organisation is The Learning Centre which provides initiatives and strategies that give students task-specific skills within the university as well as skills for lifelong learning.

The Learning Centre had investigated engineering students' English language skills in early 1997 and had found that about 5% of local students (ESB & NESB) and up to 20 % of international students had a level of literacy that was considered 'marginal' for university requirements (Carew, 1997).

An early response to this situation was to identify those at risk by means of a written task for all first year students in the School of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering. This was assessed either by staff in the school or in the Learning Centre. At-risk students then were required to undertake supplementary classes in spoken and written English during that semester. The Learning Centre's experience had been that those students who regularly attended classes of this kind showed definite signs of improvement in their text structure and their language use. This was assessed by using a pre-test and a post-test for listening comprehension, summary and paraphrasing skills, error recognition and paragraph structure. Students who had sporadic or poor attendance showed no improvement in their pre and post-test results. Although the benefits of our supplemental English classes were 'obvious' to The Learning Centre, many students specifically identified as needing help and required to attend often resisted. We wondered whether students perceived these classes as a punishment for not speaking the dominant language properly, or as a waste of valuable study-time when they were likely to be struggling anyway because of communication difficulties.

A later response was to run short courses in the mid-year break with the idea of avoiding cognitive overload during the semester. These workshops were called 'Getting Ahead in Mechanical Engineering' (GAME) and to encourage students to attend, it was explained that the course would give them a head start for their studies in Semester 2. These four to five day intensive courses had a number of objectives:

- give practice in exactly the kind of report writing students would need for design assignments in the next semester;
- introduce the technical words they would come across in the near future;
- increase students' awareness of their individual abilities and needs in the areas of language, learning & study skills;
- provide information, strategies and resources for ongoing development of language and study skills.

Despite the authors' efforts to personally contact and encourage students to attend, these classes were not well patronised either. Attendance was so low that it was difficult to assess the impact of this type of support program. Perhaps the students identified as being at risk were especially in need of a break from campus work, or perhaps they had lost confidence in the ability of UNSW staff to help. Some did state they had work commitments during the break. A couple asked whether they had actually failed a subject and when assured they had not, then questioned whether they had to attend. For these students, it seems that a pass, no matter how poor, was considered 'OK'.

It was 'a Catch-22 situation'. If the students were failed in an assessment and then referred to support classes, the matter was perceived as remedial and a punishment. If students were referred without failing, this was not perceived as an urgent matter, and so students did not attend. Clearly, there was an opportunity for innovation.

A NEW DIRECTION

At the end of the 1998 academic year the authors decided that it was time yet again to try a new approach to supporting students. Reflecting upon the previous experiences led us to the idea of a study guide. It would be friendly, accessible, as concise as possible and above all practical. It was intended to be the supplemental resource of first choice for all students about to start the unfamiliar challenge of an engineering degree program. It would not be angled specifically to those struggling with the English language (although they were to be kept foremost in mind) because anything that helped them would help others too. This way the study guide would not be perceived as a remedial resource.

Beyond providing immediate assistance to anyone starting a task, IAN would also be a gentle and timely way of encouraging those who would benefit from help of any kind to decide for themselves to go and use the resources available. For example, if a student had problems with report writing that were beyond the scope of the sections in IAN, then there would be other sections to direct that student to writing assistants and workshops provided by The Learning Centre; or if a student were troubled by adjustment to university or English language, then there would be information on where to obtain advice and resources.

For the students to value and use IAN the content had to be relevant; that is, discipline-specific to mechanical engineering. We wanted to include models based on the types of tasks required in the School of Mechanical and

Manufacturing Engineering. We also wanted to assist students to adapt to the university learning environment and to encourage the application of skills and strategies to all courses in the Engineering program, so we included some generic study advice as well. If the students valued *IAN* for its practical content, we hoped they would value this advice and therefore be more likely to self refer to The Learning Centre's services and resources.

We hoped that students would use *IAN* in many ways, employing both meta-cognitive and cognitive learning strategies (O'Malley et al., 1988). Students could use *IAN* as an advance organiser that gives an overview of the assignments and the processes they would be experiencing, or as a self evaluation tool when completing assignments. This usage is related to meta-cognitive skills of self monitoring and selective attention. Cognitive learning strategies could be facilitated through contextualisation, repetition, and imagery. Students could work through a task by following the suggested steps, or revise course content by reading the sample solutions. To help students retrieve content and to show them model tasks and processes, *IAN* was designed to take advantage of image as much as text.

CREATING IN A NUTSHELL

Figure 1 lists the topics that were chosen for *IAN*. Most of the content was adapted from a range of materials that already existed. Lecturers in the School of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering were asked for instructional materials that were related to specific assignments in their courses. The Learning Centre gathered materials from previous programs designed for mechanical engineering students and a number of other suitable generic resources. Much of the information had been originally presented in paragraph and list form and needed adaptation. In addition, other descriptive material was specially developed.

When adapting materials for *IAN*, we assumed that young busy NESB students would probably not appreciate a large volume of text-based information added to their current load. To assist students to digest the information, content was kept as concise as possible and annotated visuals were preferred to descriptive prose. We chose to write in a style that would be considered Plain English (Eunson, 1996). White space was deliberately used to improve the impact and assist readability.

Two extracts from *IAN* are presented in Figures 2 and 3 to show how layout, content and advice were incorporated. Each section of *IAN* begins with a definition and description of the section. What follows varies with the topic and may contain written instructions for completing tasks, samples of past students' work, and study skill information. Advice was mainly presented as annotations which highlighted procedural, structural and functional aspects that students should be aware of when attempting a similar task. Figure 2 presents guidance that is based on a sample of students' work, with annotations highlighting structural and content aspects. Figure 3, which is from the section on the Free Body Diagram, covers a very important concept in the subject, Engineering Mechanics 1, and provides a definition, a sample problem and a sample solution with annotations.

Contents
Professional Communication
Inter Office Communication
Minutes of Meetings
Reports
Acknowledging Sources of Information
Oral Presentations
Cover Sheets and Binding
Presenting Technical Calculations
Free Body Diagrams
Presenting Solutions in Tutorials and Exams
Documenting Design Calculations
Study Skills
Time Management
The Learning Centre
How do you Learn?
Emotions
Engineering Emotion
The Counselling Service
Knowing the Words
Learn the Sights and Sounds of Engineering
Beyond the Nutshell

Figure 1. The Contents of *IAN*

The drafting and redrafting process covered a period of two months. Printing costs were reasonable with the 40-page resource costing less than AU\$2.00 per copy.

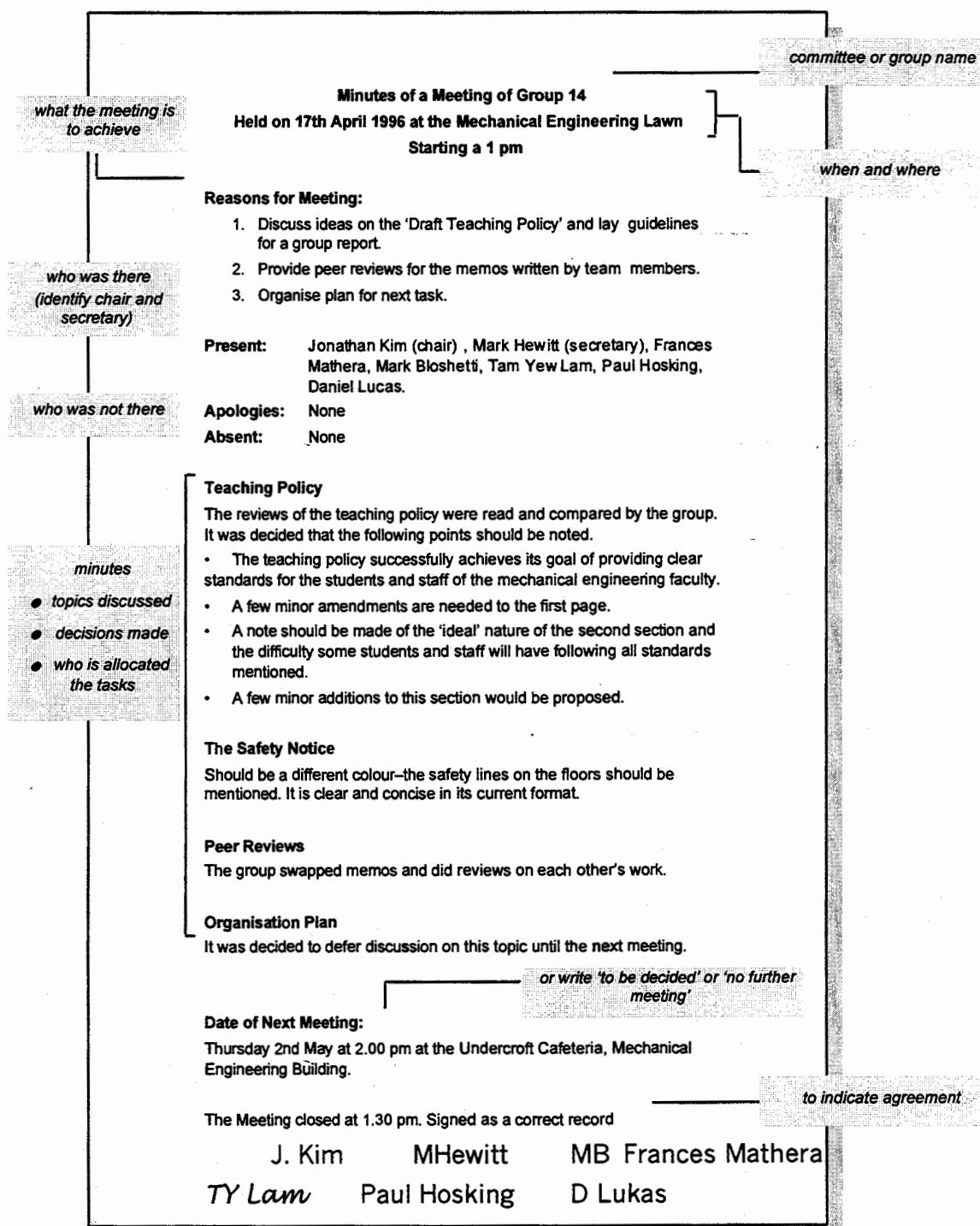


Figure 2. Minutes of Meetings



Free No contact with other objects

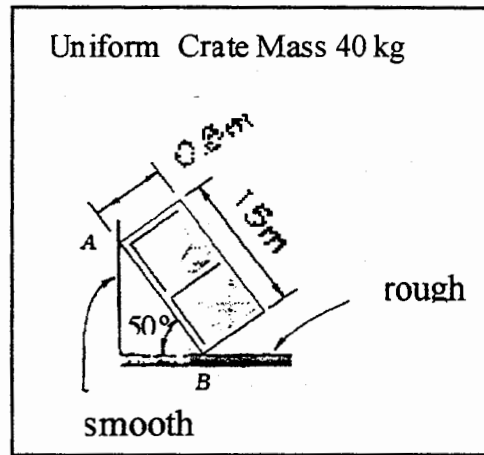
Body The object to be analysed is shown in a recognisable form

Diagram An abstraction for relating theory to physical reality. It shows all the information needed for a solution.

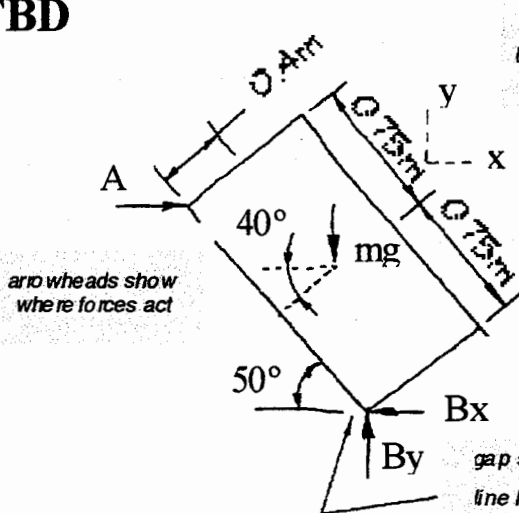
ANNOTATED START OF A STATICS PROBLEM

1. Draw an FBD of the crate which meets the rules
2. Use this FBD and equilibrium equations To calculate the horizontal force at A setting out your solution so that it meets the rules

The coefficient of B is sufficient to prevent sliding.



1. FBD



directions x and y are referred to at B , so the x - y axes must be shown on the diagram.

dimensions used in the solution are shown on the FBD-easiest to add them as you proceed.

The diagram looks like the object and is approximately to scale

gap shows that this is a dimension line NOT the surface of the ground

Figure 3. The Free Body Diagram

TRIALING IN A NUTSHELL

IAN was distributed in the first few weeks of Semester 1 in the subject Engineering Mechanics 1. We chose this subject because it is a core subject that contains concepts and activities fundamental to the mechanical engineering field and we could show that the content of *IAN* was an integral part of engineering studies. *IAN* was regularly promoted in Engineering Mechanics 1 to maintain this emphasis.

Copies were sent to Heads of Schools in Engineering and the Deans of Faculties in Science and Technology, Engineering and Life Sciences, to advertise the initiative and to invite comments. Some later year students also received *IAN* because they entered the program with advanced standing. Throughout 1999 copies have also been circulated to interested lecturers in The College of Fine Arts, the Schools of Medicine and Law and others to encourage them to consider developing their own study guides in collaboration with the Learning Centre. Other Learning Centres in New South Wales and New Zealand also received copies for comment.

FEEDBACK

Student feedback has been encouraging. At the end of the semester, 100 students completed a brief survey that explored their use of and satisfaction with *IAN*. The survey used multiple choice and Likert scale questions (range 1-5).

Table 1 lists the most and least used sections of *IAN*. The most used sections of *IAN* were those designed specifically for the core subjects Engineering Mechanics 1 and The Engineering Profession. Over 60% of students used and were satisfied with these sections which included: free body diagrams (75%), minutes of meetings (66%) and report writing (65%). Pages that gave guidance on first year assignments were used by more students than sections that gave information about services and additional resources. Nevertheless, roughly 30% of students reported that they did use the information sections, and we hoped that this group included those students initially estimated to need this support.

Table 1. Use of *IAN*.

Sections Most Used	% students	Sections Least Used	% students
Free Body Diagrams	75%	The Counselling Services	29%
Minutes	66%	The Learning Centre	29%
Reports	65%	The Welcome Page	28%
Documenting Solutions	58%	Beyond the Nutshell	28%
Acknowledging sources	56%		

Table 2 lists the degree of satisfaction with each section of *IAN*. Students were asked to rank the usefulness of each section on a Likert scale of 1-5, with 1 being 'useless' and 5 being 'very helpful'. Sections that related to current assignments received the highest mean scores. Sections which received low mean scores included descriptions of the other types of assignments that students would encounter later in their program, and sections that described additional resources for students requiring support. We are not sure why the support pages received this low ranking and this will be explored when developing future versions.

Table 2. Usefulness of Sections in *IAN*.

Section	Mean Score	Section	Mean Score
Reports	3.72	Oral Presentations	2.91
Free Body Diagram	3.63	Time Management	2.64
Minutes of Meetings	3.53	Learning the Sights and Sounds...	2.53
Acknowledging Sources	3.45	Engineering Emotion	2.46
Presenting Solutions...	3.31	How Do You Learn?	2.43
Documenting Design Calculations	3.22	Welcome to <i>IAN</i>	2.32
Cover Sheets	3.32	Beyond the Nutshell	2.32
Contents	3.19	The Learning Centre	2.21
		The Counselling Service	2.14

We were also interested to know what would stop students from using *IAN*. When asked why they did not use *IAN* more (Table 3), the largest response (42%) was that they forgot. This did not necessarily mean that they forgot to use it at all, but that they might have used it more if they had remembered. A large number of students felt they had enough information from their course and so perhaps did not need to refer to *IAN* for additional examples and explanations. Comments in the category 'other reasons' indicated that *IAN* had served its purpose, for example students reported they "used *IAN* once and got the idea", "no need" (to use it more), or "used it when doing assignments".

Table 3. Reason for Not Using *IAN* More.

Forgot	42%
Used course materials instead	27%
No time	14%
Other reasons	9%
No response	8%
Received <i>IAN</i> late	5%
Not helpful	3%

IAN was distributed to all staff in the School of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering, and feedback was requested. Responses were generally positive although some would have preferred something more formal. Many suggestions were received for incorporation in later revisions.

Professor John Sweller (1999), who has developed a model of instructional design, has given specific feedback on *IAN*. Sections of *IAN* that directly linked visual and textual information and avoided repetition were evaluated as being particularly effective for learning. When the visual and text links contained repetition or 'redundancy', this caused 'split attention' and was considered ineffective, possibly doing more harm than good. These ideas will influence future versions of *IAN*.

DISCUSSION

Students did use *IAN* in a very selective and economical way, which was our expectation when we designed it. In future versions we will include more obvious links between sections within *IAN* to encourage students to access further advice both within *IAN*, on campus, and on-line.

The sections of *IAN* that were frequently used did receive favourable responses from the students confirming that *IAN* is a useful resource for these students. However we do not know precisely which students found this resource useful because demographic data, such as language background or English scores, were not obtained from the survey. Future surveys will explore NESB use and satisfaction so that future versions of *IAN* can better respond to the immediate study concerns of these students.

The extent of staff usage of *IAN* is not known at this stage, and a survey will be conducted to evaluate this. The objective is to make *IAN* constantly referred to as part of the school's standard documentation, so that staff and students alike value it as a reference, and contribute to its continuing development.

Based on suggestions from students and interpretations of student use and needs, we have decided to include the following additions:

- An audio-cassette which contains a list of key vocabulary in specific subjects. This would particularly assist NESB students and would be available upon request at the time of distribution in the lectures. The vocabulary list itself will be included in *IAN*.
- Additional strategies and advice for working out sample problems and getting tasks done. Perhaps some current student strategies or experiences could be included. This will require interviewing a range of students (both successful and unsuccessful).
- A brief section about technical writing style with references to additional resources.
- WWW links to information and resources in the School of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering and sites suitable for learning and language skills development.
- Reference to generic on-campus support programs and locations of additional on-campus resources within the discipline-specific sections.

However, the spirit, style and intent of *IAN* will remain the same. It will continue to walk a middle path between compulsory direct-intervention programs and unfacilitated entry into tertiary study (abandonment). The authors will also build upon the collaboration between a learning centre and an engineering school that has proven to be creative, productive and enjoyable, and which in itself has taken a middle path.

CONCLUSION

This collaborative project aimed to develop a user-friendly study guide specific to Mechanical Engineering. Students did use *IAN* and were satisfied with the sections they used. Usage patterns were influenced by the nature of the assignment task and the school promotion of the resource. Student suggestions and feedback from students requiring support will influence further development of *In a Nutshell*.

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Electronic delivery of academic skills: Feasible or feckless?

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Abstract

With recent evidence such as Russell's (1999) compilation of "No significant difference" studies showing that students can learn as well or better from electronic media than from face to face teaching, and funding cuts motivating university executives to look for cheaper methods of delivery, there has been much interest in electronic delivery of content-based courses. While there is still considerable debate about the quality and cost effectiveness of distance education for mainstream courses, relatively little attention as yet has been devoted to the supply of academic skills support via electronic media, such as CAL, email, web sites and MOOs. This paper explores pedagogical effectiveness, cost-benefit ratio, access, workload, motivational, ethical and other issues of electronic delivery in contrast to the current small group and individual consultation methods of providing academic support for undergraduates.

INTRODUCTION

Academic skills delivery differs from most university teaching in its intermittent, just-in-time nature and its need to operate within and respond to a complex context arising from the different discipline communities, specific communication genres, and the learning history and needs of individual students. This paper explores the impact of these differences on the potential for academic skills delivery by electronic means, and how such delivery might impact on us as language and learning advisers working in Australian universities.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK OF THE SSC

The work of the Study Skills Centre at ANU has for many years centred around individual face to face consultations on essay drafts, exam skills, and other study issues. We also run multiple small group sessions on essay writing and a large half-day program on Introduction to University Studies. Clearly some part of our work is instruction, and there is no question in my mind that this can be done, and done well, by electronic modes. However, much of our work involves diagnosis, feedback, and individualised instruction. We are in the position of evaluating students as "Symbolic Analysts - those who create value by manipulating symbols (data, information flows, words, oral, audio and visual representations) and whose primary tasks are conceptual, involving critical and creative thought", as Lepani (1996) puts it. Face to face discussion with the student currently provides a check on the correctness of our cognitions, and enables us to negotiate how the sentence should have read, or what the missing step in the argument was, or whether our suggestion is totally unhelpful. The process of academic advising is dialogic in nature.

Further, at least some of the time we deal with students in crisis, where the academic requirements exceed the student's real or perceived ability to meet them. In this situation, many students panic. We normally direct such students to Counselling, while also attempting to solve the academic problem which precipitated the issue. However, as a stopgap, part of the technique of advising such students is to calm them, so that they can think, take stock and hopefully realise that things are not as bad as at first appears. Even in non-crisis mode, a substantial number of school-leavers, mature age and second language students appear to need encouragement as much as they need skills or cognitive assistance. So emotional support is an important part of our job.

Advisers adapt generic skills in a very context specific way to a very wide range of students - after all, audience accommodation is a fundamental principle of good communication. So school leavers, second language speakers, students with disability, equity students, Honours students, academic assistants in colleges, computing tutors and residential college students across all disciplines need to be accommodated by whatever offerings we make by electronic means as adequately as they currently are by face to face (F2F) consultations.

THE MOVE TO ONLINE UNIVERSITY COURSES

In the US, 78% of four-year public higher education institutions now offer distance education (DE) courses (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). According to Telebank NB's 1999 database, there are already at least 9000 fully online courses. Yet, the market for online learning is not currently large; enrolments in Western Governors University (a new major broker of online courses) in the first year numbered only 120 students (Associated Press 08/21/99), and the market's eventual saturation size is uncertain. If online courses have the capacity to teach large numbers relatively cheaply, there is likely to be extreme competition between universities for students (Milam, 1998). 'Customerisation' of the university experience is occurring (Carr, 1999) as is 'commoditisation' of education (Noble, 1998). An average of only 16% of DE courses claim to have courses specifically tailored for distance delivery (Primary Research Group, 1999), presumably because of the high up-front cost of producing good courses. Because of this and general scepticism about DE, faculty are questioning the quality that is possible with purely online teaching (see debates on Digital Diploma Mills on LRNASST and other lists). It is into this untried market that many universities are venturing, seeking to alleviate troubled budgets with staff cuts and a global student market based on electronic delivery.

CAN FLEXIBLE DELIVERY OF STUDY SKILLS WORK?

Although it is widely accepted that teaching can be as successful via technology as by traditional means (e.g. Hiltz, 1997; Nevin, Stutler, & Zambo, 1999; see also Russell, 1999 for a compilation of studies showing no significant difference between traditional and technology based teaching), such claims have recently been queried (Phipps & Merisotis, 1999). The latter conclude that most of the research on distance education failed to control for extraneous variables and novelty effects, and did not use randomly selected students, or establish the reliability and validity of the evaluation instruments. The studies also failed to explain high drop out rates among DE students. Consequently, Phipps and Merisotis (1999) consider that the equivalence of DE with traditional teaching has not been established.

Further, at least one recent study using matched student pairs to control for the usually different student populations found that distance-students both dropped out more frequently and performed significantly worse than traditionally taught students (Downing-Alfonso & Tomlinson, 1999). Mendels (1999) also found that drop out rates are high, and students need better than average writing skills and self-discipline. As these are two of the common presenting problems for students seeking academic skills assistance, online students could need even more help than the on-campus population.

Hiltz (1997) notes that successful use of an asynchronous learning network (ALN) requires careful management and cannot be an optional part of a course or students will not use it, despite its advantages in freedom of access. This has implications for the use of ALNs for voluntary activities such as study skills delivery. More administration and preparation by staff was needed than for traditional classes, a fact that is worrying given the already high workloads of language and learning advisers. Hiltz further adds that careful structuring is needed to achieve the sense of collaboration and community which, rather than content delivery, she views as the network's most important role.

Moreover, even when an author considers DE successful, there is evidence that distance learning does not function equally well for all students (Bothun, 1998), and is unable to respond appropriately to varying student needs (Perley & Tanguay, 1999). Successful students are graduates, mature age students already using IT at work or parents (mostly women) at home with young children, whose time and space constraints are well met by electronic delivery (Hiltz, 1997). Motivation (interest in subject), self-discipline, and prior learning appear necessary for success (Bothun, 1998).

Arguments about whether electronic delivery can or cannot substitute for F2F among experts on lists such as ITForum suggest that success is not determined by use of a specific delivery mode, but rather the appropriateness of that mode and its educational design for a particular course and student population. Chickering and Ehrmann (1997) describe the ways in which electronic media can be used to further the seven principles of good practice in undergraduate teaching, but acknowledge that it is never the use of the media *per se* which results in good teaching. In other words, it is the content, its purpose and the pedagogy/androgogy

used, not the use of an electronic medium, that distinguishes good online content teaching. This principle can be assumed to also apply to online study skills.

POSSIBLE ELECTRONIC MODES FOR FLEXIBLE DELIVERY OF STUDY SKILLS

The most obvious, fax and telephone, are hardly problematic - it is likely that most of us have already used them, and they are often convenient for students. However, they have cost implications - paper is paid for by the Centre, not the student, and phone calls, particularly STD or ISD, are an expense for either the student or the Centre.

Multimedia allows use of visual, auditory and kinaesthetic as well as verbal learning channels, which could be advantageous for delivery to students with learning disabilities (LD) or second language students, for whom graphic or spoken representations can support text in providing meaning. It is, however, very expensive to create, requiring a substantial investment of time by a team of specialists. Once created, it is limited to a predetermined set of responses, and thus cannot adequately deliver the dialogic process used by most advisers. Further, it is relatively laborious and hence expensive to update. It is thus unlikely that universities facing budget cuts will use multimedia except for special purposes such as dry labs, where the alternatives are even more expensive.

Web delivery of multimedia is possible. However, the expense of creating pages with video, graphics, sound and/or interactivity, slow loading due to bandwidth restrictions and the high-end hardware and software requirements for users currently remain serious impediments to other than mainly text-based pages. While technological improvements will eventually ameliorate these problems, the lag between high-end technology at the delivery end and out-dated technology among the recipient population will probably remain. For the majority of students therefore, multimedia is still a dubious prospect for study skill delivery, both because of technical limitations and because the abstract and verbal nature of the material generally does not justify expensive non-verbal media.

Web pages in their simplest text-based form are cheap and quick to produce. However, in their simplest form they are limited to provision of information and have little to recommend them over a handout, except that they can (in theory) be accessed at any time. Many universities, like the Australian National University, do, or will soon, require web access to course materials such as lecture notes, past exams, tutorial or lab notes and other resources. Despite the issues of intellectual property rights raised by this requirement, it is likely that language and learning centres will have to similarly provide downloadable handouts. As many students still cannot or will not use the Web, this will be an added cost in time rather than a saving in paper, as the need for paper versions will remain.

A major distinction with the Internet is that of synchronous and asynchronous delivery. Synchronous or real time discussion is motivating and has the obvious benefits of immediate feedback, but requires simultaneous access for the entire group, thereby losing one of the main advantages of distance mode, and raising political issues as to who is inconvenienced or inconvenienced by the access times. Conversely, asynchronous delivery has the advantages that people all over the world can join in discussion despite time zone differences; and students on shift work, mothers of small children and others can access when it suits them. There is a potential role for both in delivery of academic support.

Email is the most common asynchronous medium. It can deliver texts for comment as attachments, either to a discussion list or person to person. Still, file incompatibility of attachments can cause problems, including loss of formatting, so an exchange is easy only as long as the correspondents have compatible software. There are also potential ethical and practical problems in losing the distinction between the student's and adviser's words. Texts delivered as paper versions must be line numbered by students so that they can be easily referred to by both student and adviser; otherwise, emails can provide only general comments (Craswell, pers. comm., 1999). While Microsoft Word allows use of annotations and revision mode to mark changes to electronic versions of texts, extensively marked documents are hard to read on screen. Both these methods lack the capacity for student and adviser to negotiate their way, step by step, through the intentions underlying the text, but at least

allow some analysis and feedback at a distance. However, students and staff would both have to learn to use the software in more sophisticated ways, adding to their learning load.

As for interaction, email provides students with quicker and easier access to staff than F2F. Many researchers have commented that shy students increase participation after email contact. As Sanders (1999) comments, his 150 "predominantly Hispanic student population", who "were reticent to speak out in a university classroom" became comfortable with both email and F2F contact after email introductions. Nevertheless, not all students participate freely with email. Crouch and Montecino (1997) in their e-paper, "Cyberstress: Asynchronous Anxiety" describe students worried about using the technology, and their own worrying over whether their students had received their emailed messages. They also contrast school leavers' competence with computer games with their stilted email discussion of academic topics such as essay writing. Students rarely emailed every week as requested and both staff and students reported freezing in front of the screen, too confronted by the technology to be able to verbalise the issues. They advocate F2F meetings to overcome these problems, plus all manner of back-up materials for the times when connections fail due to technological problems.

While students cite easy access as a major advantage of online learning, staff may be totally overwhelmed with email volume and students' expectations of instant response. Currently, advisers' workloads are largely controlled by the appointments book, but we could soon find ourselves in the situation of one staff member who complained that an overseas Masters student provides him with thesis drafts on Friday afternoon and complains to the Vice-Chancellor if they are not returned with comments by Monday. There is thus a need for a booking system to control email consultations. Academics experienced with email courses warn that what works with 50 students will not work with 150, and suggest promising to reply to email within several days only. Although the core of most language and learning work is personalised feedback, restricting one to one email to essential personal queries is also suggested, along with using bulletin boards and lists for generic questions, so that students can answer each other and staff need intervene less frequently.

Unlike lists, where the email from all other participants comes to the user whenever they check their email, bulletin boards require an effort on the user's part - you have to "go" there. Because of this effort, students may prove unwilling to visit bulletin boards for non-compulsory material such as academic skills development. Nevertheless, they have some potential as a means for pooling experiences or ideas for study strategies. Both bulletin boards and lists allow asynchronous discussion, touted as being a major advantage of online learning, so short courses could feasibly be conducted by either means.

There are advantages to online discussion. Yen (1999) is typical in claiming greater spontaneity and thoughtfulness for email discussions. However, as they come without the support of extended text and the exchange of non-verbal communication, email and bulletin board messages are also prone to misunderstanding and are notorious for abusive arguments (FLAMES). Ground rules on email conventions (never use irony in electronic text media) can help decrease flaming and increase participation, yet too many rules can dampen enthusiasm and lessen the sense of community (Gumness, 1999). Also as Davis (1997) points out, 'netiquette' cannot absolutely prevent flaming and flaming deters participation. There is also a potential for harassment of staff or other students by email, and the interpersonal and legal issues involved in managing this are still unresolved (Loughary, Pearson JD & Ripley, 1997).

The type of medium used does appear to affect the students' responses. Hancock (1998) found that bulletin board responses are better thought out and longer, less prone to misunderstanding and suited to critical discussion, whereas chat responses are more like live class interaction, quick, error-prone and better for checking students' progress. However, since he also comments that "I suspect that if we only used the asynchronous bulletin board our attrition would increase significantly", chat appears to be often more motivating than a bulletin board.

Internet relay chat (IRC) provides synchronous discussion; the users must all log on at the same time into a virtual room for text-based chat. The users can take on personas other than their own - even change genders (Bruckman, 1993); and with the freedom provided by anonymity, also sometimes behave outrageously (see Dibbell, 1993). IRC grew out of MUDs (Multi-User Domains), originally developed for role-playing games, which, with MOOs (Multi-user domains Object Oriented) seem to have been used more often for educational purposes than IRC.

MOOs are text-based virtual spaces which combine synchronous and asynchronous communication with programmed objects which can be "seen" and "used" by characters in the MOO at any time. Virtual classes meet in "rooms" (which can be private or public), in venues like Diversity University for exploration and discussion or just for fun. Because they are text-based, MOOs are quick to load and can be accessed from low-end hardware using shareware clients, or from the Web. However, they do require users to learn simple typed commands in order to move and communicate, and a more complex set of commands for programming objects, so frustration is a usual part of learning to use a MOO. Although they are not an easy medium for novices, MOOs can be very engaging, even addictive, and thus could themselves provide another distraction for students. From a staff perspective, their main drawback is the time taken to set up a useful virtual environment and the need for application maintenance by one or more programmers. While the special skills required for MOOs would probably deter many students from accessing academic help by this means, there are some groups of notorious under-users of support services, such as young men, who might utilise study skills resources through a MOO because of its game-like nature and anonymity. For this reason, MOOs could be worth trying, perhaps as a collaborative venture in order to spread the considerable time investment over several institutions.

Use of multiple media is becoming common, but increases the time commitment for students who must learn multiple applications and skills to access all parts of the course. Hedberg, Harper and Corrent-Agostinho, (1998) used a mix of IRC, a Web site and email discussion for a postgraduate course on Implementation and Evaluation of Technology-Based Learning. Even with an audience presumably keen to try the technology, they confronted social, technological and pedagogical difficulties due to confusion about means and requirements, and difficulties in focussing topics and discussions. The Web study guides were the most successful electronic medium as web authoring allowed students to integrate material and publish their own insights to the class. The students generally preferred the F2F component of the course to the electronic media. The researchers comment on the need for the instructor to be a leader of attitudinal and social change; a hands-off approach definitely does not work.

CAN STUDENTS GET EMOTIONAL SUPPORT VIA THE NET?

Chenault's (1998) paper concludes that heavy users are more likely to look for and get social support over the Net, but relationships develop more slowly than in F2F. This is a concern for advisers who initially have two to five minutes to achieve rapport with students before delivering sometimes unpalatable news.

There are electronic substitutes for non-verbal communication which Chenault (1998) reviews. These include emoticons such as the sideways faces made up by punctuation: smiley :) and sad :-[or the wink ;) and the emote commands which allow some of the non-verbal cues to be represented in MOOs; for example, "Jan emotes laughs" would appear as "Jan laughs". However, these are coarse tools compared with the subtle messages of body language that can reveal a student's level of understanding, or distress, or hint of undiagnosed problems. Emoticons and emotes also require consciousness and consent; the student must be aware of, willing and able to verbalise their emotional states. In addition, Chenault points out that, in the absence of the usual non-verbal cues, other signals take on meaning. There is evidence that timing - the speed of an email response, and time of day it is sent - convey emotional messages about caring. This raises the issue of poor control of emotional messages with computer-mediated communication (CMC). Chenault's conclusion is that emotional support can be provided across the wires, but it may require specialised skills which advisers would have to learn.

COLLABORATIVE WRITING WITH COMPUTERS

The major advantages claimed for net courses on writing is the greater participation and initiative of students and increased spontaneity in writing. There is much enthusiasm for computer mediated collaborative writing (CMCW) amongst people using it (usually for creative writing). However, Kemp (1994) acknowledges that there is little objective proof that it improves writing - particularly the rigorous academic writing that is the bread and butter of study skills advisers' work.

Collaborative writing also presents a number of issues for study skills advisers. We do not set assignments, and any collaborative writing exercises we set independently would add to students' workload. Any topic chosen

would have to avoid essay topics set in the disciplines. Such an exercise could therefore most easily be done within a unit under the auspices of the unit convenor. Further, Nolan (1998) acknowledges that educational CMC requires more motivation from students than traditional modes: "task dedication; self-motivation/direction; willingness to take risks, as well as share and support the learning of others, are not the goals of EdCMC, but necessary conditions for success." The use of CMCW for language and learning skills is therefore likely to be limited.

COSTS OF IT

The costs of technology are not trivial and, due to its rapid development, are ongoing; yesterday's computers will not run today's applications.

Using Flashlight Program's approach to cost modelling, Henderson reported on the costs of development of an instructional module (presumably multimedia computer assisted learning) called InterFon. This was designed to help "students learn the sounds associated with phonemes in foreign languages" through integrated quizzes and writing assignments; translating "course material into an online format (combining content with strategic email response boxes)"; and "development of a "template" web forum for organising threaded discussions that could be used for many courses". In terms of total costs, the template for a Web forum was the most expensive; InterFon was moderately expensive and the translation of course material to an online format was the cheapest activity. However, on the basis of student usage, the development of InterFon cost \$14,000/student week, whereas the length of student use caused the development costs of other parts of the course to average out at about \$8/student week (reported in Ehrmann, 1999b). Henderson and his colleagues concluded that specially developed instructional modules (ie multimedia) need to have very specific and justifiable goals (e.g. dealing with a particular learning problem and having "substantial benefits for learning in later courses") to justify their high costs per student. Putting a course online is much cheaper but "requires advanced faculty skills".

So, as Steve Ehrmann (1999a) concludes, staff time is the real cost: "I'm increasingly convinced that the problems of costs and of burnout are linked, and need to be dealt with together, because they both involve how people use their time." At the very least, skills acquisition time is needed for advisers to learn applications, hardware, netiquette, different teaching skills, interface design and usability studies, management of online classes, evaluation and so on.

CONFIDENTIALITY ON THE NET

Another potentially significant issue for language and learning units is confidentiality. Students' privacy is currently carefully protected. Individual consultations leave no record beyond names and dates and the student and adviser's brief notes. In contrast, email, as a number of lawsuits have shown, is there forever, potentially retrievable by anyone, including hackers, and certainly by server administrators. There are also other potential legal issues to do with confidentiality, such as the disclosure of information pertinent to others in networked discussions (Loughary, Pearson JD & Ripley, 1997). Use of electronic media implies that both advisers and students accept these risks. Is this a big problem? I'm not sure, but it could be for universities, if not individual advisers, as Australians follow the lead of the US in becoming a litigious society.

EQUITY ISSUES

Yet another issue is equity. Can we guarantee that all students will have equal access to advisers by electronic means? Of course, depending on the actual mode of delivery, some students will be better off. Text-based asynchronous modes were found by Warschauer (1996) to help second language users who have difficulties with accents and rapid speech in F2F. This study also found that ESL students used more formal and complex language in electronic discussion than they did in F2F, an observation explained by Warschauer as due to the possibility of careful thought and editing with asynchronous modes.

Students with disabilities such as mobility problems, chronic illness or hearing problems are helped by electronic delivery. Blind students and others with reading difficulties can also access web sites if they are properly designed (Carnevale, 1999). The point to notice is that different disabilities require different accommodations

(see Web Accessibility Initiatives, Adaptech or Bobby sites), complicating the design and increasing the expense of online delivery.

However, the poor spelling, abbreviations and garbled texts of synchronous delivery make it difficult for second language and for LD students. The latter, especially dyslexics, may also be disadvantaged by an increase in written communication over oral. Although many LD students are now making use of text readers, these represent a significant investment of 'learning' time, are not very satisfactory according to some of my students and are currently unable to read Acrobat (.pdf) files, one of the most common formats for downloadable files on the web. Technological breakthroughs to allow graphic rather than text based interfaces or internet telephony may help, although they would also destroy some of the advantages/attractions (eg anonymity, false personas etc) and disadvantage other groups.

Students from lower socio-economic groups are definitely disadvantaged, as they are less likely to have experience with computers or net access from home. Even in the US, where penetration of computers is greatest, a study by Rutgers University found that "less than half of the working poor have Internet or PC access at work or home. Just 39 percent had Internet access, compared to 76 percent for other workers." (Washington Post 07/22/99)

CONCLUSIONS

To summarise, pre-packaged standalone multimedia courses are probably only justified for a small group of students with special needs, as they are expensive to produce and update, and are too inflexible to provide the individual diagnosis and feedback central to effective academic support. These functions must be provided responsively by skilled personnel, hence text-based telecommunications media are more appropriate for flexible delivery of study skills than multimedia. Email with attachments is probably the most suitable individual contact medium in terms of cost and ease of use, but requires skill and planning to manage workload and emotional cues effectively. Similarly, asynchronous group sessions can be run by email lists or bulletin boards in association with web pages, or in MOOs, with some advantages of convenience to students.

These media require new skills on the part of the students, but as these are rapidly becoming essential in the job market, the time commitment is justifiable. Less easily dismissed are the potentials for breaches of confidentiality and for harassment or abuse, the loss of vital non-verbal cues, and the restricted access for lower income students.

The expectation that education by IT will be cheaper is only true for large numbers and so presupposes a big student market. The extent of this market is, however, untested. Further, email and discussion based courses are not scalable to large student numbers without additional staff or significant loss of quality in terms of feedback, and are more suited to older, more experienced students than to first time learners. While we will undoubtedly need to experiment with flexible delivery as the universities change, in the long run it may prove that the cheapest and most effective way of providing quality academic support is in face to face contact with a skilled human being.

USEFUL LISTS AND WEB SITES

1. **AAHESGIT**
To subscribe to AAHESGIT go to:
<http://www.tltgroup.org/listserv/.html>
2. **ITFORUM**
Instructional Technology Forum discussing monthly stimulus papers on educational design, uses of educational technology, andragogy and pedagogy, etc. Past discussions available at:
<http://itech1.coe.uga.edu/ITForum/home.html>
3. **Making Web pages accessible for students with disabilities**
Adaptech
<http://omega.dawsoncollege.qc.ca/cfichten/adaptech.htm>

Bobby

<http://www.cast.org/bobby/>

Web Accessibility Initiatives

<http://www.w3.org/WAI/>

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Section 4

Generic Learning and Discipline-specific Learning

Keynote paper: Generic learning and discipline-specific learning

The 'generic' and the disciplined: Can universal and particular be reconciled?

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Abstract

If all learning were specific to the disciplines of knowledge, there would be no need for language and learning programs in the university. If, on the other hand, all learning were governed by so-called generic skills, the role of the disciplines would be no more than to delimit a subject matter to which learning specialists could be left to apply their expertise. This positing of such extremes is not merely a dialectical artifice. There are discipline specialists who think that the 'higher' skills, at least, are their own preserve and that disciplinary discourses are radically incommensurable; while university administrators, by contrast, are setting out lists of generic skills that are somehow supposed to create a comprehensive framework for all learning. Caught in the middle of all this, the language and learning practitioner needs to develop a coherent response which involves bringing the particular and the universal into some fruitful relationship, one that is neither inductive nor deductive. As something of an 'outsider', the learning specialist is in a position to tease out what Wittgenstein called not common essences but 'family resemblances' between disciplinary discourses or 'language games', a position which, paradoxically perhaps, also involves emphasising difference. Building on the notion of games and Gadamer's concept of play, what we can help students (and staff) to arrive at for themselves is a realisation of the ways in which these skills converge and diverge and to encourage a capacity for judging their application in the concrete circumstances of the learning (and teaching) tasks at hand.

Towards the end of 1998 an appeal appeared on the UniLearn site of the internet. The writer had been requested or required by the powers that be in his university to provide a general study skills course. Could UniLearners offer advice on how to mount this enterprise? My heart sank, and I confess to feeling considerable irritation. A number of us in the study skills centres of Australian universities, as well as many others in staff development centres and elsewhere, had spent nearly twenty-five years working to expunge such programs from the university. These programs, we reasoned, are founded on the behaviourist and technicist idea that so-called learning 'skills' are uniform across the board, and (presumably like nothing else) can be taught in isolation from the disciplines of knowledge which give them substance and meaning. They serve, so we argued, only to shore up an ignorant, cheapskate and ultimately cynical bureaucratic systems-approach to learning, as well as ultimately to confine the learning specialist to the position of a drudge. It was Brigid Ballard, of the Study Skills Centre at the Australian National University, who took up the challenge mounted by the UniLearn correspondent's appeal, gently but firmly trying to dissuade him from any such enterprise. All of us here today should pray that she was successful, and that the person in question found ways in turn to dissuade his superiors from pressing the matter.

In telling this story I cast the university administrators as the villains, the UniLearn correspondent as a not wholly innocent victim, and the tradition of knowledge and practical experience built up in our field as the potential rescuer. I am sure that this is substantially right. Yet it is possible to see the university administrators themselves as victims both of an older tradition and of the more recent imperatives inflicted on universities by governments and what in Australia we call their 'peak' advisory bodies. The older tradition assumed that most of the underlying learning skills were acquired by students at school, and that the perceived deficiencies of entering students are either the fault of the school system or the result of the great influx of what are often still called 'non-traditional' students - those with cut-off scores that would not in the past have gained entry, ethnic minorities, overseas students, and so on. These students were categorised in general terms as unable to think or to write English clearly, and so on. Therefore thinking and writing themselves were seen as pre-requisite general skills which students bring *to* their studies rather than developing *along with* those studies.

The more recent imperative came from two reports to the Commonwealth Government - the Mayer Committee on Key Competencies for employment (1992) and the Higher Education Council's report *Achieving Quality* (1992), which married the concept of setting out the necessary 'generic skills, attributes and values' to the principles of institutional self-evaluation and public accountability. The latter report contained a sting near its tail: 'institutional leadership' with respect to generic skills was now under the hammer. Within months university propaganda departments (without, apparently, consulting their lawyers too carefully) were publishing lists of the generic skills, attributes and values their graduates would be certified to possess. As in most instantaneous revolutions, the worst of the past was preserved in the revolutionary present, disguised by some changes in language, and what had once lain just beneath the surface now had an explicit, sometimes menacing edge to it: quality became Quality with its industrial, procedural overtones; 'general skills' became 'generic skills'. University administrations fell in with (or into) all this.

If, in this version of the story, vice-chancellors and their acolytes are victims of government, they are not victims with whom we need to feel a great deal of sympathy. Having in the past taken no serious interest in the nature of higher learning other than to mouth old platitudes at graduation ceremonies, they immediately reached (as we have noted) for the account of 'generic skills, attributes and values' provided by the Higher Education Council report. That this account is muddled in the extreme has been effectively shown up by John Clanchy and Brigid Ballard in a paper in the journal *Higher Education Research and Development* (1995). Clanchy and Ballard point out that the HEC report calls both skills and values attributes, as well as calling attributes attributes. Attributes later become 'qualities' and then 'characteristics'. They go on to ask whether intellectual curiosity can reasonably be called a 'skill', intellectual rigour a 'personal attribute', the recognition of the provisional nature of knowledge a 'skill', problem-solving a 'quality', and so on (p. 157). These categorial muddles continue to be reproduced in the often impenetrable prose of many university planning documents, which themselves display a conspicuous lack of the 'critical thinking' skills, 'logical thought' and 'communication' skills that their authors expect all graduates to have attained. In particular, they fall well short of one of the most important 'capacities' identified in the HEC report, namely the capacity to 'step outside the system' (in this case the system provided by the report itself) 'and reason about it' (p. 23).

Yet the attempt to articulate what transcends particular discipline specific knowledge and technique is one that can hardly be shirked. Indeed, given the nature of human language and thought, which rely upon generalisation, it is inevitable. But there are considerable complications. Discipline specialists in my experience often manage to hold together two not quite compatible attitudes to the transcendent and the particular. For example, I know one modern language specialist who maintains on the one hand that 'an essay is an essay', so that the ways of writing an essay need not be taught in the disciplines; while also insisting that the rhetorical approach to the literature and culture of the language he teaches stems from a tradition quite peculiar to that culture, and therefore does need to be taught. What such an approach as this fails to come to grips with is that there must be *some* features common to the rhetoric of the two languages (otherwise coherent and cohesive translation between them would be impossible) and that learning what is particular to the target language would be greatly enhanced by an appreciation of these commonalities as well as the differences. Other discipline specialists regard the 'generic' as the low level skills to be brought from school (one thinks of things like spelling, syntax, arithmetic calculation, elementary statistics), while the 'higher' ones are specific to the discipline or a group of disciplines, such as the social or the biological sciences. This is contrary to the thrust of the HEC report, which seems to be saying - at times rather uncertainly - that the 'generic' are the 'higher' skills that a university should seek to impart (see, for example, p. 20). Such considerations suggest to me that universities are hardly at first base in trying to sort out the connections between the generic and the discipline-specific, and that documents like the HEC report and university pronouncements - driven as they are primarily by external pressures such as those from employers and government productivity commissions - are hardly the place to begin.

The HEC report links these generic skills, attributes and values very firmly to the disciplines of knowledge, while also seeing in them the mechanisms by which disciplinary particularities are transcended:

They will be introduced and refined in a subject-related context - indeed it is only through the study of a body of knowledge that they can be acquired - but they will also enable the graduate to transfer skills between contexts (p. 20).

This introduces a major claim. Though taught within the disciplines, generic skills 'enable' *graduates* (notice, not students) to transfer them between different contexts, presumably of work, if not also of study. Transferability is the major issue here - indeed, what are called generic skills in Australia are called transferable

skills elsewhere (Golding, Marginson & Pascoe, 1995, p. 14). It is these transferable skills which themselves make possible their own transfer. We might say that this is the case by definition: transferable skills pull the student's transferable skills up by their own bootstraps, and, presto, the skills are transferred to any context in which the student or graduate finds him or herself. But surely this is an empirical claim, one which needs to be examined empirically, rather than a self-fulfilling definitional prophecy, a mere expression of hope, or what so many of these documents call an 'enabling' condition.

Misko (1995, cited by Golding, Marginson & Pascoe, 1995, p. 15) expresses a note of caution, based on empirical findings. Misko is impressed by studies which emphasise the importance of 'content and specific knowledge' over generic skills training. She notes that these findings question seriously those who advocate a discovery approach to learning, who seem to think that learning proceeds from what might be called the generic skill of being able to access information. She concludes that a curriculum based on developing generic skills is no more than a 'hope' that it will help graduates prepare for diversity in their working lives. Similarly, quite a few years ago, in a couple of papers on the nature of skill and of 'cultural literacy', I raised an empirically based argument put by the American cultural literacy advocate E. D. Hirsch (1989, p. 112). Hirsch takes the view that, with respect to one generic skill, reading, this experience is 'different every time', depending entirely upon the nature of the content being read. Concomitantly, according to Hirsch, knowledge of a wide range of content is the *sine qua non* of reading skill (Taylor, 1990; 1991). It seems to me that both Misko and Hirsch are wrong in sheeting everything home to specific knowledge or content; though I would support both in their rejection of approaches to learning which emphasise 'discovery' based upon some generalised or 'generic' principles of skill development. But whatever the outcome of arguments such as Misko's and Hirsch's, they are based not just on a definitional hope and a prayer, but upon the interpretation, however misguided, of empirical evidence in particular situations.

If we are to place some faith in the idea of generic, transferable skills, we must look to a position which reconciles, on the one hand, the muddled and vague definitional hopes expressed by the Higher Education Council and Australian universities at the present time and, on the other, the cold but necessary empirical shower poured upon those hopes by the likes of Misko and Hirsch. If we do not, then we are stuck with the impossible situation faced by the UniLearn correspondent with whom I began. That is to say, we need to resist the temptation to isolate the desired generic skills and then find a 'context' in which they can be taught, to adopt a 'top-down' procedure. The idea of a 'subject-related context', to use the words of the HEC report, in which these skills can be presented, illustrated and 'refined' is altogether too loose. Let me take a few examples.

This problem of looseness is raised by my own text *The Student's Writing Guide for the Arts and Social Sciences* (1989) and the course for undergraduates in the Arts Faculty, on which it is based. Though restricted to the humanities and social sciences, about which I have come to know a fair deal, such general skills as I deal with there - analysing essay topics, thinking through possible answers to a question, reading and note-taking, writing beginnings, middles and ends of essays, rhetorical patterns, editing one's work, academic conventions, and so on - remain overgeneralised, and ultimately lacking in real intellectual depth or interest. This is so even though much of what is in that book is the outcome of my own close empirical studies of students' writing. Moreover, though, since that book was published, I have rethought aspects of it, and have often revised the examples for the purposes of the classroom, I confess to having become bored stiff teaching that course. I think this feeling of boredom stems from frustration at not having the time or opportunity to examine in any real depth the ways in which the general and the particular influence one another.

Similarly, Swales's (1984) account of the rhetorical structure of the introductions to scientific papers I immediately found very powerful and widely adaptable to disciplines beyond science. I even prepared a one-page handout which I would give to graduate students in Arts. But I always loathed teaching it in graduate seminars, no matter how co-operative were the students from a variety of disciplines in writing and sharing draft thesis introductions based upon it, and no matter how strongly I stressed that this 'generic' pattern could be subject to very wide interpretation and variation. 'Here are the rules arrived at quite empirically', I seemed to be saying after George Orwell, 'but break any of them sooner than write something barbarous.' But what I couldn't supply, in the nature of the case, is a generic, interdisciplinary rule for how to identify what is barbarous. It is not just that, as I became aware, these rules are truly 'generic' - that is, they apply to a 'genre' of inquiry which transcends disciplines, but are in no sense universal in all disciplines. (For example, my observations of the discourse structure of post-structuralist critique in someone like Jacques Derrida or of certain kinds of historical writing reveal quite different things going on.) It is also that one might *need* to be barbarous - well, let us say, unconventional, imaginative, or, in the words of one pious expression by Monash University (1999, p. 9) of what

its programs 'must enable graduates' to do: 'attempt always to set the agenda rather than follow the well trodden path'. But how does one distinguish between the barbarous and the imaginative; how does one reconcile one grand articulation of a universal attitude or skill with a truly generic or particular one with which it is in apparent conflict? On the other hand, how does one settle for teaching the generic and the conventional, which is what university administrations are really asking of what they call 'support' programs, without our endlessly repeating ourselves into a coma of generalisations?

It is perhaps instructive - in my own case, quite certainly - that these problems seem rarely to arise when one is working individually with a student. The student with his or her piece of work is, like a play, a novel, a painting, a piece of music, the true concrete universal. All the universals are potentially there - those of human beings, those of the academic and broader social forces at play, those of thought and language patterns - and they are realised in concrete particular in that student, that assignment topic and that piece of work before us. We are 'reading' this situation, and are absorbed into its frame, just as when we view a painting, conscious nevertheless of those things outside this frame that both contribute to it and are rejected by it. Our unique perspective enables us not only to frame the picture before us with this student but also to picture the frame. The tensions between the universal, the generic and the particular seem to dissolve in the face of *this* student writing at *this* stage in his or her studies on *this* topic in *this* discipline with *this* theoretical or epistemological persuasion espoused by *this* lecturer or supervisor behind it. In the face of such a fascinating interplay, if working with an individual student becomes tedious and unrewarding, it is not so much because we are dealing with generic skills in a vacuum created by our own teaching situation but because of the vacuous nature of some of the topics lecturers give their students to work on.

The luxury of working individually with students, when the particular and the 'generic' become collapsed into the concrete universal, is one that we should do everything in our power to maintain for as long as possible. It is the ideal. And the ideal is not something abstract, which, like a list of desirable skills, is produced to a recipe for the accomplished graduate. Rather, in the words of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1817, p. 282), 'The ideal consists in the happy balance of the generic with the individual. The former makes the character representative and symbolical, therefore instructive ... The latter gives it living interest; for nothing lives or is real, but as definite and individual'.

But we know that the political economy of higher education compels us to work with groups of students. (The individual tutorial even at Oxford and Cambridge, where it has always been protected by special funding, is now under threat.) Our challenge is to find ways of achieving that concrete universal, the ideal, in circumstances that may not obviously be conducive to it. This challenge is both necessary and worthwhile. Language and learning specialists can meet it only by co-operating as closely as possible with those who teach in the particular disciplines of knowledge, while at the same time preserving a measured distance which asserts our own intellectual and professional integrity.

I have already indicated that the top-down, deductive procedure according to which we isolate a set of universal skills and proceed to teach them through a more or less accidental or random series of examples thrown up by the student composition of a class or by one's own attempts to be eclectic is, for me, inadequate. It can only be a second or third best. This is because the general is being *imposed* upon the particular; the only function of the particular is to illustrate the pre-established characteristics of the general. But understanding does not work like this. The most important characteristic of human understanding is that the general and the particular modify and change *each other*. To speak of a 'subject-related context' in which the general skills are 'introduced and refined' assumes that the general has a hard inner core, an 'essence', that is not subject to change by confrontation with particular contents. In an interesting description of a content-based English as a Second Language program in Oman, John Flowerdew (1993) relates how he discovered that what constitutes a definition is subject to such 'pragmatic modification' in actual discourse as to bring into fundamental question J. R. Searle's 'generic' account of definition in terms of truth values. By the same token, it is also wrong merely to assume - as many discipline specialists and, as we saw, Misko and Hirsch seem to do - that whatever skills are general will be almost subliminally absorbed by the student through exposure to particular disciplinary contents and 'methods'. It is therefore my view that the most important function of the language and learning specialist in the university is to be a catalyst for reconciling the top-down (the deductive), beloved of administrators, and the bottom-up (the inductive), which lies at the heart of teaching in many empirical disciplines.

Perhaps the best way to articulate such a program is Wittgenstein's (1958, paras. 65-7) idea of 'family resemblances' between games. The important thing about the 'family' of activities we call games is that there is

'a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing', but there is no single common or essential property that characterises *all* games:

Look, for example at board games, with their multifarious relationships. Now pass to card games; here you find many correspondences with the first group, but many common features drop out, and others appear. When we pass next to ball-games, much that is common is retained, but much is lost. - Are they all 'amusing'? Compare chess with noughts and crosses. Or is there always winning and losing, or competition between players? Think of patience. In ball games there is winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball at a wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared ... we can go through the many, many other groups of games in the same way; can see how similarities crop up and disappear.

There are two lessons we can draw from this. In the first place, while we can admit the multifarious skills, abilities and attitudes that might in various ways come into academic work, when one looks *closely* - as Wittgenstein urges us to do - there is nothing really 'generic' there at all in the sense that one can define clear boundaries. We cannot say, for example, 'this is the core curriculum for an academic skills course' (any more, indeed, than one can say 'this is the core curriculum for a humanities course or a history course or an economics or a zoology or a structural engineering course'). There is no genome for academic skills waiting to be discovered and applied.

Secondly, if we are to take even one individual 'skill', say critical thinking or essay writing, this in itself is no more than a loose set of family resemblances and differences. As Ballard and Clanchy (1988; 1995), among others, have pointed out many times, what constitutes critical thinking or essay writing in one discipline may have certain things in common with other disciplines, but there will be significant differences, too, depending on the nature of the evidence to be brought and on other things. Not only that, but what constitutes critical thinking both *within* and *across* disciplines can vary considerably according to what are now commonly called 'discourses'. In literary, fine art and other studies, for example, formalist, Marxist, feminist, deconstructionist and other modes of critical thinking about a text or painting constitute another family of language games and mind games - one which makes some departmental families, as Tolstoy noted at the beginning of *Anna Karenina*, unhappy in their very own particular ways, and not at all amenable to well-intentioned generalisations about critical thinking skills.

So what is the role of the language and learning specialist in this complex swirl of currents, counter-currents and undercurrents? I suggested earlier, when talking about working with individual students, that our position outside the standard departmental and disciplinary structures of the university gives us the chance to picture the frame. If now we think not in terms of frames, which tend to be rather rigid things, and develop the idea of games, we can capture something of the fluidity, the back and forth movement of play, characteristic of human understanding. If we conceive of play in the transitivity terms of Hallidayan functional grammar, we see that play does not have an Actor-Process-Goal structure at all. When we play a game, 'game' is what Halliday (1985, pp. 134-5) calls 'Range' rather than 'Goal' - one plays *in* a game, where 'game' (or any hyponym such as tennis, football, cricket, chess and so on) is the 'domain of the process' rather than a separable entity which constitutes the goal of the action. This grammatical analysis accords well with Hans-Georg Gadamer's conclusions about the nature of play in his major work *Truth and Method* (1989, pp. 101-10). It is the play itself that instantiates the coherence of the action, that back and forth movement, what Gadamer calls the *energeia*, of the players and the ball. It is like the play of light on water, the play of the parts of a machine in motion, the interplay of colours or light and shade in a painting or a physical landscape. So the players in a game, says Gadamer, are not the *subjects* of the play, any more than the game is the goal or *object* of the players.

Yet we continue to think of skills as pre-defined goals to be attained or objects to be acquired, and once acquired become portable possessions or 'characteristics' that subjects (students or graduates) carry around with them and simply 'apply', irrespective of the generic game or the dynamics of a particular game in which they happen to be playing. Such-and-such a skill box has been ticked and certified. What we should be doing, instead, is to use our own vantage point both to research and to teach the currents of play as we see them. In this we have a dual responsibility - to academics and to students. To academics, who, indeed, are often encased within their own fairly rigid disciplinary or discourse frames, we need to demonstrate just how fluid these games actually are. To undergraduates, quite a few of whom want to be provided with no more than a stereotypical frame with which to enclose themselves, we need to be able to point out the similarities and the differences in the applications of these skills within and between the various subjects they study. For it is by pointing up differences or contrasts

as well as by noting similarities that learning takes place most effectively. This is part of what I mean when I imply in the title of this paper that 'generic' skills need to be 'disciplined' by bodies of knowledge, as I have argued. But it also means that, every time we view a skill or set of skills, this gaze has to be disciplined by the broader conception of the play of human understanding I have briefly tried to articulate.

In the end, though, none of this work can be more than indicative. If, as I have said, there can be nothing in the manner of a skills genome waiting to be discovered, this implies that there can be no sure-fire pedagogical *method*, scientific or otherwise, for inculcating these skills. What students stand most in need of is help to develop what I shall label not a skill but a faculty. This faculty is the faculty of *judgement* - judgement of what is the best thing to do in the circumstances in which one finds oneself. The salient features (and the ways in which they interact) of these circumstances are not predictable in advance of the situation requiring action, just as in a ball game, where such things as the position of the ball or the mood and tone of play at any given moment cannot be scripted in advance. In Australian football, the good players are those who are said, in a happy metaphor, to be able to 'read' the play. What makes judgement different from a combination of skill and experience, as well as from knowledge, is that it cannot be subsumed under any general principle of learning or discovery. In other words, as Kant (1787, p. 17, B172) notes, judgement cannot be systematically *demonstrated* either by abstracting general or universal principles of judgement from the contents of knowledge or by deducing it from something higher. If we were to try to show systematically which particulars should be subsumed under a universal, we should need a meta-judgement, which itself depends upon a meta-judgement, and so on ad infinitum. Universities, like all other institutions and places, have plenty of people who are skilful and knowledgeable - who can handle the ball well and who know the game's rules and the coach's game plan - but who lack judgement. But it is only judgement that truly 'enables' people to make appropriate use of the knowledge and skills they have built up in these many different situations. It is only the faculty of judgement which can reconcile the universal and the particular, the 'generic' with the discipline-specific.

Kant thought that judgement can't be taught. If by teaching we mean systematic demonstration then he is, as we have seen, right. But if we mean that the university can create the conditions under which the faculty of judgement in our students can be given the chance to flower, then it can indeed be nurtured. We can give practical substance, therefore, to the idea of generic, transferable skills by preparing students to exercise their judgement, to chance their arm or their pen. What their education needs to put before them is as wide a variety of experiences, situations, circumstances, language games, as possible. How they respond to a particular situation, how they see a connection or a difference between this situation and that, and how, most importantly, they judge the extent to which and the ways in which this situation is similar to or different from the 'generic' is, ultimately, up to them. It is to the *contents* of these situations that they make a well-judged response. But when university administrators and others talk about and attempt to certify in their graduates the 'possession' of generic skills, it is often only the mere form, abstracted from those contents, that they have in mind. From a distance, Coleridge reminds us, an egg and an egg-shell look the same. Study skills and language and learning specialists need to resist any blandishment that would compel us to work only, or even chiefly, with the shells, necessary as they are.

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Critical thinking skills in the visual and performing arts

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Abstract

Critical thinking is a crucial component of academic discourse. Traditional critical thinking frameworks are useful in distinguishing subjective and objective knowledge. These frameworks were included in an acculturation program for international VCA students, but have broader applications. However, because the nature of the performing art discipline assumes a greater subjective response, additional frameworks are necessary which take account of how the student experiences a work of art and constructs meaning. This paper will consider some ways to move from traditional analyses into those which include response and interpretation within the performing arts context. In this way, the question of what distinguishes critical thinking and analyses in the performing arts will be discussed.

AIM

The aim of this paper is to briefly outline some of the current discussion on the nature of critical thinking, to identify those aspects that are relevant in performing and visual arts learning contexts, to describe to what extent the frameworks in traditional and artistic learning contexts are different, and to consider how we use these frameworks within the academic and learning skills areas of visual and performing arts institutions.

BACKGROUND

In 1998 with the introduction of international students to the VCA, an academic skills acculturation program was developed by the authors with input and feedback from VCA lecturing staff from the School of Art. This initial 16 hour program included a three hour session on critical thinking which built on traditional models of critical thinking, and explored relevant frameworks for students enrolled in Art, Dance, Music, Film and TV, Drama, and the School of Studies in Creative Arts. Having introduced the program, we wanted to further refine our approach and explore how differing concepts and frameworks of critical thinking apply to the visual and performing arts, and their pedagogical uses with students, specifically international and other students from diverse backgrounds.

Barnet (1993, p. 1) in *A Short Guide to Writing about Art* states: "We write about art in order to clarify and to account for our responses to works that interest and excite or frustrate us. In putting words to paper, we have to take a second and third look at what is in front of us and what is within us". Inherent in this quotation is one of the essential differences between traditional concepts of critical thinking and critical thinking as it may be used in the creative and performing arts, that is that students often need to take cognisance of what is 'within'. Critical thinking in the arts requires many 'ways of seeing' and 'making meaning', some of which demand a personal experience and response in the process of evaluating and forming a critical view of a work of art.

In asking for a personal response, we open up the question - where does meaning lie? Is it with the creator, the work itself, or the receiver? These questions have led to various schools of thought, developed over many centuries (Manns, 1998). Manns concludes that in the process of making meaning about a work: "Clarity must not be treated as a property that inheres exclusively in any expression taken by itself: it arises and dwells in the relation between the transmitter¹ ... and a receiver ..." (p. 116) and the art work.

CRITICAL THINKING

There are many definitions of critical thinking that have been advocated and debated. Dewey (1933), a strong advocate of critical thinking based on the Socratic method, defined it as reflective thinking that requires "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that

support it and the further consideration to which it tends [that] includes a conscious and voluntary effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of evidence and rationality” (Dewey, cited in Kurfiss, 1988, p. 9). This is one of many definitions that has given rise to current debates on critical thinking.

Paul (1993) argues that critical thinking is complex and conceptually interdependent, linking to notions such as: the critical person, the critical society, critical theory of knowledge, learning, literacy and rationality and further suggests that it is important not to put too much emphasis on any one definition. The variation in definitions is apparent in Johnson’s (1992, p. 40) summary of five key understandings of critical thinking: for Ennis critical thinking is “reasonable reflective thinking that is focussed on deciding what to believe”; for McPeck it is “the skill and propensity to engage in an activity with reflective skepticism”; for Paul “critical thinking is disciplined, self-directed thinking which exemplifies the perfection of thinking appropriate to a particular mode or domain of thinking”; for Lipman it is “skilful, responsible thinking that facilitates good judgement because it 1) relies upon criteria 2) is self-correcting 3) is sensitive to context”; and Siegel “defines the critical thinker as the individual who is appropriately moved by reasons”.

Paul (1993, p. 54) argues that all critical thinking has three parts: a process, an object and a standard which require an ability to evaluate information for relevance, identify assumptions, make plausible inferences, and identify relevant points of view. This process requires the posing of questions and formulating answers which demand higher order cognitive skills such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation and critique (Bloom, cited in Paul, 1993, p. 376).

Atkinson (1997, p. 80) suggests that “Critical thinking is cultural thinking”. According to Fox (cited in Atkinson, 1997) critical thinking “... is more than just a set of writing and thinking techniques - it is a voice, a stance, a relationship with texts and family members, friends, teachers, the media, even the history of one’s country” (p. 71), extending beyond exclusive and reductive processes.

These definitions or understandings are certainly important and relevant, however, for the purposes of this paper Kurfiss’ (1988) definition appears to accurately encapsulate the traditional understanding of critical thinking as it is applied to written and spoken texts in academic discourse.

Critical thinking is a rational response to questions that cannot be answered definitively and for which all the relevant information may not be available. It is defined here as *an investigation whose purpose is to explore a situation, phenomenon, question or problem to arrive at a hypothesis or conclusion about it that integrates all the available information and that can therefore be convincingly justified*. In critical thinking all assumptions are open to question, divergent views are aggressively sought, and the inquiry is not biased in favour of a particular outcome. (Kurfiss, 1988, p. 2) [original emphasis]

However, within creative and artistic contexts, the process of critical thinking includes consideration of non-verbal mediums and an experiential engagement with the artistic ‘text’.

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE THE FRAMEWORKS IN ARTISTIC CONTEXTS DIFFERENT?

Tasks within Arts institutions vary from those that ask students to analyse, describe, examine, interpret, critique and perform the work of others to those that ask them to create their own works. The role and nature of critical thinking varies across this spectrum. For example, students may be asked to analyse a painting within the context of a gallery or seminar, analyse the relevance of social events to a particular art movement, write a history of a particular dance style, review the films of a particular director and describe and analyse the experience of working with a particular choreographer. They are also asked to create their own works, comment on them and discuss the works of others.

Within this context there is the creator of a work, the work itself and the audience/receiver. In the process of reviewing and discussing the works and performances of others, students must negotiate their personal perspectives and understandings, the work itself and the *gestalt* of the creator. Shifts in critical theory mean that at any time in the process of ‘making meaning’ (see Figure. 1), greater weight might be attributed to one of these areas rather than another. For example, the twentieth century shift from Modernism to Postmodernism has transferred the location of a work’s meaning from the creator to the receiver. So, when trying to understand

Michaelangelo's *David*, do we look for meaning in the artist's life, Michaelangelo's intent, or the cultural context? Do we look at the work and consider the line, stance, material, and surface qualities, or do we look to the effect of this work on our psyches and ask what is our response to it? These questions are only some of those that could be asked. However, what is assumed throughout, regardless of the critical theory focus, is that in the process of 'evolving meaning' there is a vital connection between artist and audience mediated through the work of art.

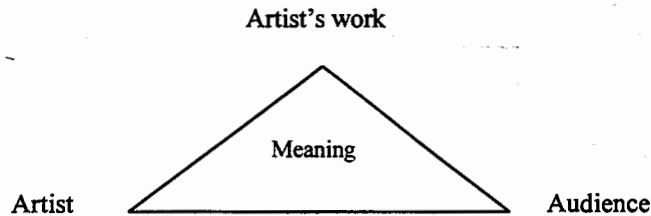


Figure 1. Elements in negotiating meaning.

One of the difficulties in asking for student responses within the visual and performing arts is that these fall within an interpretative framework that may include not only the student's personal experience of the work, and the intent of the artist, but historical, philosophical, political, cultural and aesthetic frameworks. While some knowledge is fixed, such as date of birth, or type of materials used, other 'knowledge' may be determined by the many theoretical constructs which underpin definitions of art and aesthetics (Manns, 1998). In responding to a work, one or more of these frameworks, or any of their aspects, may contribute to the process of 'making meaning' (see Figure. 2). The student may draw on many facets of these many complex and overlapping interpretative frameworks.

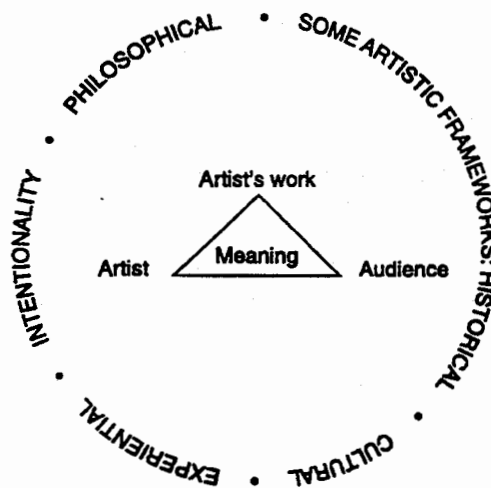


Figure 2. Some Frameworks used in the process of 'making meaning'.

By looking at several approaches to art education, and the way students are asked to think about and respond to works of art, we can see that a number of different frameworks are used which lead to and demand, different 'ways of seeing' or 'making meaning'. One of these 'ways of seeing' is that outlined by Glass (1997, p. 93) in his description of Dewey and the Barnes Foundation, a school of art in Philadelphia, USA. Within the school:

The ability to 'see' is further developed by the introduction of new aesthetic concepts, the first being the 'aesthetic experience.' Experience is not passive but involves an interaction between

the artist and his environment or the view and the painting. Seeing and hearing is an active process, not a mere registration of impressions.

In his belief that art can be analysed objectively through 'formal' artistic analysis by appreciation of colour, light, line and space, Barnes emphasised that students must have contact with real paintings, not prints and slides which reduce all to the same scale and surface. The assumption is that part of the critical process is experiential. Barnes emphasises the experiential aspect of understanding works of art: "The artist, whether in paint, words, or musical tones, has embodied an experience in his work and to appreciate his painting or poem or symphony, we must reconstruct his experience, so far as we are able ourselves" (Barnes, cited in Glass, 1997, p. 93).

Barnet (1993) in *A Short Guide to Writing About Art* suggests that learning to appreciate an artist's work demands more than a passive response; appreciation requires the objective recognition of a painting's qualities using analytical rather than descriptive language. For example, a pure description would tell us that the head of a sculpture "faces front; the upright rim of the nose is missing and the limb of the right earlobe is missing..." (Barnet, 1993, p. 72). However, while the language of analysis does inevitably include description, it also moves beyond this to "the surfaces below the cheeks are sensitively modelled to suggest the soft, fleshy forms of age" (Barnet, 1993, p. 73). Barnet implies that an aesthetic framework is relevant here.

He also emphasises the experiential when he asks the student in the first place to look to personal experience, to consider their first response to the work. Is it, for example, puzzling, boring, pretty, ugly, tender or emotional? Students are asked to analyse why they have the response - focussing on both individual emotional responses and contextual responses which demand that students have a knowledge of the context, audience, purpose, condition of the work and title. Students are asked to distinguish between subject matter and meaning related to style (both period and personal) and form (using formal artistic analysis) by asking what is there, what the subject matter is and how does the viewer experience it? Barnet asks students to consider 'how' a work means. In the arts 'the content is meaning made visible', a phrase that could well be applied to other art forms such as movement, dialogue, sound, film, painting, ceramics, or digital/cyber art. He summarises 'how' a work means by saying: "In short, to get at the content or meaning of a work we have to interpret the subject matter, the material and the form (size, shape, texture, colour and so on), the socio-historical content, and perhaps the artist's intentions" (Barnet, 1993, p. 29). (See Appendix 1 for relevant artistic analysis questions by Barnet.)

Although the category of intentionality is controversial in the Arts, it is still an important consideration in some artistic frameworks. Ahlberg (1999, p. 170) maintains that "Art-historical research, by reconstructing vanished situations, traditions and institutions, provides us with the necessary knowledge or understanding of what kinds of artistic intentions were possible". Intentionality can encompass both the intentions of the artist and the work. However, knowing the intentions of the artist may not provide the sole source of meaning, in fact the work may have many other meanings. Frequently the intentions of the creator are unavailable, equally the work can have its interpretation altered by knowing the artist's intentions. For example, Paul Cox in his documentary film *Vincent* used van Gogh's letters to his brother to provide an interpretative framework for van Gogh's works. Whether or not an artist achieves their intention, and to what extent a student's interpretation is influenced by an artist's statement may, or may not, form part of a student's response.

Another view of how students develop a critical appreciation of a work of art is put forward by Ahlberg (1999). He suggests that to gain a full understanding of musical works and works of art, students need to have experience of many other things 'particularly of life'. Paul in outlining his model of the educated person, skilled in critical thinking also states that the "... literate person is fundamentally a repository of strategies, principles, concepts, and insights ... Much of what is known is constructed by the thinker as needed from context to context..." (1993, p. 126).

Drawing from personal contexts is overt in the language of criticism and interpretation. Metaphors and similes are enriched by personal experience despite the existence of more technical descriptive terminology. For example, music critics use many non-musical terms to describe musical works (Sibley, cited in Ahlberg, 1999, p. 13). Sibley notes that these terms are drawn from adjectives normally applied to light, feelings, touch and gait and lists many of these commonly used words: sparkling, bright, soaring, placid, murmuring, bitter, sinister, soft, to name a few. Although Ahlberg acknowledges that characterising music in emotional terms may not be necessary (as there are many ways to listen to and describe music, such as using purely technical terminology), he draws a distinction between an "aesthetic and non-aesthetic" way of listening to music, where he emphasises that the non-aesthetic experience is essential to describing and understanding music (Ahlberg, 1999, p. 14).

The experiential framework is also emphasised in Richardson's (1996) view of the critic's musical thinking when she highlights both the person and the process. By implication we can think of the student as a person with accumulated experience, past musical knowledge, sensitivities, feelings and 'musical imagination'. The process involves the musical encounter itself which brings with it the process of expectations, comparisons, predictions and evaluation. The questions that a listener starts to ask are: "What am I hearing?" or 'Of what does it remind me?" (Richardson, 1996, p. 60). Other questions that arise in a critical approach to music would be: "How should it have gone? How might it go? How is it going?" (Richardson, 1996, p. 60). Embedded in these questions is the process of evaluation where the critic revisits the evidence and reduces the music to the logic of language by labelling the music and the extra-musical ideas. We should note that abstract thinking occurs after the listening experience which combines evidence of tonal thinking and the evidence produced through the multifaceted template of personal experience. As Richardson (1996, p. 61) states: "... the musical thinking done by the listener can be described as a rich amalgam of cognition, affect, and the abstract manipulation of ideas".

Within the arts a further consideration is that students are responding to symbolic, aural, movement, and visual statements (McKenna, 1999). Such 'languages' and thought are not neutral and natural. Students may need to learn, in articulating their responses, to analyse works using methods appropriate to the medium. They may also need to understand the shifting ideologies that underpin their critical thinking and questioning, which include tacit and unconscious values and behaviours that inevitably have cultural and political resonances. "One way to encourage students to consider the relationship between the non-conscious mind and ideology is to have it connect with a personal experience" (McKenna, 1999, p. 2).

From these various approaches it is evident that the student may analyse the work using 'objective criteria' of artistic analysis, but the student is also asked to be subjective in responding to the question of *how* they experience, participate in and reflect on the work. Subjectivity is inherent in questions such as to what extent does the work express something significant and important? Significant to whom and in what respect (Ahlberg, 1999)? So here subjectivity is operating in interpretations and judgement of art works. While these judgements and interpretations differ, "some are more firmly grounded in the work than others and hence more 'plausible' if not more 'true' or 'correct'" (Kurfiss, 1989, p. 76). In essence: "The study of art is not a science but neither is it the expression of random feelings loosely attached to works of art. You can - you must come up with statements that seem true to the work itself, statements that almost seem self-evident ..." (Barnet, 1993, p. 21).

CRITICAL THINKING IN THE ARTS: A PROGRAM FOR VCA INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Local and international students are often presented with tasks requiring written personal responses. How do we as Academic and Learning Skills advisers encourage the development of critical thinking processes? One way is to offer programs that highlight the important role individual response plays in critical thinking in the visual and performing arts. Such a program was offered to newly arrived international students at the VCA.

International students "... face a period of transition which involves varying degrees of adjustment to Australian university culture in general and the conventions and expectations of students' individual disciplines in particular" (Beasley & Pearson, 1999, p. 303). The *Critical Thinking Skills in the Arts* acculturation class was part of a larger transition program offered to international students in 1998 and 1999, initially within the orientation program, and in 1999 as a separate mid-semester program. The students (mainly undergraduate, but also including several postgraduates) were from South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, Japan and Mexico, and presented with a range of English language skills. (VCA admission is based on performance and folio presentations and although an IELTS score of 6.5 or above is preferred, students may be admitted with a lower score.) This generic program was designed to accommodate students enrolled in the six schools (Art, Dance, Drama, Film, Music, Studies in Creative Arts). The material of the program focussed on the visual arts because of the number of students enrolled in Studies in Creative Arts. Participation in the program was voluntary but highly recommended. In 1998, most students attending were enrolled in Music, whereas in 1999 most students were from the School of Studies in Creative Arts. The content took into consideration course outlines, assessment tasks and comments and feedback from several members of the VCA academic staff.

The development of the program considered: current thinking about the educational experiences of international students; that educational practices within some cultures may make it difficult for international students to engage in critical thinking frameworks which include personal opinion (Ballard & Clanchy, 1997); the critical

frameworks needed by students to understand assigned tasks and the recognition of discipline specific discourses. Whilst the program may be deemed to be using a 'deficit' model because it was offered to international students, we see it as a transitional developmental approach that might be appropriate for all new students (Biggs, cited in Beasley & Pearson, 1999, p. 307).

McKenna (1999) has proposed many useful pedagogical strategies that help bridge the opposition between art theory and art making which is often articulated in terms of visual versus verbal intelligence. For many students, art may be seen "as non-intellectual endeavour - as manipulation of physical materials separate from ideological contexts" (McKenna, 1999, p. 1). For some students, grappling with analytical reading, texts embedded with theory and discourse specific language, and writing styles that exemplify current philosophical positions, just comprehending the text may be extremely difficult. McKenna's goal is to empower students. To achieve this, students need to understand that their visual and verbal language is not neutral. She uses video clips, slides, contemporary art and photography to exemplify representational codes as having ideological content, such as perspective.

The Critical Thinking session drew on a variety of media and texts that would facilitate students considering: the aesthetic experience; formal analysis; the difference between analysis versus description and subject matter versus style; personal response; both subjective and objective viewpoints; and differing cultural and political responses. It integrated Barnett's questions about art works (See Appendix 1), and traditional question frameworks of analysis, synthesis, evaluation and critique that are usually applied to written texts (see Cartwright, Appendix 2). Various media were used, a strategy also found successful by McKenna (1999): some well-known and obscure photographs, paintings, sculpture, postcards, and models of critical commentary from the visual and performing arts (see Table 1 for an outline of some of the areas explored, the content and the processes). These provided students with opportunities to experience and express responses and opinions within a critical framework. Students, for example, were presented with Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother, Nipomo, California* (cited in Barnett, 1993, p. 64), with Lange's comments, and asked to identify some formal elements of analysis such as perspective, colour, texture, and so on. (See Barnett, 1993, for some excellent examples.) Subsequently, students were asked to respond to them by identifying how they felt and then analyse why and how these responses emerged. The group shared their verbal and written responses to the works, read sample responses to the same work, and through discussion identified the language of analysis and reasoned opinion in the writings. Through this process, students were encouraged to be open about, and identify, their responses.

For some, "Critical thinking is cultural thinking" (Atkinson, 1997, p. 89). During class discussions a number of cultural readings and values emerged. McKenna (1999) cites an activity titled: 'The Colour Red'; in which the use of red is explored in terms of communism, romance, danger, blood, religion, and so on. The use of colour serves as a catalyst for discussing how colour had "political, historical, corporeal meanings that resonate in a system of cultural relations" (McKenna, 1999, p. 4). A cultural reading of colour also emerged during the discussion of a childhood taboo of the wearing of blue and green together. Students from Korea and Taiwan confirmed that they had experienced equivalent taboos, but for them the incompatible colours were red and green. Other cultural readings were elicited from the students in relation to power, gender, age and race. It was also interesting to observe that the medium of photography proved useful with music students who were able to parallel the forming of interpretations and responses in their discussion of music.

In essence, the session combined Barnes' (cited in Glass, 1997) experiential approach with Barnett's (1993) analytical questions and writing samples, the richness of the students' varied life experiences within their interpretations as suggested by Ahlberg (1999), and activities that elicited differing ideological meanings like those suggested by McKenna (1999). Regardless of the interpretations, students came to understand that there are meanings embedded in the language of analysis and critique. In this process of deconstruction, students were able to examine the construction of cultural myths and values and explore a variety of cultural readings.

Given that this was only a three hour session, aspects of this critical thinking acculturation session were integrated into the follow-on writing session, and later into the ongoing VCA English as a Second Language (ESL) support classes. The pedagogical strategies outlined in Table 1 use a model of critical thinking that considers the many frameworks relevant in interpreting and responding to works of art. Having knowledge of such frameworks (be they for example, historical, philosophical or experiential) is important in discussions of 'making meaning' and interpretation because it is through an understanding of these that a more reasoned evaluation of a work can occur. In fact, critical thinking itself might also be regarded as one of the cultural frameworks that a student may bring to a work of art as a basis for response.

Table 1. Critical Thinking Skills in the Arts - Session Outline.

<i>Area of focus</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Process</i>
Functions of an art critic	Nature of criticism, interpretation of a work's meaning, reason, cultural context ...	Read sample reviews of music and art work Discuss language elements revealing opinions, reason ...
Facts, opinions and inferences	Definitions and explanations of terms	Complete and discuss written quiz on identifying facts, opinions and inferences
Analysis and evaluation in art	Definitions and explanations of terms	Discuss slide of Michael Angelo's <i>David</i> in terms of origins, material, pose, facial, expression, nudity, size, original site ...
Subject matter versus content/meaning	Definitions and explanations of terms	Discuss and compare student responses to two photographs of paintings
Getting ideas: asking questions about art	Elicitation of responses to a work	Elicit responses and discussion by using Barnett's questions (1993, pp. 30-31) and a list of words expressing emotion Discuss, compare and write responses to photographs
Formal analysis questions	Exploration of configuration of artistic objects in terms of line, colour, shape, texture ... Analysis of language through model paragraphs	Apply Barnett's questions (1993, pp. 31-68, see Appendix 1) to photographs and paintings Discuss language components
Style analysis: personal and period	Exploration of works in terms of personal and period style	Compare Van Gogh & Renoir's styles Discuss and analyse model paragraphs
Critical evaluation question frames	Exploration of question frames Elicitation of a variety of responses from students (e.g. experiential, cultural, feminist ...)	Use Cartwright's question frames (Appendix 2) to discuss art works Identify different interpretations in writing models from Barnett (1993, pp. 66-69)
Critical reading questions	Provide details of how to read a journal article	Homework

The session was offered as a generic class in critical thinking, although it attempted to integrate some discipline specific material. Ennis (1992) describes one of the most controversial issues as being: whether critical thinking should be taught separately (the generalist approach); be infused in instruction in existing subject matter where critical thinking processes are made explicit (the infusion approach); or result from a student's immersion in the subject matter where the critical thinking process is implicit (the immersion approach).

As all meaning is relational, and situated in historical and cultural contexts, McKenna (1999, p. 3) suggests using all three of Ellsworth's (1989) strategies: 1) infusing critical thinking into art classes, especially studio art programs, 2) conducting sessions in critical theory and thinking in seminars, and 3) offering generic classes on critical thinking. The strategies adopted may depend on the nature, structure, location and provision of Academic and Learning Skills services, and this is relevant to the development of critical thinking skills programs within Academic and Learning Skills contexts.

EVALUATION AND REFLECTION

The full VCA acculturation program was formally evaluated, with a detailed evaluation form for each session completed by students anonymously (since the program was voluntary). The data collected included demographics and qualitative and quantitative (a 5 point Likert) scale responses. All students in 1998 and 1999 thought the Critical Thinking session had been of value and individual comments included:

It was very helpful.

[Made my thought to be more solitudereflective].

To have a very clear way to [criticise] the arts.

[Progressing my imagination].

New ideas, new input.

I learned a lot.

A student commented that the most useful part of the session was: "How to analyse, describe, evaluate. I think it is a good idea and example if we learn how to describe etc. by the pictures".

Overall, students responded very positively to the content, teaching strategies, and materials including handouts. In total, 94% of students in 1998 and 1999 ranked "feeling more aware of critical thinking in the arts" at the highest end of the positive scale.

The most difficult aspect of presenting a generic program was finding a time when all students could attend. The very high number of contact hours in VCA courses led to the program being offered late in the afternoon which affected attendance because of student timetable clashes. However, the program was valuable for those who participated.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ACADEMIC AND LEARNING SKILLS CONTEXTS

Within the context of the visual and performing arts, critical thinking skills are important. Academic and Learning Skills Units, depending on the way they are situated within an institution - within a faculty, school or student support services - may use generic, infusion and/or immersion models. Regardless of the model, the role of Academic and Learning Skills advisers is:

- to encourage students to identify and express their responses to works;
- to make the various frameworks in the arts explicit to students;
- to identify that discourses in the various domains are not neutral and are genre specific;
- to make these domain-specific discourses transparent for students;
- and to provide models that exemplify how individual responses form a part of critical thinking in the visual and performing arts.

Methods of fulfilling this role within the many delivery methods (one-to-one, workshops, subject guest lectures, publications, on-line delivery) of Academic and Learning Skills Advisers might include:

- encouraging journal writing as a way of expressing and clarifying personal response;
- encouraging the reading of critical reviews of music, film, dance, drama, art and so on;
- directing students towards domain specific language, glossaries and dictionaries;
- arranging bridging lectures/tutorials;
- and providing question frameworks and opportunities that encourage critical thinking.

Academic and Learning Skills advisers, by abstracting and analysing discourses of the various domains, need to consider the following characteristics of critical thinking in the visual and performing arts:

- the various frameworks (experiential, aesthetic, historical, philosophical, cultural, intentional) that may inform individual response;
- that there is a relationship between the student, the work of art and the creator of the work;
- that the language of response may be both personal and/or drawn from the discourses of the various domains;
- that the experience and response of a student can have the status of 'an authority';
- that students are often grappling with verbalising a non-verbal experience;
- and that a response is 'an' experience.

Acknowledging these characteristics, and incorporating them within Academic and Learning Skills contexts will help students develop critical thinking skills, facilitate the process of moving from non-verbal to verbal discourse, and identify and express their individual responses. We need to acknowledge that "... many students

want to be artists ... because they take pleasure in intuitive and experiential forms of knowledge" (McKenna, 1999, p. 5).

ENDNOTES

¹ While Manns uses the term transmitter, we do not intend to imply a fixed transferable meaning on the part of the creator; meaning is negotiable.

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APPENDIX 1

More Detailed Questions to Ask about Drawings, Paintings, Photographs and Other Works of Art

Extracted from Barnett, S. (1993). *A Short Guide to Writing about Art* (4th ed.), NY: Harper Collins, pp. 31-68.

1. What is your first response to the work? Do you find the work puzzling, boring, interesting, pretty, ugly, tender, emotional etc?
2. Why do I have this response? That is, how did the artist manipulate the materials in order to produce the strong feelings that I experience?
3. When and where was the work made? Does it reveal the qualities that your text book attributes to the culture?
4. Where would the work have originally been seen? (A church, a palace, textbook, museum, cyberspace)
5. Who is the intended audience?
6. What purpose did the work serve? To stimulate devotion? To enhance family pride? To teach? To delight? Does the work express likeness, or express a feeling, or illustrate a mystery?
7. In what condition has the work survived? Is it exactly as it left the artist's hands, or has it been damaged, repaired, or in some way altered? What evidence of change do I see?
8. What is the title? Does it help to illuminate the work? Sometimes it is useful to ask yourself what would I call the work?
9. What is the subject matter? What is happening?
10. If the picture is a figure painting what is the relation of the gaze (viewer's and artist's) to the gaze of the figure?
11. Does a given artist present a strong sense of social class or a strong sense of an independent life? Is the view frontal, three-quarter or profile?
12. Is the figure related to the viewer by a glance, a gaze? What is the figure's pose?
13. Is motion suggested by the figure?
14. If a profile, is the figure decorative or psychological?
15. If the figure is a double portrait does the artist reveal the connection between the two figures?
16. Do the figures look at each other?
17. Does the portrait reveal the artist in any way?
18. Does the picture suggest opulence?
19. Does the picture imply transience (eg burnt out candle, perishable nature of objects of food, flowers)?
20. What is the symbolism of the images in the work?
21. What is the relation between human beings and nature? Are the figures at ease or are they dwarfed? Are they earthbound or do they stand out against the horizon?
22. What does the picture tell us about the society in which the art piece was created?
23. Does the piece emphasise the play of light?
24. Does the origin of the picture help to interpret it?
25. Are the contour lines (outline of shapes) strong and hard, isolating each object? Or are they irregular, indistinct and fuse together? What do these lines suggest (liveliness and vitality, or lines of uniform attention)?
26. What does the medium contribute?
27. Is colour imitative of appearance? (e.g. why would the flesh of Buddha be gold)?
28. What tempera is used if the work is a painting? Or is it done with oil paint?
29. What is the effect of light in the picture?
30. Do the objects share the space evenly, or does one overpower the other?
31. What is the focus of the composition?
32. Does the artist convey motion?
33. Does the artist convey depth? If so, how? If not, why not?
34. Does the picture suggest a series of planes?
35. What is the effect of size and shape of the work?
36. What is the scale of the work (ie the relative size)?
37. What is the dynamic interplay of colours, shapes, lines, textures?
38. What is the effect of carving or modelling?
39. What kind of volumes are we looking at? Geometric (eg triangular, spherical) or irregular?
40. Is the silhouette (outline) open or closed?
41. What does the art work say?

42. Are photographs of the pictorialist school or the reporters school?
43. Is the photograph manipulated (ie altered at the negative stage) or fabricated (ie a created effect)?
44. Does the photograph yield all that it has in a glance or does it take repeated viewings? Why?
45. What is the narrative that is being told?
46. Is the focus in a photograph expressive?
47. Is the choice of print size important?
48. What developing process was used?
49. How did the photographer achieve the effect?

APPENDIX 2

Some Question Frameworks of Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation and Critique

Extracted from Cartwright, P. (1999). Critical thinking. In *The ACU study guide* (2nd ed., pp. 117-118) Nth Sydney: Australian Catholic University.

Question Frames

Below are listed some example question frames in each of the question type categories. Question frames are questions with the concepts taken out of them. In place of the concepts are gaps for us to fill with the concepts we are immediately concerned with. In this way, question frames become general and very portable, allowing them to be applied in a variety of contexts. For example, our evaluation question above: *How helpful is this strategy?* looks like this in its general form - How helpful is ... anyway?

Summary and/or Definition Questions

what is (are).....?
who.....?
when.....?
how much.....?
how many.....?
what is an example of.....?

Analysis Questions

how.....?
why.....?
what are the reasons for.....?
what are the types of.....?
what are the functions of.....?
what is the process of.....?
what are other examples of.....?
what are the causes/results of.....?
what is the relationship between and.....?
how does.....apply to.....?
what is (are) the problems of conflicts or issues.....?
what is the main argument or thesis of.....?
how is this argument developed.....?
what evidence or proof or support is offered.....?
what are other theories/arguments from other authors.....?

Hypothesis Questions

if.....occurs, then what happens.....?
if.....had happened, then what would be different.....?
what does theory x predict will happen.....?

Evaluation Questions

is....good or bad.....?
.....correct or incorrect.....?
.....effective or ineffective.....?
.....relevant or irrelevant.....?
.....clear or unclear.....?
.....logical or illogical.....?
.....applicable or not applicable.....?
.....proven or not proven.....?
.....ethical or unethical.....?
what are the disadvantages or advantages of.....?
what are the pros or cons of.....?
what is the best solution to the problem/conflict issues.....?

what should or should not happen.....?
do I agree or disagree.....?
what is my opinion.....?
what is the support for my opinion.....?

Critique (critical evaluation) questions

how might your views on.....affect the way you respond to and interpret.....?
how is your response to.....affected by who you are.....?
where do you find yourself resisting.....and is this resistance necessary.....?
do you respond differently to.....from another person.....? why?
what do you know about the readers for whom.....was written?
where/when was.....published.....?
what words have been chosen in.....which may be an attempt to influence the reader.....?
who is the author of.....? what organisation do they derive from.....?
can you tell who the writer of.....is? (age, gender, race, nationality).
what do you know about the author's position on.....from what she or he has written.....?
can you tell what are the writer's views, beliefs, values on.....?
how many points of view are given on.....?
which of these points of view on..... are given the most support by the writer?
what points of view on..... are missing?
how does the context help to position the reader?
how do pictures, layout and spacing help the writer to position the reader?

It is important to stress that these questions should not simply be memorised. Instead, they should be learned gradually through application to your course work. These questions will help you to read texts critically, and you should be able to use them on any text. However, not all the questions will be equally useful for all texts.

Cultural hoops and linguistic hurdles: How are graduates recruited?

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Abstract

The English Language Study Skills Assistance (ELSSA) Centre at UTS is currently conducting a research project which investigates the recruitment processes used in the employment of new graduates in Engineering and Computing Science. The project seeks to provide a rich description of the cultural and linguistic aspects of recruitment and to provide a basis for the development of courses in the area of employment-related communication. The project uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

While this project focuses specifically on the recruitment process, it is anticipated that it will provide a basis for further research in the area of workplace communication, and curriculum development for employment-related courses.

There are three stages to the project: a questionnaire survey of current students, graduates and staff, followed by in-depth interviews of students, staff and employers and finally, analysis of written texts associated with employment selection. The project will give us a clearer picture of the range of procedures used to select graduates, and of the role of culture and language in this process. This paper reports on preliminary findings from surveys and interviews.

INTRODUCTION

This project grew out of our experience in teaching an undergraduate elective subject "Communication for Employment" to bilingual students at the English Language Study Skills Assistance (ELSSA) Centre at UTS. Students use this subject to assist with their applications for industrial training or employment in their field. Feedback from some of these students suggested that there were gaps in our knowledge about the actual recruitment experiences students were going through when seeking employment.

We were particularly interested in Engineering and Computing students - the former, because Engineering is seen as a more 'conservative' profession with more conventional recruitment processes and the latter, because we were interested in investigating how employers were adapting recruitment processes in a market where there are considerably more jobs than potential employees. In this paper we report on the first phase of a research project which looks at recruitment of engineering and computing university graduates, and the hurdles which job seekers have to jump in order to obtain work. The project investigates what these graduates and academic staff who work with them believe makes graduates successful in obtaining employment. This report is based on a survey of students and staff and student interviews. The second phase of the project will look at how the recruitment process of graduates is perceived by employers.

AIMS OF THE STUDY

The project has three main aims. Firstly, we want to know more about what happens in the graduate recruitment process; what do candidates have to do to get a job? Discussions with students in our courses has suggested that some candidates for employment are required to do more than simply submit a resume and be interviewed. We want to find out what else is involved.

Our second aim is to explore what 'good communication' means in the context of graduate recruitment. What does it mean to be 'a good communicator' or to have 'good communication skills'? What do graduates think it means? What does it mean to employers? How do employers assess 'communication'? If the notion of 'communication skills' can be made clearer then we can use this description to develop a framework for the development of communication - focussed courses for final year students. This is the third aim of our study.

From our three broad aims we derived a set of 11 specific questions to guide our research:

- 1 What processes are used to select new graduates for employment in the fields of Electrical Engineering and Computing Sciences
- 2 Who are the gatekeepers in the selection process?
- 3 What kinds of texts do candidates need to read and write in the selection process?
- 4 What kind of spoken interactions do candidates need to negotiate in the selection process?
- 5 With regard to these interactions, what makes a candidate successful or unsuccessful?
- 6 Are there any differences between candidates from English speaking and non- English speaking backgrounds in the selection process?
- 7 Is there any difference between public and private sector employees in the selection process?
- 8 At which stage in their studies do candidates begin to look for work?
- 9 How does UTS prepare its students for the employment selection process?
- 10 How might this preparation be improved?
- 11 How is cultural diversity seen by employers? As a problem or as a strength?

METHODOLOGY

In order to identify key issues and focus the study, we interviewed staff in the Engineering and Computing Science Faculties and in the Careers Services unit at UTS. We also surveyed the literature in three areas: organisational psychology/recruitment, sociolinguistics and communication.

On the basis of the issues identified in our preliminary interviews and in the literature, we designed two 20-item questionnaires, one for staff and one for students. These were trialled and the final version was sent to 1,000 students, graduates and 80 staff members in the two faculties.

Following the questionnaire survey we began a program of interviews with students, graduates, staff and employers. We intend to continue our interview program and to supplement it with observations of recruitment activities and analysis of recruitment texts, such as resumes, letters and interviews.

LITERATURE REVIEW

For employers, recruitment is a process of deciding what is required in a candidate and then using some kind of selection procedure to evaluate the suitability of potential employees. Although cultural and linguistic factors are influential at all stages in this process, the research literature in the area of recruitment does not examine their role. Attributes sought in graduates have been described (Caldwell & Burger, 1998), but these descriptions tend to itemise skills and areas of knowledge rather than addressing deeper issues of culture and language.

Research on selection procedures has had a similarly narrow focus; there have been studies evaluating the effectiveness of interviews, psychological tests, and the use of group selection procedures (Melamed, 1995; Darrah, 1994; Bhasin, 1997; Mencken & Winfield, 1998), but this work has not considered the cultural or linguistic background of candidates and selectors.

Studies of employment interviews have come closer to a consideration of cultural factors by examining speech styles (Peterson, 1992; De Bell, et al., 1998), and the ways in which interviewers and candidates interpret each other's interactions (Monacada & Saunders, 1999; Papadopoulou, Ineson & Williams, 1996; Graves, 1993), but this research focuses on individuals from a psychological rather than cultural or linguistic perspective. Interaction management strategies such as questioning techniques and the use of non-verbal signals have also been examined by theorists in the area of communication studies (Parton, 1996; Pascarella, 1996), but this work tends to regard communication as a process of using a set of defined skills to transmit messages between speaker and listener. The role of language and culture in mediating this process has been largely ignored. The work of Sarangi (1994) and Roberts, Davies and Jupp (1992) has been most relevant to the present study. It provides a unique and valuable insight into cultural miscommunication in employment interviews, but in both studies, the interview candidates were either non-graduate workers or experienced graduates entering the workforce as new migrants.

Our study is positioned at the intersection of three areas of research - communication theory, sociolinguistics and organisational psychology - and it draws on the insights provided by all three. Communication theory can provide a useful focus on the skills and processes operating in employment interviews; organisational psychology offers insights into the attitudes and behaviours of participants, from an individual perspective and sociolinguistics allows us to view the recruitment process from a sociocultural perspective; focussing on the participants as language users and members of cultural groups. Drawing on these three discourses, our study seeks to provide a richer description of the process of graduate recruitment. The results of this description will allow UTS to better assist its graduates, in particular multilingual and multicultural students, to gain employment.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

THE SURVEY

The sample

A total of 936 surveys were sent to students, 47% to undergraduate Engineering students, 26% to undergraduate Computing Science students, 13% to postgraduate Engineering students and 14% to postgraduate Computing Science students, and 80 to staff. Staff in the UTS Careers and Appointment Service were also surveyed. A total of 186 student surveys (nearly 20%) and 36 staff surveys (45%) were returned.

Engineering Surveys were grouped by areas of specialisation, i.e. electrical engineering, computer engineering and telecommunication engineering, to see if there were differences between these groups. We also wanted to see if there were differences in responses between engineering and computing students as a whole, between engineering and computing staff and between undergraduate and postgraduate students. In addition, we analysed the data to see if factors such as gender and English/non-English speaking backgrounds significantly affect the results.

There was no significant difference within and between any of the student groups and there were only minor differences within and between the responses provided by staff from both faculties. Despite the fact that over a third of Computing respondents and 12% of Engineering respondents were female, and that over 41% of all student respondents were NESB, there was no evidence that the factors 'gender and language background' affected the results significantly. In other words, there was no evidence that female students responded differently from male students and that English speaking background students responded differently from students who indicated that English was not their first language.

Consequently, we have amalgamated the responses into faculty groups and we report the findings of the survey as the 'staff survey' and the 'student survey'.

Profiles of respondents

The first section of the survey covered linguistic, academic and personal backgrounds. Students were also asked about their experience in finding employment, including current and past positions held, and about when, during their degree, they started to look for work. We also asked a series of questions about the types of recruitment processes (CV, interviews, psychological tests, obtaining employment through personal contacts and so on) which students and staff were familiar with and/or had experienced.

Two thirds of the *staff* respondents were in the 45-60 age group and nearly three quarter were male. Most of the respondents were at lecturer/senior lecturer level. Over a quarter of staff respondents held positions with direct responsibilities for assisting students in gaining employment or placements in work experience programs.

Three quarters of the *students* were between 21 and 28 years old and most (78%) were males. Nearly half the students were full-time and two thirds were in the final semesters of their studies. The vast majority (80%) reported doing well in their studies, with a credit to distinction average. Nearly half of the students said that English was not their first language and nearly two thirds spoke a language other than English. Few (14%) had sought assistance from the English Language Study Skills Assistance (ELSSA Centre) during their study. Most of the respondents (80%) were employed at the time of the survey. Interestingly, over three quarter of the students indicated that they had begun planning for their employment (discussing it with friends, lecturers,

university staff, choosing particular subjects, thinking about where they might work) early in their studies: within the first 2 (for full-time students) or 4 (for part-time students) semesters.

Knowledge of and experience with recruitment processes

In this section we surveyed respondents' experience with different types of recruitment processes (CV, interviews, psychological tests, obtaining employment through personal contacts, social activities and so on). For staff we differentiated between experiences as candidates, as members of recruitment selection committees and as advisers to students.

Most *staff* indicated that they had experienced the more conventional employment processes such as CVs, job application letters, interviews, and so on, as applicants or as members of selection committees. However, only a small number of staff had experienced selection procedures such as psychological tests, group interviews, attending social events organised by employers (see Table 1). This could be attributed to the fact that recruitment processes used by universities rarely rely on these kinds of recruitment strategies. The exception was the staff from 'Careers Services' who were all familiar with all recruitment strategies and who all had assisted students in preparing for less conventional recruitment strategies.

Almost all the *students* (97%) who were employed in their field had experienced the more conventional recruitment processes (CVs, interview, application letters/forms). Half of them had also attended more than one interview for the same job and nearly half had completed psychological tests, attended social events organised by employers and had relied on recommendations by a contact person within a company. About a quarter had also participated in group activities and made an oral presentation to an employer.

About two thirds of the faculty staff indicated that they had helped students with written elements of the recruitment process (CV, application letter)¹, but fewer staff members had helped students with oral aspects of the recruitment process (interviews, group activities, spoken presentation, etc.). Less than half said they had helped students prepare for an interview, and only very few staff had helped students prepare to participate in group activities or social events as part of the selection process. It is also interesting to note that, while a third of staff indicated that they have helped students getting work through a 'personal recommendation', few students surveyed admitted using such a recommendation to get a job.

Table 1. Knowledge of and experience with recruitment processes.

activities associated with the selection of new employees	% of staff* familiar** with process (n=36)	% of staff* who have helped students prepare for this (n=36)	% of students who have done this in their field (n=186)
1 submit an application form	72	30	75
2 send in a resume/CV	78	63	97
3 write an application letter	70	63	87
4 attend an interview	75	43	96
5 attend more than 1 interview for the same job	77	17	50
6 complete a psychological test	17	7	42
7 participate in group activities (games, problem solving)	8	10	25
8 make a spoken presentation to employer	30	17	18
9 attend social events (drinks, retreat, seminars)	17	13	41
10 rely on contact's recommendation	32	37	40
11 use personal recommendation	20	33	19

* these figures do not include the staff from 'Careers Services' who all indicated they were familiar with all recruitment processes AND had helped students in all areas.

** prepared/undertaken as a candidate and/or experienced as a member of a recruitment selection committee

Factors affecting the recruitment process

In this section we asked students to rate 18 factors affecting successful employment (Table 2) (University results, performance at interview, personality, gender, and so on) in terms of i) how they got their current job (column A); ii) what might have affected their unsuccessful applications (column B); and iii) what they thought was important in the job search process in general (column C). We asked staff to rate the same 18 factors in terms of what determines success when student candidates seek employment (column D).

The results are reported here in order of importance.² While the average ratings vary between columns A-D, overall the 5 most important factors in determining success in getting a job were the performance at an interview, spoken communication skills, prior work experience in the field, technical knowledge and the quality of the written application.

The five least important factors influencing success were the candidates' first language, their age, social/cultural background, ethnic/racial background and, last, their gender. As most of the respondents of the survey were of English speaking background (nearly 60%) and male (nearly 80%), we compared the surveys returned by NESB students with those of ESB, and those returned by women with those returned by men. NESB students rated factors such as first language, personality, spoken and written communication skills, socio/cultural and ethnic/racial background slightly higher than ESB students. Women did not rate 'prior work experience in the field' as an important reason (2.7) for not getting a job and thought that personality was more important than men. Overall however, there were no significant differences between male and female and between NESB and ESB respondents: the rank order of factors was identical for all groups.

On the positive side, the most significant factors in gaining employment were a combination of good spoken skills, as well as appearance and personality and technical knowledge, including prior work experience in the field. These factors were judged more important than written skills and university results. Factors such as candidates' social, racial, language backgrounds, their gender and their age were not perceived to be important. This was the most unexpected finding of the survey, especially in light of Engineering and Computing being traditionally male-dominated professions.

Table 2. Factors which are important for successful employment.

factor	how students got their current job		why students thought they were unsuccessful		students' view on job search process in general		staff views on job search process	
	A mean	rank	B mean	rank	C mean	rank	D mean	rank
1 Performance at an interview	4.4	1	4.0	1	4.5	1	4.7	1
2 Spoken communication skills	4.3	2	3.2	4	4.4	2	4.7	1
3 Prior work experience in the field	4.2	3	3.8	2	4.4	2	4.3	3
4 Technical knowledge	3.9	6	3.5	3	4.1	3	4.4	2
5 Quality of written application	3.8	6	3.0	5	4.1	3	4.4	2
6 Appearance & presentation	4.1	4	2.9	7	4.1	3	4.1	5
7 Personality	4.0	5	3.0	6	3.8	4	4.2	4
8 Written communication skills	3.8	7	2.8	8	4.1	3	4.4	2
9 University course/exam results	3.4		2.9		3.7		4.2	
10 Prior work experience in any field	3.6		3.1		3.5		3.8	
11 Advice from professionals who know the field	2.8		2.4		3.2		3.6	
12 Knowledge about the job search process	3.1		2.7		3.2		3.5	
13 Contacts in the employing organisation	2.8		2.6		3.0		3.2	

14 First language	2.8	16	2.2	16	2.7	15	3.1	14
15 Age	2.3	17	2.2	16	2.4	16	2.9	15
16 Social/cultural background	2.3	17	2.1	17	2.2	17	2.5	16
17 Ethnic/racial background	1.9	18	1.9	18	1.9	18	2.3	17
18 Gender	1.9	18	1.9	18	1.9	18	1.9	18

Overall, our survey results are notable in two respects. Firstly, they confirm the commonly held view that performance at interview, together with experience and knowledge in the work area, has a significant influence on candidates' success. Following this confirmation, we have used our interviews to further clarify the meaning of 'good interview performance' and to discover what kinds of work experience are most valued by employers.

The second interesting finding of our survey is the fact that gender and cultural background were not listed as significant influences on success in recruitment. This result contradicts common perceptions about the importance of gender and language background and is at variance with some of the research in this area (Kacmar & Hochwater, 1995; Silvester, 1996). We will explore these results in particular during interviews in order to gain a richer understanding of the role of language and gender in employee selection.

INTERVIEWS

At this stage in the project we have interviewed a small sample of final year students and graduates as well as staff involved in industrial placement and graduate careers advising. The students interviewed were all working or seeking work in the Information Technology (IT) area. The semi-structured interviews take approximately 30 minutes, with some participants interviewed in pairs. The data from these interviews is preliminary. Some themes are emerging from our interview data, and we will use these to focus our inquiry as the project continues. Some of the information we have gained so far is presented below, arranged according to our research questions.

1 What processes are used to select new graduates for employment in the fields of Electrical Engineering and Computing Science?

There is a significant shortage of staff in the IT area and employers are keen to hire and keep competent staff. Industrial experience is a major part of both Engineering and Computing Science degrees and is used by both students and employers as a form of recruitment. As one student commented:

They said you can do six months of work experience but we would prefer for you to come back because its worth that to us. (UET 085)

Finding an industrial placement was similar to finding a graduate position, a competitive process involving resumes, interviews and networking. In this process most of our interviewees had had some form of assistance from a friend, contact or lecturer. For example:

I missed out on finding work experience in the second round, so my lecturer sent my resume to the company and they contacted me. (UEE 10)

I bumped into my former manager at a party and told him I was looking for something and got an interview that way. (UET 90)

and the person who interviewed me was the director of the business ... and we just got along really well ... Initially, for that particular opening they gave the job to someone else but about two months down the track there was another opening and then rather than her going through the process of finding another person she just rang me up. (UEC 117)

I knew the director of X. She went to Y and then she asked me to come across. I guess I didn't really have to do much. I went for an interview. (UEC 117)

Only one of our interviewees had found work in the conventional way, i.e. by replying to a job advertisement:

I saw this ad' ... they wanted someone with 3 to 5 years experience ... the list just went on I was kinda desperate and I thought ah what the heck ... I'll put in my resume I'll send it in anyway what's the worst that can happen ... they're just gonna say 'no' ... but ... funnily enough ... they actually, I don't know maybe they liked the resume or something ... not sure but ... they gave me an an interview ...

Selection procedures are being expanded beyond interviews and resumes to include personal recommendations, work experience and in a few cases, written tests of computing skills. Procedures such as seminars, social events and psychological tests were also mentioned by interviewees:

I applied to go to a leadership conference run by the company. They said we weren't being selected but at the end I got an interview. (UC 151)

2 Who are the gatekeepers in the selection process?

Gatekeeping occurred at two points in the selection process. The first point was the informal networking contact. Friends, family, previous employers, even high school work experience contacts, provided applicants with a way into the organisation:

My sister knew some people who worked in an engineering firm. She said I should give them a call. (UET 085)

One interviewee acknowledged the importance of knowing the right people:

If you go through official channels you can often get knocked back for jobs that you would probably get if you knew who to talk to ... maybe a manager in a company who's actually looking for a certain type of person but who hasn't actually communicated that internally to the company. (UET 085)

Another student who had used a network contact saw this as a *good break and ... a lucky break* (UEC 117) rather than a conscious employment-seeking strategy. The second group of gatekeepers was the people who handled resumes and interviews. These were usually Human Resources (HR) managers in agencies or in company HR sections, or the managers and team leaders in workplaces. Interviewees were aware of the need to make a favourable impression on these people, particularly in the area of attitude and personality:

There are two focuses (in interviews): one where you go to an agency and they test you for the skills the company wants ... and the other when you just get on with the manager, another person who you are going to work with and perhaps another person within the department ... (UC175)

3 What kinds of texts do candidates need to read and write in the selection process?

All of the interviewees submitted resumes. Two had supplemented these with portfolios of university work:

put a package together of some of the work you've done maybe read some words, look at some schematics or something you've drawn ... they like to see that you've got some pride in some work that you've done. (UEE 2)

The one student who had used an employment agency had been given a simple computing skills test:

not a psych test, but whether you know how to use Excel, Word ... they give you a piece of paper telling you what to do ...

One student had been tested on his knowledge of computer language. In an effort (successful) to obtain industrial experience another interviewee had written

e-mails, letters, a resume ... a bit of everything ... I took it upon myself to contact them ... (UET 085)

4 What kind of spoken interactions do candidates need to negotiate in the selection process?

The most important spoken interaction was the employment interview, but there was variation in the way these interviews were conducted. Some candidates were interviewed by a panel of people, others by a single manager. Most had only one interview with the employer. The student who used an agency had an interview with the

agency and another with the employer. Interviews usually included predictable questions about experience, university results, work skills, knowledge of the organisation and personal qualities, but for two candidates the interviews offered surprises:

The said to me "Tell us the R M story" I freaked out. (UEE 2)

I was given hypothetical moral dilemmas "if you were asked to lie to a customer how would you respond?" (UET 90)

The tone of interviews was often informal:

It was a very sort of casual sort of interview; it was partly like a 'get to know you' sort of interview as well; I think a lot of interviews are like that these days ... (UEC 117)

As well as interviews, the other spoken interactions which candidates had to negotiate included phone conversations, social events and recruitment information sessions at the university. One large organisation is currently using 40 minute phone interviews to rate candidates against a set of competency descriptors. (E1)

5 With regard to these interactions what makes a candidate successful or unsuccessful?

resumes and letters

UTS staff commented that many students produced resumes which were ineffective because of inappropriate 'conversational' language or because students did not match them with the requirements for the job. This comment was echoed by students who also recognised the importance of resumes and of crafting them to suit the job sought:

I highlighted parts of my uni results that could have been relevant. I definitely wrote a covering letter specifically for that job. If I could have I'd have crafted the resume even more ... (UEC 103)

Your resume ... don't just have one ... every time you look for a job rewrite your resume ... they can see that you've put some effort into it. (UEC 103)

For students, however, the best resumes were those which were distinctive:

I think the key is trying to make it stand out a bit ... Trying to preempt what other people might have on their resume ... just so it stands out. (UEE 117)

the importance of having someone look at it and not put it down. You need to spruce up the resume in some way. (UEC 085)

A comment by one student suggested that the impact of new technologies may change the way resumes and letters are written:

They just scan the CVs into a computer ... the covering letter is separate. When they want particular skills they just punch in the requirements. (UC 175)

interviews

They judge you from your resume ... When you break that barrier and get an interview that's when they judge your interpersonal skills. (UEC 117)

For all interviewees the selection interview was the most significant part of recruitment, but there were differences in what was seen as most important for success. Industrial placement staff saw body language as an important aspect of interview success:

they mustn't look nervous ... the ones who haven't got jobs are shy and quiet and less assertive at interviews. (S4)

Having a relaxed demeanour was also valued by students:

I'm a pretty casual sort of person, not an uptight sort of person so I think that appealed... (UEC 117)

For some it was seen as a game in which the correct strategy is to say 'the right thing':

Usually they ask you what's the thing you do best, what's the thing your worst at ... for the best thing, something you do on the job and for the worst I mention something completely unrelated to the job ... my friend he actually said 'communication' ... that was very bad ... my friend he had much better grades than I had ... I got the job. (UEE 10)

Look like you care about the place. (UEC 103)

For others it was an assessment of interpersonal skills:

(They wanted) ... an ability to get along with ... whoever was interviewing me ... whether there was some sort of social sort of level there, not only in a business communication sense but in a social sense so that you would be relaxed and comfortable with the person you were talking to ... is there a person there that ... will get on with other people ... (UEE 10)

With the job there's a lot of customer interaction and you know I mean I like talking and I doing that so I think she sort of realised that when she realised that I'll be comfortable talking to clients I mean you know you can't just have somebody who's technically minded and not being able to deal with people.

Show enthusiasm but don't go overboard. (UEC 103)

One student pointed to the interview as a means of informing as well as assessing the candidate:

It gives you an introduction to the culture of the organisation ... I was asked questions about working late hours ... I was given hypothetical moral dilemmas.

6 Is there any difference between candidates from English speaking and non-English speaking backgrounds in the selection process?

The interview data so far does not show any significant differences in this area. Both ESB and NESB were working in areas with high customer contact, and also in research. One NESB student had difficulty getting an interview because of poor results on his resume, but succeeded at getting the job:

I got the job after the interview. During the interview, she was like judging my communication skills. (UEE 10)

7 Is there any difference between public and private sector employees in the selection process?

Only one interviewee was working in a public sector organisation. Like students working in the private sector, he had used a longstanding contact to get employment there. Our interviews have not revealed any significant differences between public and private sector recruiters, but further interviews with employers will probably indicate some differences since the cultures of these organisations are perceived to be different. One interviewee referred to these differences:

In my company (private) they are looking for younger people, most under 30, the manager is about 35 ... but in (government organisations) most people are over 40 to 50 and the manager is 60. (UET 90)

8 How does UTS prepare its students for the employment selection process?

We asked interviewees to comment on the usefulness of their university experience in preparing them for recruitment. Most of them commented on the relevance of their study to work after recruitment, but few referred specifically to the recruitment process. The comments that were made focussed on the university as a source of contacts and on the high reputation of UTS among employers:

UTS has a good reputation. Before my interview they said they should be getting more UTS graduates ... so when I said I was about to graduate from UTS, I was really lucky. (UEE 10)

I think it's fantastic the number of jobs offered through the university ... Most of the people I talk to who are employed or doing cadetships and things ... a lot of them got it through the university or from people they knew who were at the university. (UET 90)

One student had used one of his university subjects in an interview to good effect:

One subject ... which teaches you about communication and how people relate to computers ... during my interview I just recited everything I learned in this subject and I got a pretty good response. (UEE10).

9 How might this preparation be improved?

Improvements which were suggested included preparation for interviews:

interview skills; a 1:1 approach; they point out what you did wrong, your posture, bit too nervous, speak too soft, don't know how to express yourself. (UEE 10)

As well as resume and letter writing classes:

It is a good thing to learn formal ways of writing a letter, a resume, a covering letter. It would be useful, ... particularly since industrial experience is part of the course. (UC175)

10 How is cultural diversity seen by employers? As a problem or as a strength?

Interviewees were asked to comment on the culture of the organisations in which they worked and on the idea that interviewers might be looking for employees who fit into the workplace culture. Interviews so far have not provided much insight into this question. While several of the interviewees worked with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, only one of them described his workplace as 'multicultural'.

Two interviewees mentioned conflicts and differences between people in their workplaces, but these were seen to be the result of individuals' personalities rather than of cultural differences. One student who had worked in a family company in Malaysia commented on how useful his cultural knowledge had been:

It was good experience, dealing with the people, the language barrier, the mindset ...

However, for some of the UTS staff involved in industrial placements, cultural differences seemed like more of a barrier:

Some employees are still resistant to taking students with weird sounding names. I shouldn't say change your name, but it helps ... but there was some saving grace. Once a company has experience with a good student they forget about their prejudice. (S2)

ONGOING RESEARCH

At this stage we have only begun to explore graduate recruitment. During the second stage of our research we will further explore areas indicated by our survey data, namely networking, interview performance, communication skills and the influences of language and gender. We will also investigate the use of new techniques such as online resume submission, online aptitude testing and telephone interviews. Our interviews with graduates and employers will give us opportunities to see graduate recruitment through the eyes of those outside the university. We hope that the knowledge gained in this project will help to demystify the recruitment process and allow us to make more informed decisions about how we can help graduates of all kinds negotiate their way through it.

ENDNOTES

¹ The exception is the little assistance students received from staff in submitting an application form. We felt this to be normal, as it would be surprising to find that students in their second or final year at university would need assistance in completing a form.

² The 18 factors were listed in a different order on the questionnaires.

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Assisting the transition to tertiary study: An academic literacy project in the first year of the Bachelor of Education

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Abstract

It is becoming increasingly difficult to separate the notion of generic skills from those that are discipline-specific. The development of a new set of generic attributes that all Australian universities expect of their graduates complicates this problem. This paper discusses the development of an academic literacy project in the first year of the Bachelor of Education at the University of New England. This project was designed to firmly embed generic skills within a discipline-specific context; at the same time it provided an opportunity to investigate how these new generic attributes can contribute to teaching. The results of the project indicate that they may provide a fertile medium for the future development of academic literacy programs.

INTRODUCTION

The traditional separation of generic learning from discipline-specific learning is becoming increasingly problematic, particularly in the light of current research into the many types of literacy. In the realm of critical literacy, for example, Lankshear (1994) identifies a formidable array of variants, and Reid (1997) explores the paradoxical notion of literacy as 'generic practice'. More recently, however, to further compound these difficulties, Australian universities have been developing another set of 'valued generic skills' or 'attributes' which all graduates must acquire. This national move is understandably creating new issues in the debate concerning what constitutes generic skills and how they can be incorporated into the disciplines, and whose responsibility it is to do so. This paper describes the evolution of an academic literacy project in the Bachelor of Education, and it explores how this project has provided a fruitful theoretical and practical response to these new issues.

At the University of New England, 'The Attributes of a UNE Graduate' policy defines these new 'valued generic skills' thus: communication skills; global perspective; information literacy; lifelong learning; problem solving; social responsibility; and teamwork. These attributes are interrelated, and are grounded in the philosophy that graduates will make a substantial contribution to society. In this context, the first of these attributes, communication skills, is of prime importance to the Faculty of Education. Communication skills underpin all aspects of teaching and learning. Teachers must acquire a high standard of these skills in order to function with competence and credibility within the school setting, and also within the wider community. Teachers must also be able to communicate these skills effectively to their students: they must model them, and they must be able to teach them.

In order to ensure that students in the new Bachelor of Education acquire a competent understanding of these skills, the first-year teaching staff initiated a project designed to address literacy at three levels. Firstly, the project aimed to provide all incoming students with a clear illustration of what is required of their literacy at university. Secondly, it aimed to identify the skill levels of new students and to provide focussed instruction for those students whose performance was below an acceptable standard. Thirdly, it aimed to provide teaching staff with a repertoire of teaching practices to help students quickly gain mastery of tertiary literacy.

Although it is easy to label students as 'at risk', it is perhaps more helpful to label the course as 'high-risk', because of its newness (with inherent problems yet to be fully diagnosed), and because of its acceptance of students through the Schools Recommendation Admission Scheme (which admits students regardless of their place in the HSC tertiary ranking system). From this perspective, it is clearly the responsibility of staff to help students rather than lament their deficiencies. As a representative of the Academic Skills Office, I was invited to provide assistance to students through organising an appropriate diagnostic task that would assess students' literacy levels. Using information from this assessment, I was then asked to deliver a sequence of five workshops

that would integrate literacy tuition into preparation for forthcoming assignments. The workshops were supplemented with voluntary individual consultations for students who needed a more intensive level of academic support.

THE PROJECT

A Literacy Assessment Task (an in-class essay on a prepared topic) was given to students in the second week of the semester. They were required to read three articles that discussed concepts of good teaching. The articles, which anticipated much of the teaching material in first semester courses, covered different approaches to the study of education, and represented three styles of academic discourse within the discipline: a personal anecdotal reflection (Feynman, 1988); an article concerning constructivist learning and the reflective practice of teaching (Henderson, 1992); and a review of behavioural management theories from an educational psychology text (McInerney & McInerney, 1998). Staff also distributed instructions concerning documentation of secondary sources, and a marking sheet of criteria which covered most aspects of academic discourse. The criteria encompassed the intermeshing dimensions of literacy. For the purpose of this project, these were defined as 'operational' (competency in the language system), 'cultural' and 'critical' (Green, 1988, p. 160). During a lecture period in the following week, students were asked to write between 500 and 1000 words outlining their own view of teaching and learning, justified with reference to the three texts.

After marking the essays, the first-year team lecturers identified up to ten students from each of their tutorial groups who were deemed to be in need of academic support. These students were placed in six groups and were sent letters from the course coordinator asking them to attend a sequence of five weekly workshops. Approximately half of the referred students attended on a regular basis. An interesting feature of this project was that a number of students who had not been referred, including some high achievers, asked for permission to attend, and their presence was very beneficial. It was helpful for the at-risk students to see that the high achievers were still grappling with some basic aspects of operational literacy. The mixed composition of the workshops emphasised the supplementary rather than the remedial nature of the instruction.

The workshops were based on a core of generic academic skills (planning, question analysis, critical thinking, argument construction and referencing), and basic writing skills (paragraphing, punctuation and sentence structure). In all the workshops, I adapted most of the teaching material to the content of the discipline in order to establish context and relevance. This also encouraged awareness of the differences in language and methodology in four major teaching areas in their course (English, Educational Psychology, Science and Art), as well as directly addressing the requirements of actual assignments in these subjects. Above all this, however, each workshop incorporated discussion of what constitutes literacy and how it was manifested in the workshop material.

Although the incorporation of generic skills into course content was an important factor contributing to the success of this project, there were other specific aims and attitudes which may have been even more significant. Writing was presented as a process of clarifying thinking, rather than as a final product (Nightingale, 1986). From the outset, I presented assignment writing as a two-way communication between student and lecturer, and this provided the opportunity for discussions concerning the obligations and requirements of successful communication. At the same time, I emphasised that, as members of the university, students were important members of the community of scholars (Goodman, 1964). Their role was not simply to absorb information from their lecturers, but also to help create new perspectives and knowledge through the interaction of their own learning and experiences with that of their teachers. This meant that they should regard assignment writing as a serious and meaningful activity, and one which demands the highest standards of communication skills.

In order to demonstrate this in practice, I incorporated an exercise into each workshop which was designed to raise students' awareness of the consequences of the lack of these skills. These exercises consisted of varied examples of poor writing, and students were challenged to identify the numerous shortcomings and errors within each sample, and to reflect on the effects that lack of clarity created in them as readers. Their responses as readers ranged from irritation to anger, and all readily acknowledged that the worst consequence of poor communication skills was loss of the writer's credibility. Thus students not only realised the importance of competent communication skills from a new perspective, but also developed confidence and self-esteem as they were encouraged to take on the role of assessor.

The workshops were based on the following sequence of activities:

Week 1: Overview of Academic Skills

This session introduced the concept of academic literacy as a type of cultural and critical literacy relatively distinct from basic writing skills. Students were explicitly treated as already literate persons learning a new literacy (Fox, 1999, pp. 24-26). They were also encouraged to see literacy in its fullest sense as 'the use of written language for thinking and meaning' (Green, 1988, p. 158). This was then exemplified through strategies to help students prepare for an English assignment. A generic diagram of essay construction and models of plans relating to the topic were discussed. This was followed by instruction in paragraphing, showing the strong relationship between the construction of a paragraph and an essay. The class jointly contributed to the writing of a paragraph (which modelled process as well as form), and then assessed two paragraphs demonstrating good and bad practice. Finally, referencing was introduced through a discussion of models: three types of in-text references embedded in paragraphs on the topic of the English assignment, and a reference list using selected texts and journal articles from the course.

Week 2: Preparation for the Science Assignment

A model plan of a science report was analysed, followed by a focussed discussion of the differences in academic conventions between the writing styles in the Sciences and the Humanities. This was an exercise leading to the concept of academic enculturation: in order to be successful writers, students must become learners of culture, not just content (Nevile, 1996, p. 48). This was followed by a referencing exercise using cover pages from a variety of scientific journal articles. Students were then asked to proofread a paragraph of academic writing containing common errors in spelling, punctuation, documentation, syntax and word choice. To reinforce the previous week's work on logical structure, students were again asked to evaluate two paragraphs, this time adapted to the content area and style of a science assignment.

Week 3: Development of a Specific Writing Skill

The session began with an explanation of the tools of operational literacy and its importance in establishing credibility: as student writers and as professional teachers. An explanation of the apostrophe and its uses in academic writing was then given as an example, and followed by a series of graded exercises devised from material taken from relevant subject areas. Because students were already finding their feet in the higher-order literacies of the previous workshops, they regarded this aspect of literacy as a useful tool of refinement, rather than as a basic remedial exercise. The workshop concluded with another exercise in paragraph evaluation, requiring discrimination at a higher level.

Week 4: Preparation for the Art Assignment (Critical Analysis of a Visual Image)

Students were given a worksheet outlining the tools and language of art criticism at tertiary level. This provided another means of discussing cultural and critical literacy. These were then applied to two visual images. Students were asked for their reflections on the images, and then required to place them in an ordered sequence following the guidelines on the worksheet. Finally, students were given copies of a successful and an unsuccessful visual analysis and asked to point out the weaknesses and strengths. (The poor analysis contained errors in structure, register, vocabulary and writing style.)

Week 5: Student as Marker

This final session was designed to further encourage students to become critics of their own work through identifying the flaws in the work of others. They were given a copy of an essay on picturebooks, a deceptively simple topic which has the potential to reveal how skilled critical analysis can greatly enrich the understanding of any subject. The essay contained errors which revised all the skills of the previous workshops, and included a number of central concepts needed in future essays. The errors encompassed writing skills, structure, relevance, and a blatant example of plagiarism. This was accompanied by a marking criteria sheet, based on those used by the Faculty to assess students' work. Students were asked to read the essay and mark it according to each of these criteria, award it a grade, and write comments. They were now the lecturers, having crossed the boundary from student to professional. Despite the fact that most students missed a significant number of individual errors, their evaluations using the marking criteria, their grades and their general comments, were remarkably similar and accurate.

EVALUATION

Because of the brevity of this trial and the speed with which it was implemented, it was difficult to obtain meaningful evaluation. Furthermore, there remains the problem of determining what it is that we are actually evaluating: is success a matter of improved grades, or is it 'to be looked for in changed attitudes, in which case, are we concerned with increasing the confidence of low-achieving learners, or with converting high-achieving surface learners into high-achieving deep learners' (Garner & Edwards, 1994, p. 286). In fact, the project appeared to be successful in terms of all these criteria. Students began the workshops with some trepidation, but quickly became responsive and enthusiastic learners. This enthusiasm was directed not only towards the rapid acquisition of academic literacy, but also towards the value of learning itself. All those who were identified as at-risk and who attended all or most of the workshops passed the first formal assignment of the course, and by the end of the project many were gaining credits, some moving into the distinction and high distinction grades. It was surprising and extremely rewarding to note that some students who had been identified as particularly 'weak' were quickly making sophisticated and insightful comments in classes, and making huge leaps in the development of their writing skills in their formal assignments.

A preliminary evaluation survey and personal conversations with students and the lecturers who taught them revealed that students perceived the strengths of the workshops in two ways: firstly, the workshops functioned as a forum where difficulties with all types of literacy could be discussed without judgement; secondly, the incorporation of literacy skills into focussed preparation for forthcoming assignments provided a relatively seamless transition to tertiary literacy. Comments from students ranged from 'accessible, approachable and comprehensible' to 'more, more, more'. Seventy-five per cent of the 143 students who responded to the evaluation survey considered that the Literacy Assessment Task had assessed their literacy 'well' or 'very well'. The section of the survey intended for those who had attended the workshops revealed a very significant rate of client satisfaction, with 40/44 students responding that the workshops had facilitated their understanding of academic literacy 'well' or 'very well'. This academically weakest group of students (those specifically referred through the Literacy Assessment Task) has produced only 3 of the 15 students who failed the course.

In retrospect, perhaps the greatest problem with the project was that despite our best efforts, it was discoloured by association with remedial literacy. This was unfortunately established very early in the title of the Literacy Assessment Task, and later reinforced unthinkingly by staff members when referring students for 'extra help with literacy'. In later interviews with students who had been referred but chose not to attend, it emerged that the stigma attached to literacy was a significant barrier. Although from our point of view the Literacy Assessment Task was meant to be merely predictive in nature, students initially interpreted it as punitive. This serves as a good illustration of the fact that projects such as these remain focussed on (and limited by) 'fix the problem' models, even though those who work within them do not necessarily teach in this way (Baldauf, 1997, p. 4). Consciously focussing on graduate attributes rather than on literacy could perhaps help to remove this stigma.

The early and significant success of this program appears to confirm that failure to achieve at tertiary level is strongly linked to a lack of awareness of the specific requirements of academic literacy. This lack of awareness is far more inhibiting than lack of knowledge: 'the most significant problems are concerned less with the formal mechanics of writing and more with the construction of meaning within the demands of particular disciplines' (Neville, 1996, p. 43). The workshops aimed to increase this awareness through critical reflection upon literacy at the same time as they explicitly taught a range of skills. The relatively simple act of giving students direct and clear instruction in academic skills in a discipline-specific context (rather than expecting them to absorb the information through a self-directed initiation rite) was of immediate benefit to the students who regularly attended the program. Those who began the workshops with low levels of competence at the operational level of literacy improved very rapidly with little formal instruction. It seemed that just being in a class which focussed on higher-order literacies in a discipline-specific context enabled them to gain a degree of competence in the lower-order skills. This was evident in the final workshop when students were asked to mark an actual essay. Each student read aloud the comments and final mark he or she awarded the essay. From this it was evident that students were already comfortable in using language from the 'critical' and 'cultural' vocabularies of their course, as well as spotting the majority of errors at the 'operational' level. The success of this exercise exemplifies Bartolomae's (1988) assertion that students must participate in the discourse of higher education before they have the skills to do so; they must 'try on the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding and arguing that define the discourse of our community' (p. 273). Essentially, students learnt that their own academic writing should be a strong bridge of communication between one mind and another, and not (as is commonly believed) a weak connection from an inferior to a superior intelligence. Thus,

on the one hand students learnt respect for their own contribution to the academic community, and on the other they learnt that clarity and organisation are pragmatic and ethical requirements of communication in both academic and professional settings. The general responses of these students at the end of this stage of the project revealed both a desire for excellence in their future work and a commitment to lifelong learning.

As you can predict from the terminology I have been using during my own assessment of this project, I became increasingly aware of how substantially the generic attributes were already involved in my teaching. Even if invoked unconsciously, they provided a rationale for students which helped give a wider context to their learning. The exercises that involved paragraph and essay evaluation focussed on communication skills; of course, there is nothing new in this, but here they were presented as an ethos (not just as a descriptive term for a set of skills). Clear communication is an obligation which is connected to the attribute of social responsibility, as can be very clearly seen in teachers' professional lives. Each of the workshops incorporated exercises which taught literacy through problem solving, rather than through the transmission of a set of skills. Citation was presented as a branch of information literacy, but also, and more importantly, as a communication skill, imparting essential information to the reader. Through the obligation to acknowledge intellectual ownership, there is also a dimension of social responsibility. This gave students an understanding of the logic which informs the referencing system, so that they could not regard it as an arbitrary set of conventions or just another academic skill. The explicit teaching of text-types (formal essay, critical reflection and scientific literature review) led to a discussion of cultural literacy and of how subcultures within disciplines can be compared to regional variations in ethnic cultures. Although an understanding of text-types is accepted as being of central importance to the teaching of international students, McLoughlin (1995) argues that an understanding of text-structures should be taught to all university students as it leads to a high degree of both cultural and critical literacy. It is also a potential means of contextualising these literacies within a global perspective.

The teaching of these literacies is an issue of social responsibility:

One always has the ethical obligation to try to explicate (render overt and conscious) any social practice that there is reason to believe advantages oneself or one's group over other people or other groups. (Gee, 1993, p. 293)

The teaching of academic literacy itself satisfies this ethical obligation, and it functions as a strong model of empowering practice. This is a particularly important issue at the University of New England because many of its students come from geographically remote communities and do not leave school with the educational and cultural capital of their urban peers.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The program has now been extended and expanded under a year-long Teaching Development Grant awarded to JoAnne Reid and Bill Green from the Education Faculty, and Robyn Muldoon from the Teaching and Learning Centre. This second stage of the project hopes to fully absorb the teaching of academic literacy within the discipline, so that it moves from a supplementary to a collaborative and integrated approach. An academic literacy booklet is being developed for distribution to all first-year BEd students. It will cover a range of the traditional academic skills integrated into examples from course content. Sections on essay writing and critical reflection papers will be accompanied by annotated models. The project will culminate in an interactive website, available to all students in the Education Faculty.

Staff development is seen as an important part of the project and academic time-release has been made available so that staff can participate. Part of my role is to function as a 'cultural intermediary' between students and academic staff, identifying the differences which exist in their perceptions of academic discourse. This is an essential part of the project because academics often 'fail to realise their own assumptions and expectations, let alone make these explicit in their disciplines' (Ferguson, 1997, p. 165). Thus a number of strategies are being developed collaboratively to improve the consistency of academic literacy demands across the very diverse BEd program. A senior member of the first-year team has also praised the project for providing a catalyst for increased staff communication and cooperation.

The possibility that a national skills test, the Graduate Skills Assessment, may soon be implemented, both on entry and on exit, suggests that the teaching of academic literacy should be incorporated into all faculties as

quickly as possible, and adds urgency to the claim that improving academic literacy is the responsibility of all tertiary teachers (Nightingale, 1986; Baldauf, 1997). It is likely that the BEd Literacy Assessment Task used this year will be used next year in conjunction with a national pilot version of the Graduate Skills Assessment. There are of course many ethical and pedagogical problems which are emerging from the use of these kinds of mandatory and computer-based assessments of literacy, once confined to school level, but now emerging as a significant issue in the tertiary sector. Despite the many cogent objections that will be raised, it could be argued that it is better to know the full nature of the opposition in order to effectively demolish it. The usefulness of the Graduate Skills Assessment will almost certainly depend on how we structure the teaching which follows from it.

CONCLUSION

From my own teaching in a variety of contexts, through generic workshops and through discipline-specific and culture-specific settings, I can fully sympathise with students who are perplexed by differences in academic discourse, and by inconsistencies amongst faculty teaching staff in their attitudes towards literacy. It is increasingly obvious that to overcome these problems, and thus for academic literacy programs to be successful, there needs to be a commitment from the university as a whole (Elliot, 1997). Such a commitment could be in the form of 'clear formal language, literacy and communication policies' which would be responsive to both student needs and to the 'changing nature of tertiary language and literacy provision' (Baldauf, 1997, p. 2). To some extent, the national development of generic graduate attributes is paving the way for the implementation of such policies.

There is a danger, however, that such policies will further contribute to the negative, reductive effects of Outcomes Based Education. Absalom (1997) warns that the outcomes driven procedures which result from such policies are in opposition to the liberal humanist philosophies which have been the foundation of university education. Although this is certainly a danger, my own experience in this literacy project has forced me to think that this need not necessarily be so. The generic attributes of Communication, Lifelong Learning, Social Responsibility, Team Work and Global Perspective, despite their modern names, are based on values associated with the traditional community of scholars, and they are linked to the collective rather than the individual good. Far from being in opposition to the liberal humanist tradition, they may actually support and extend it, so that the values within it may be reshaped in a contemporary form. Furthermore, because these attributes provide an orientation to academic literacy that is generic through a universal and socially responsible perspective, they are relevant to students in a way that is not just linked to higher marks; thus they encourage deep rather than surface or achieving learning.

Within discipline-specific programs, the use of these attributes may provide a context through which we can teach literacy in its fullest generic sense: 'through holistic social practice' (Reid, 1997, p. 151). This is not the practice that involves the application of a discrete set of generic skills; instead this practice involves participation in an environment which is steeped in the ethos of the attribute, that itself has both an academic and a wider social meaning. In this way operational literacy and cultural literacy become inseparable from critical literacy; critical literacy then becomes a generic practice, not a generic rule. In a commitment to a policy on language and literacy, the universities are enacting one of their 'valued generic skills': social responsibility. This is a commitment to a pedagogy which is fundamentally oriented to the well being of society.

Much of the argument of this paper is encapsulated in Giroux's (1993, p. 376) claim that:

a pedagogy of literacy and difference is not based merely on providing students with conflicting paradigms or dispassionate skills of rhetorical persuasion. On the contrary, it points to practices which offer students the knowledge, skills and values they will need to critically negotiate and transform the world in which they find themselves.

This is particularly relevant to Education faculties, whose graduates will have such profound social influence. The use of generic attributes as a framework for tertiary literacy teaching supports Baldauf's claim that a university language and literacy policy can be 'more than the sum of its parts', and that 'there are not only problems to be solved, but cross cultural understandings and information to be gained' (1997, p. 4). In this sense the university can continue to function as a community of scholars: not one within an ivory tower, but an expanding and inclusive one with a genuinely global perspective.

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Resisting generic-ness: A discipline-specific, integrated, collaborative and faculty-wide model of language and learning skill development

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Abstract

Contrasting with the current emphasis on generic skills, an integrated, discipline specific approach has been extended faculty-wide in the Faculty of Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences of the University of Adelaide, using both top-down and bottom-up strategies over eight years. The process has increasingly incorporated self-access resources developed from authentic student writing, recently made available online. This paper discusses the approach as Faculty students currently encounter it, as well as highlighting key outcomes from the cycles of action and reflection that have supported the development of the approach. Details of the approach are given under the following headings: first year essay writing; Faculty-wide writing guidelines; self-access resources; online provision; later-year subjects; final year communication skills focus; and relationship to individual consultations. The paper concludes by discussing adaptation of the approach for other discipline-specific contexts, and the broader implications of such a model in the context of the development of lifelong learning skills.

INTRODUCTION

Much of the rhetoric seeking to relate outcomes of higher education to the requirements of the workplace uses the term 'generic' to characterise skills to be acquired by graduates. This applies particularly to skills related to communication, which are commonly cited by employers as important job selection criteria (Anon, 1995; Ingleton & Wake, 1997). The use of the term is problematic, however, both because of the vagueness and variability with which it is employed, and because the higher-order generic skills manifest themselves differently in different disciplinary contexts (Clanchy & Ballard, 1995). A discipline-specific approach has long been advocated by many involved in working with students to develop appropriate academic language and learning skills: academic skills advisers or language and learning (L&L) lecturers. As Becher (1994, p. 158) points out, 'general' study skills programs are often seen by students as being of limited use because they ignore disciplinary differences, particularly in terms of discourse structure. In addition, as Brigid Ballard pointed out in a contribution to the Unilearn discussion list – referred to also by Gordon Taylor in his plenary address at this conference – the different development needs students face at different stages of their degrees, as they engage with a range of subject areas at varying levels of complexity, add to "... the impossibility of providing generic courses that will fix them up for their whole university career ..." (pers. comm. B. Ballard, 11 Dec. 1998).

The 1994 National Language and Academic Skills Conference held at La Trobe University was entitled 'Integrating the teaching of academic discourse into courses in the disciplines' (Chanock, 1994b). The conference title highlights the fact that a significant number of members of this professional area have, often independently of each other, developed processes for making their work more effective and available, which can be described by the process 'integrating'. Skillen, Merten, Trivett, & Percy (1998) describe an integrated model as addressing many of the failings of the earlier 'do-nothing' and remedial models of learning development in Australian universities. However, they point to a number of limitations in the early manifestations of the 'integrated' model they describe. When L&L lecturers work alone with students in the discipline-specific context, rather than collaboratively with content-specialist lecturers, valuable opportunities are missed for insights to be carried over into curriculum renewal. This is the case whether a segment is presented in a content subject (Chanock, 1994a) or a complete skill-development subject is designed and taught (Decoteau, 1997; Hampton, 1998). It is also not clear whether skills taught and assessed through content specific to a communication subject are in fact applied effectively in other subjects and situations. Skillen et al. (1998) describe an approach designated IDEALL (Integrated Development of English language and Academic Literacy and Learning), developed at the University of Wollongong, which seeks to overcome these limitations. This "systemic, curriculum-based and collaborative" approach operates by "integrating or embedding learning development into curricula [so that] it becomes contextualised, relevant and discipline-specific" (Skillen et al., 1998, p. 3). Two case studies are presented by these authors, who outline the successful implementation of this

approach in core first-year subjects in two different discipline areas, working collaboratively with subject coordinators. Skillen et al., (1998) suggest that this could be the starting point for systematic integration of tertiary literacy throughout an entire degree program. The problem, however, is that no details are provided about how this aim might be realised.

The present paper provides a case study of work in progress to create such systematic integration across the Faculty of Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences (FA&NRS) at the University of Adelaide, which teaches a range of degree and diploma courses across three campuses. Case studies are important in this context (Ingleton & Wake, 1997), because they allow readers fuller insight into the relationship between the specifics of a particular situation and the outcomes achieved, often providing springboards for action in other contexts.

The FA&NRS has a strong commitment to developing students' written and spoken communication skills (University of Adelaide, 1997, p. 2), which led in 1991 to my employment as Faculty language and learning lecturer. Reasons for this step included perceptions of an increasing gap between the entry-level communication skills of many students and those required of graduates at all levels. My position is jointly funded by the Faculty and the centrally located Advisory Centre for University Education (ACUE). This shared provenance allows for concentration on a relatively coherent discipline context in Agriculture, as well as the opportunity to interact professionally with other L&L and staff developer colleagues, giving exposure to developments in other discipline-specific contexts and highlighting opportunities for cross-over or adaptation.

Rather than a pre-determined procedure for integrating skill development being implemented in a target situation (Skillen et al., 1998), a fully collaborative process has developed over time in the Faculty, allowing adaptation to changes in externally defined priorities, in participants' perceptions of feasibility and relative importance, and in contextual constraints. Over time we have been able to address the objections of content lecturers that they do not know how to help students develop their skills, and that such teaching takes too much time away from teaching the content (Haug, 1996). An important feature of the development has been the parallel use of top-down and bottom-up strategies, an approach previously proved successful in this Faculty during the development of a program for international postgraduate students (Cargill, 1996). The approach which we have developed has the following characteristics:

- progressive and systematic integration of the development of high-level communication skills into content teaching at all levels;
- a focus on students taking responsibility for their own learning;
- provision of relevant and targeted resources integrated into all aspects; and
- regular evaluation of outcomes and revision of strategies following an action-reflection cycle.

Rather than reporting the developments and accompanying reflection cycles sequentially, the paper is structured around the approach as it currently appears to students, and relevant learning and teaching issues are discussed as they have contributed to the development of each component. The final section of the paper focuses on future developments and characterises the approach as a model which has the potential to give concrete expression to the goal of developing independent learners in the tertiary context.

FIRST YEAR ESSAY WRITING

All first year students are introduced to the Faculty's explicit emphasis on communication skill development in the context of their first assignment in a core subject, an essay. This emphasis for first year has been determined at the level of the Undergraduate Studies Committee, and fits with the finding of an assignment audit carried out in 1996 that essays are the second most frequently set assignment in the Faculty.

In most cases, I adopt the widely-endorsed method (e.g. Skillen et al., 1998) of team-teaching classes with the lecturer setting the assignment. In these classes we highlight the Faculty approach, the specific task at hand, the assessment criteria to be used (based on those in Figure 1), the resources available (see Sections 4 and 5) and the process recommended for completing the assignment. We use examples from previous students' work, demonstrating to what degree they meet particular criteria at first year level and how they could be improved. This style of working began at the invitation of individual lecturers in some cases (bottom-up), and that of the Faculty Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies (top-down) in others.

One large foundation subject has developed an alternative approach. Here tutors work on skill development with their tutorial groups, using example-based teaching materials. I prepare and demonstrate these materials to tutors in annual workshops, to enhance their effectiveness in focusing on relevant skill components and providing formative feedback. The experienced lecturers who acted as tutors during the years of the subject's development participated in workshops to develop the approach and then to refine it in response to their experiences in assessing the essays and the students' formal evaluations of the subject. One significant outcome of this refinement was a move from two essays to one, which tutors mark stringently according to the criteria (Figure 1) early in the semester. The essay is then returned with formative feedback and advice to seek an appointment with me if necessary. Students may then resubmit an improved version, together with the original, for remarking. The resubmittable essay is now a general feature across first year. Annual review meetings at subject and Faculty level ensure that the skill development focus for first year is maintained and refined in line with changing practical requirements.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The detailed assessment criteria, in the form of a one-page marking proforma which was originally developed for the first year focus, have been made available to all Faculty staff. They have been adapted for use in many subjects at all levels, so that both similarities and differences in expectations between subjects and lecturers are now easier to identify. The basic criteria (Fig. 1) are published in the Faculty writing guidelines, so students have constant access to them and to notes on how to apply them in a range of written assignment tasks.

FACULTY-WIDE WRITING GUIDELINES

In their first encounter with the Faculty's communication skills focus, new students receive a hard copy of a booklet entitled 'Written Communication in the Faculty of Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences' (Cargill & Bellotti, 1997). The text is also available electronically via the Faculty's homepage. The whole Faculty has assumed ownership of this booklet through the cyclic development process undertaken to develop, trial and refine it and integrate it into teaching practice. This took place as part of an internal Teaching Development Grant project in 1996, in response to a lack of clarity in lecturers' expectations about different assignment types and students' perceptions of them. During the project, a survey was conducted of all subject documentation from first year to Honours level in the Faculty, in order to build on existing best practice in producing guidelines for all common assignment types. We also sought input on learning needs from focus groups of students at all levels. A reference committee with membership from all of the Faculty's eight departments contributed ideas and material, critiqued drafts, and facilitated the evaluation and final adoption of the guidelines by each departmental committee. As well as general guidelines for researching, preparing and presenting well-written assignments in the agricultural and environmental sciences, the booklet includes clear guidelines on referencing (one style has been agreed on by all departments for the first two years of all courses) and specific guidance on essays, practical reports, literature reviews, major project reports, short answers, tables and figures, and posters. A 'Lecturers' Guide' to the guidelines has also been produced and distributed to all staff, highlighting how they can integrate them into their own subject and assignment outlines. In my role as Faculty LLS lecturer I undertake an annual revision of the documents to keep up to date with staff's perceptions of student learning needs.

The evaluation process to ensure the guidelines meet the learning and teaching needs of both students and academic staff included formal student and staff evaluations during their first year of use (see Table 1 for students evaluations). The booklet has also been adapted for use at Batchelor College, N.T.

Essay Cover Sheet

A Argument	
1. Question clearly understood	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Question misunderstood
2. Introduction clarifies standpoint and anticipates structure	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Vague or evasive introduction
3. Argument developed logically in body of essay	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Haphazard collection of points
4. Argument supported by relevant evidence	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Argument unsupported/ evidence irrelevant
5. Essay holds focus on question asked	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Essay wanders from question
6. Sources acknowledged consistently and correctly	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Acknowledgment of sources inconsistent or missing
7. Attempt at critical analysis/original thought	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Restatement of others' views
8. Conclusion reviews issues raised in the essay and finalises argument	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Conclusion introduces new material or is repetitive
B Presentation	
1. Language used is appropriate for an academic essay	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Language is colloquial or chatty
2. Concise	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Repetitive / verbose
3. Fluent, attractive, clear writing	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Meaning obscured by awkward expression
4. Properly constructed and punctuated sentences	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Persistent errors in sentence construction and/or punctuation
5. Paragraphs properly developed, with topic sentences, to clarify structure	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Paragraphs too short or long, haphazard in arrangement, obscuring structure
6. Carefully proof-read	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Typographical/ spelling errors constantly distract reader
7. Reference list set out correctly	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Reference list faulty or missing

Figure 1. Standard Faculty assessment criteria for essays (Cargill & Bellotti 1997).

Table 1. Summary of student evaluation of 'Written Communication in the Faculty of Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences', 1997 (n=291; 1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree).

Question	Mean	S.D.
I found the booklet relevant to my needs	5.4	1.1
The booklet was easy to read and understand	5.6	1.1
I would recommend this booklet to other students	5.6	1.1

SELF-ACCESS RESOURCES

The Faculty's approach has come increasingly to involve learning resources which students access themselves as appropriate. Our move to this medium is based on the principle that resources for communication skill development must be available when and where students recognise a need for them, and that this recognition of need must be facilitated. Lunchtime voluntary classes are of little help where 'lunchtime' has largely

disappeared, due to 'blocking' of subjects on a single day and the exigencies of the bus system covering the 50 kms separating our campuses. We therefore work from three directions: developing targeted resources of demonstrated relevance and effectiveness for our students; ensuring that the resources are readily available and easy to find and use; and demonstrating explicitly which needs they meet and how they relate to assessment criteria for assignments and workplace requirements.

Students are referred in specific rather than general terms to the range of self-access learning resources in the team-taught classes focussing on communication skills development. For example, when showing students an example from a previous year's essay which scored poorly on criterion A6 or B7 from Figure 1, instruction takes place using 'Chapter 5: Referencing' from Cargill and Bellotti (1997). When problems are identified relating to Criterion B4, sentence construction and punctuation, teaching materials are taken from our Self-Access Tutorials (SATs). Eighteen of these were developed with support from a second Teaching Development Grant in 1997. They use examples taken from the writing of Faculty students and focus on commonly encountered difficulties, including both sentence-level (sentence structure, punctuation, grammar) and discourse-level problems (information order, 'flow' within and between paragraphs). Most include a diagnostic test for students to evaluate their own learning needs and practice exercises with answers to help them assess their learning. The SATs are available as booklets through Language Development Drop-in Centres on all campuses, and since 1998 most are also available as Effective Communication Modules through the Adelaide Online website.

ONLINE PROVISION

The online access was provided as part of the CUTSD funded, Adelaide University Learning through Information Technology (AULIT) project, run jointly with the Faculty of Science. This development used Lotus Notes[®], the University's supported software for online resources provision. This means that the underlying structure of what the students see is a database, with the attendant advantages for organisation. However, not all of the hard-copy SATs could be converted to this format without difficulty, and more work remains to be done. The titles of the online modules currently available are as follow.

Introduction	Needs assessment exercises
Writing complete sentences	Nouns and pronouns
Verbs	Using <i>a, an</i> and <i>the</i>
Using <i>which</i> and <i>that</i>	Apostrophes
Punctuation	Document flow
Editing documents for flow	Oral Presentations & Seminars

Evaluation responses at the end of 1998 showed that the electronic form of the self-access modules has not been utilised effectively by on-campus students, and that the hard copy form is often preferred. (The responses of external students have not yet been sought.) More detailed formative evaluation has been conducted with focus groups and Honours classes. This has shown that current development needs include:

- further simplification of the terminology used to describe grammatical categories;
- refinement of the template and navigation system to ensure students always know where they are, both within the module and within the whole database; and
- increased sophistication in the diagnostic tests.

This work is underway, under the auspices of the Adelaide University Online Learning and Teaching Committee.

LATER-YEAR SUBJECTS

I am also available to work with content lecturers in any subject to design a specific skills development focus for any assignment students are experiencing difficulties with. Recent examples are group projects leading to the writing of a consultancy report, or an essay focussing on reviewing literature. These collaborative undertakings often result in an effective reworking of the assignment task, clearer guidance to students on what is expected, and enhanced integration between the subject handouts and the other forms of learning resources available to the students. Sometimes I am asked to collaborate on a similar session in the following year, but often the content lecturer works with the integrated materials alone after the first collaborative effort.

FINAL YEAR COMMUNICATION FOCUS

Compulsory capstone subjects with a strong communication skills focus are also in place in the final year of the Faculty's degree courses: Agricultural Policy, Practice and Communication; Grape Industry Policy, Practice and Communication; and Principles and Practice of Communication. In the first two of these I team-teach skills-based segments which are integral to the subject content and assessment, and in the last mentioned I am a full member of the team which developed and teaches the subject. This integration of skill and content foci mirrors the world of work students are conscious they will soon enter, and the approach is well received. Communication skills highlighted include poster presentation, oral presentation, using adult learning techniques and IT, and writing for specific workplace audiences, including Curricula vitae and job applications.

RELATIONSHIP TO INDIVIDUAL CONSULTATIONS

The development of the integrated and collaborative approach has enhanced both the reach and effectiveness of the limited number of individual consultations able to be offered to students. Because all students meet the skills development focus early and regularly, they have a face to put with the name and the function and are more likely to know when an individual session is needed. Many issues arising in diagnostic consultations can be addressed with reference to the self-access materials as they were developed from Faculty students' writing. Small group consultations are feasible because students have a shared idea of what is expected from the team-taught classes. In a climate where effectiveness has increasingly to be demonstrated, these advantages contribute to our ability to argue for the retention of individual consultations in the overall program.

POTENTIAL FOR WIDER ADAPTATION

The model of discipline-specific, integrated, collaborative and faculty-wide language and learning skill development presented in this paper can be characterised in these terms:

- a range of strategies and activities to teach and assess the desired language and academic skills, fully integrated into a range of core subjects throughout the courses in a faculty,
- supported by a wide variety of targeted learning resources which students access as the need arises in their particular learning situation.

For the model to be optimally effective, the two components should mesh tightly. Students must experience the resources as meeting their specific needs when the needs arise for them. Direct relevance needs to be demonstrated (as through the use of discipline-specific vocabulary and concepts in examples and exercises). In addition, each 'chunk' of resource should address one problem only, and students should be able to locate the chunk they need readily. This needs some learner training in the teaching component of the model (Mozzon-McPherson, 1998). The specific skills represented by the chunks should be required for success in the core subjects, and students should be able to see clearly the relationship between the assessment criteria in the subject assignment, the skills, and the resources designed to help them learn or revise the skills. These requirements have been systematically addressed in the approach described in the paper, so that we can demonstrate in a concrete form to academic staff outside the language and learning field the concepts of integration and embedding of skill development. This is proving very helpful in working with staff from other faculties who approach us in the ACUE for help in developing their students' writing skills.

However, another interesting phenomenon is also occurring. The online Effective Communication Modules designed for embedding in the FA&NRS courses are being used effectively by students, and referred to by lecturers, in a wide range of other disciplines. It is clear that they are seen by lecturing staff struggling to address perceived weaknesses in students' writing skills as a valuable resource, despite the discipline-specific nature of the vocabulary used in the examples. This outcome provides an on-the-ground opportunity to adapt the whole approach to other contexts.

The effectiveness of the self-access modules in these extended contexts could be enhanced in two ways. Firstly, the specific examples and exercises could be revised using vocabulary and concepts specific to the target context – not an overwhelming task given that the basic structure of the resources has been shown to be effective for students. Secondly, these revised modules could be embedded in teaching strategies and activities in subjects in those contexts, and the connections to the modules made explicit to the students. In this way the interest

currently shown by lecturers in one aspect of the integrated model (the online modules) could be harnessed to encourage adoption of other aspects. However, what is also required for this transfer to be optimally effective is consideration of how the model fits with the specific requirements of the different discipline-specific contexts.

Encouraging engagement with the hands-on practice of developing students' language and learning skills in this way is one avenue for broadening acceptance by academics of the importance of a discipline-specific emphasis, and lessening the often unhelpful focus on 'generic' skills. In addition, the approach presented here provides an opportunity to demonstrate independent and resource-based learning to our students in a concrete way which can contribute to their development as effective lifelong learners. The model could be seen as an experiential link for students between the organisational *system* signified by the term 'self-access' and the educational *philosophy* and *process* signified by the term 'independent learning' (Sheerin, 1997, p. 54). It is in ways such as this that academics belonging to the discipline of Language and Academic Skills can make a particular contribution to the wider debate currently taking place in our universities about learning and teaching methods and outcomes.

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TULIP (Tertiary Undergraduate Literacy Integration Program): A project that focuses on the literacy development of tertiary students

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Abstract

The expansion of the number of tertiary places in Australian higher education institutions in the last decade has brought more students into the university system. One consequence of the greater diversity of student cultures and capabilities is that the tertiary teaching context has become more problematic. Students' tertiary literacy development is of current concern nationally and internationally. We share this concern, and to this end, we are engaged in a CUTSD funded program, called TULIP (Tertiary Undergraduate Literacy Integration Program) which, as the name suggests, foregrounds the integration or embeddedness of tertiary literacy within content teaching. In this paper, we describe some of the activities and interim outcomes from the first phase of TULIP, the phase focusing on two Education units. We also consider some of the issues which have arisen when working across various boundaries.

TULIP PROJECT ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTS

The aim of the TULIP Project is to enhance students' tertiary literacy simultaneously with their learning of the content of their discipline areas. Rather than adding generic literacy skills onto study programs, the Project begins from the proposition that discipline content is itself composed of language which has been constructed by each disciplinary community. Introducing neophytes into that disciplinary community is therefore like an apprenticeship in the ways with words of that community (Bartholomae, 1985). To understand the discipline is to be able to engage in the discourse of that discipline. Hence, "literacy" is not something that can be remediated in isolated tool sessions, but is integral to the teaching and learning of the discipline material. It follows from this view of literacy as a social construct that the language conventions (or "literacy") which need to be fostered will be in many ways specific to each discourse community (Baynham et al., 1994). But insights from the field of literacy theory and pedagogy suggest that there may be generic teaching strategies which can be used to foster the learning of different discipline languages, without recourse to a discourse of student deficit. TULIP is exploring this possibility.

Through action research, five lecturers and approximately two hundred students from the disciplines of Education, Social Science, Environmental Science and Nursing at the University of Ballarat and Australian Catholic University (Aquinas Campus), are developing, trialing, and refining a series of literacy learning and teaching strategies to be used within the usual tutorial sessions as the content of each subject is taught. There are two phases to the Project: Phase One involves Education lecturers and Education students from both institutions; Phase Two involves lecturers and students from the other discipline areas from both institutions. Each lecturer engages in an action learning process with his/her particular group of students, centred on using literacy teaching strategies. The students are thus assisted in learning their discipline knowledge as the teacher makes explicit to them the component skills and conventions of the discipline language; students learn about their discipline through the language and literacy of that discipline.

The literacy teaching strategies cover aspects such as vocabularies of discipline areas, approaches to organising arguments, achieving authority in texts, forms of reflective writing, and understanding features of the genres of academic texts. The documentation of these strategies will result in a Tertiary Undergraduate Literacy Integration Program (TULIP) Resource Kit. It is envisaged that the final version of the TULIP Resource Kit (available early in 2001) will contain a number of learner centred literacy teaching strategies adaptable to any tertiary classroom; a brief theoretical justification for each strategy; narratives from teachers of different disciplines about the teaching context and use made of each strategy; appropriate evaluation approaches, student workshop materials and teachers' notes.

PREVIOUS WORK

The TULIP project builds on our previous work on student learning and literacy. We have conversed across subject boundaries within Education over a number of years as we have integrated literacy learning into teaching discipline knowledge within our own classrooms (Noone & Cartwright, 1997). Strategies which were generated by this work are the basis for Phase One of the TULIP Project. The TULIP Project also builds on our work with first year students' literacy (Noone & Cartwright, 1998), by extending into a broader range of disciplines. Cartwright's (1997) action research with lecturers from different disciplines in the University of Ballarat documented a general concern for students' literacy and a desire to know how it might be fostered. The TULIP project seeks to build on this cross-disciplinary concern by engaging participating lecturers in action research on literacy learning and teaching.

TEACHING AND RESEARCHING / RESEARCHING TEACHING

The research in which we are engaging for the TULIP Project can be seen as a case study of change in the practice of tertiary teaching through action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1989). As with any case study, the emphasis is on exploring in some depth the nuances of the particular, rather than seeking the abstract generalisability of a study based on scientific principles. Any lessons from the case study for others come not from the generation of laws but from resonances which readers/listeners/practitioners can identify as speaking to their own circumstances of teaching, and which may spark in their imaginations possibilities as yet unimagined. Our approach can be seen as part of the shift beyond positivist notions of research towards that family of research which Lather (1991) calls postpositivist in which there is a "constructive turmoil that allows a search for different possibilities of making sense of human life" (p. 52).

The approach is particularly appropriate for explorations in teaching. In considering tertiary teaching, Ballantyne et al., (1997) suggest that the logico-scientific mode of knowing tends to underplay those elements of teaching which involve:

... making sense of contradictions and dilemmas; wrestling with ideas and methods; interacting with students and colleagues; and juggling the demands of teaching in an increasingly crowded portfolio of professional responsibilities.

(Ballantyne et al., 1997, p. 137)

In our work, teacher narrative (Jalongo et al., 1995; Connelly & Clandinin, 1986, 1990; Elbaz, 1991) is an important part of the change process. Narratives foreground all of the elements referred to above, and acknowledge them as parts of the usual state of affairs within a teaching situation. They acknowledge teaching as an uncertain business, and one whose character results from the sense which teachers make of the immediate and broader contexts in which they act. In undertaking the TULIP project, and indeed when the TULIP material is produced, teachers' stories from the classroom will feature strongly.

Our approach is also "action research" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1989), a collaborative process which begins from participants' exploration of their current ways of understanding their circumstances in order to define the problem and their values; moves to planning and implementation of possible strategies; and culminates in evaluation and re-planning through participatory modes of learning and working. Of course, in a teaching setting, the same situation is never replicated. We as teachers make judgements and draw lessons from each teaching episode - our own and that of others - in order to re-engage in the action research cycle.

The teacher stories about what happens in classrooms when using the literacy teaching strategies constitute both data for the project and the means by which practitioners give meaning to their activities. The stories are constructed from the teachers' reflections on their own practice, their judgement of the literacy outcomes in students' discipline work, and their perception of the students' experiences of focusing more directly on literacy learning. While the aim of the project is to enhance students' literacy skills within each discipline, we will not be able to prove that the literacy pedagogy accounts for any differences in students' performance of discipline work. A pre- and post- test is not consistent with this form of action research in teaching. At most, we can make professional judgements based on comparisons of samples of individual students' work (although this will be over a short time span) and investigate to what extent students are conscious of their own literacy development.

EXPERIENCES FROM PHASE ONE - EDUCATION UNITS

Based on the methodology outlined above, we refined and used a suite of literacy teaching strategies to teach the content of our two first year Education units in semester one. Although both units were from the discipline of Education, they were in fact two different sub-disciplines. Students had to learn two new “languages”: one of these “languages” concerned language and literacy in the unit ‘Language and Literacy’; the other concerned educational ideas and critiques in the unit ‘Ideology and Education’. We documented our activities through maintenance of professional journals and session plans; collected samples of student writing at the beginning and end of the semester; met weekly with a Critical Friend to critically reflect upon classroom practice, and “tell our stories”; and documented students’ responses to the various literacy teaching strategies.

For the purposes of this paper, we can outline only some of the material which was generated. We shall focus on two of the literacy teaching strategies (academic journalling and write/share/add/ confront/reconstruct) (WSACR); some comparative samples of students’ writing taken from the beginning and end of the semester; and some of the feedback from students on the overall experience of the literacy focus within the units.

LITERACY STRATEGY 1 - ACADEMIC JOURNALLING

Journalling is used in a variety of ways by different teachers in different circumstances (Holly, 1989). Some teachers and students see journalling as akin to diary writing, a style of informal writing that describes personal thoughts and feelings. Others see journalling as reportage, a style of writing which recounts events and material, and which gradually allows students to become familiar with both discipline content and language, and with the ways of writing for the academy. While each of these forms can be useful developmentally, it is another form of journalling, academic journalling, which we find the most powerful form of writing. Like diary writing, it continues to privilege the “voice” of the writer, but places this “voice” among discipline theorists. Students are thus able to critically reflect on their growth of understanding of their discipline; explore the ways of making meaning in writing; and interrogate particular theoretical perspectives which they may find problematic.

Academic journalling combines the personal with the political in that it allows the “voice” of the writer to be heard, but theorises and politicises the particular event to which the writer refers. It enables the writer to see how the situation being described is part of a construction of culture that encompasses a dimension that may be political, economic, classed, raced and gendered. By this means, students may be led to see writing as a process of discovery, as a way of knowing. It engages students in a critical interrogation of social and discursive practices, translating personal understandings into a discourse that can be interrogated in writing, or with others. Rather than seeing personal and academic writing as a dichotomy, academic journalling negotiates a position in writing that allows the writer to speak a multiplicity of voices into the cultural and academic dialogue (Cartwright, 1998).

Samples of Students’ Academic Journalling

In the following extracts from students’ journals (Figures 1 and 2), we can see the difference between diary journalling and academic journalling exemplified. Student A ultimately demonstrates successful practice of academic journalling, with its inherent characteristic of being a personally and politically powerful form of writing. However, we would not wish to claim that all students were able to enter this discourse. Student B exemplifies a substantial group of students who continued to journal in diary form, but who were quite capable of using academic form in essays.

Student A

In these extracts from the student’s journal (see Figure 1), we can see in Week 3 the use of stilted, short sentences, which tend to be declamatory or rhetorical statements of popular wisdom. However, even at this point, we can see that the student is exercising evaluative judgement on material which has been read in order to distinguish between what “most people” agree with and what “I” agree with. By Week 10, the student’s initial awareness of diverse views has developed to the extent that he/she can contrast views from different authorities with each other and with his/her own. The language of the discipline, in both form and content, is being used in a manner which includes personal engagement. The sophistication of vocabulary, syntax and tone match the more complex thoughts which are being expressed. To use Cartwright’s (1998) formulation referred to above, the writer is speaking multiple voices - a personal voice, a scholarly voice, a citizen’s voice - into the cultural and academic dialogue:

Week 3:
This view I don't exactly agree with. Most people would agree with it. People have dreams. Imagine what people said when Nicole Kidman said she wanted to be an actress. They would have tole [sic] her to get a proper job.

Week 10:
Teachers may be resistant to critical pedagogy. As Freire (1997) comments, teaching the purely technical aspects of a procedure is not difficult and it means that the teacher doesn't have to think about values. I like his idea of teaching not being a mechanical method. One idea that I will use when I am teaching is the problem-posing approach because I have experienced it in this class and it is very encouraging because it makes you think of bigger issues. I didn't really notice any shift away from a focus on individuals, which Symes and Preston (1998) say is a problem in an emancipatory perspective.

Figure 1. Extract from Student A's journal.

Student B

After an initial entry in diary form in which the student is already engaging in self-reflection, we see no development towards academic journalling in the later entry. Indeed, the earlier tendency to think and write self-reflectively has also disappeared. Reportage and diary forms of journalling constitute the writing in the later entry. There is no attempt to engage with the substantive ideas of the "exciting" article: the difficulty in "understand[ing] it all" suggests that the student has not been able to enter adequately the discipline discourse. It is interesting that he/she attributes this lack of understanding to a particular dysfunctional personal state of feeling "tired and grumpy". As teachers, we are conscious of having been apparently unable to foster more powerful writing / depth of engagement with content understanding with this student.

Week 1:
Already after my first class I have started wondering why and what makes me think the way I think. What makes me judge things such as people when I don't really know them. Also why do I find it hard to express myself and answer "why" when asked, when deep down we do no [sic] "why".

Week 9:
I found the article almost exciting to read why and how these people came up with different theories. But I had to read and re-read it several times, and even after doing that, I'm not sure that I understand it all. I was tired and grumpy and I should have read the article when I was fresh.

Figure 2. Extract from Student B's journal.

Extracts from Our Stories of Using Academic Journalling

Students do not use academic journalling in a vacuum. They are but one partner in the "web of relationships" (Kemmis, 1995) of a classroom; we as teachers are a key other. In order to understand both the strategy, and the samples of students' writing which eventuated from the use of the strategy, it is necessary to place them within the context of the teachers' (our) intentions, interpretations and actions. As Elbaz (1983) points out, it is important to gain insight into how teachers hold and use their knowledge in order to begin to understand how institutions help to create and make legitimate forms of consciousness. The following comments, written in Week 10, are extracts from our writing about our practices of using academic journalling which help to contextualise the students' material. A more detailed analysis is not included for this paper.

Pat: *In the Language and Literacy Unit, students wrote in their journals in class, and out of class. They were to explore and deconstruct a range of text types, from their textbook, from the media, and from other academic reading, in order to see how meaning is constructed and shaped through language. And they were to explore their own assumptions regarding their lived experience, and place these under the lens of a critical literacy perspectives. I responded to their entries each week, sometimes sharing experiences, but also challenging statements they were making and asking them to clarify, to question, to re-think, and to include their responses in the next journal entry. By this means, I was able to become familiar with the students and their writing, and to gauge their development over time in*

regard to the conventions of writing, but especially the development of their ideas on the issues of class, race, gender and ethnicity that we were interrogating.

Lynne: *I used the journal as a folio of work, based on a variety of set tasks, and engagement with new or different ideas from lectures and reading. Some of these writing tasks were done in class time; some were done out of class time. Some students wrote a lot, some wrote ... sparingly. But most wrote more, and better (both in terms of content and writing style) as the semester progressed. I decided to "write back" to each student regularly (every two or three weeks), in order to spur them on, to write more, to consider other questions which were implied in their writing. It took some time for the students to develop academic journal writing, and indeed some of them continued to write in diary and reportage styles, despite my oral and written prompting and examples.*

Students' Responses to Academic Journalling

Students provided a range of comments regarding their experience of journalling. In the following extract, students explicitly made a connection between writing and thinking deeply about the content:

I thought that it was a good idea as writing made you think more deeply about certain issues. I gained a much richer understanding of the unit content by reinforcing what was learnt through comparing my views with authors.

One student commented on the value of capturing the transience of ideas into some external format through writing in a process which is no longer perceived in terms of fear of the 'blank page':

The journal was a great way of getting ideas down on paper and is great for future reference.

The journal as a means of reflective writing is a focus of the following comments, although it must be noted that there is a range of meanings connected with 'reflection'. These comments do not really inform us about what the students meant by this term. As can be seen, not all of the students found the reflective process to be useful.

My reflections showed my closed mind at the beginning of the unit, but at the end I understood the tasks more, from putting them into writing.

I found that reflections were not very helpful, as I never really had any questions and could not think of much to write.

At first, I thought I would never be able to write the reflections, but as the unit progressed I was reflecting before I had even thought about it.

While we, and most students, have found academic journalling to be a particularly powerful form of integrating literacy with content learning, we must also acknowledge that not all students shared this perspective, as the following comment indicates:

Didn't really like writing the journal - thought it was a waste of paper, although I tried to think of stuff to write and fill it.

Very few of the students shared this somewhat negative view of journalling. In the following data, we can see that the overwhelming majority of students felt that journal writing benefited both their thinking about the content and their writing.

Table 1. Students' Responses to Journal Writing.

	<i>Not At All</i>		<i>A Bit</i>		<i>A Lot</i>		<i>Total Responses</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
a. Individual journal writing helped me to think.	5	5	45	44	52	51	102	100
b. Individual journal writing helped me to put my ideas into words.	3	3	25	25	74	72	102	100

LITERACY STRATEGY 2 - WRITE/SHARE/ADD/CONFRONT/RECONSTRUCT (WSACR)

Becoming a reflective thinker entails developing an awareness of the assumptions under which we, and others, think and act. According to Brookfield (1995), a reflective thinker learns to pay attention to the context in which actions and ideas are generated, becomes sceptical of quick-fix solutions, of single answers to problems and of claims to universal truths. One also becomes open to alternative ways of looking at, and behaving in, the world. Many of these elements are echoed in Smyth's (1986) exploration of reflection-in-action, but he emphasises that reflection is a social process, like language, and always begins from the historical reality of people's lives. Further, critical reflection confronts the constraints and contradictions in understanding in order to "see in other ways" (Smyth, 1986, p. 24).

The write/share/add/confront/reconstruct strategy (WSACR) is an adaptation of these principles to a classroom practice which foregrounds writing. The strategy becomes a combination of individual and small group writing and interaction. In response to a question, each student initially writes several lines, then shares this with a peer. The partners then question each other's views, ask for clarification, and share each other's thoughts in order to extend the other's view. An opportunity is then provided for each student to add to the original response. At this point, the teacher may provide further perspectives on the question, prompting and challenging the students to confront their existing response with questions such as: *What are your reasons for ... ? What connection can you see between ... and ... ? How would author X apply ... ? Do you find yourself resisting the points made by ... ? Why? Whose knowledge is it and whose interests does it serve?* Finally, the student takes time to reconsider in writing these and other oppositional points of view, and indicate in writing how their original views have been extended and/or challenged, or reconstructed.

This process was central in much of our classroom activity. It was also used in conjunction with other strategies, for example role-plays, critical reading, and so on. Students frequently were discomfited by the notion that they were expected to write during the tutorial. Sharing was also a process that they found somewhat confronting: they were uneasy about sharing their work with another person; and they found the public nature of their writing to be something to which they did not come easily. There was a tension between the writing for self clarification and coming to see that 'my' learning has some sort of relationship to 'your' learning. So the social dynamic of learning that occurs through this process is one of the challenges.

Sample of Students' Writing Using WSACR

Student C

The following sample of student writing (Figure 3) illustrates the process of thinking and writing which eventuates from this strategy. It is an example from Week 1, where a generative question was set as a way of validating and building from students' existing knowledge and experience, and as a beginning to a process of broadening and rethinking existing understandings about education. This student could initially write only two lines and chose to respond to the question painfully honestly. At each stage of the writing process, we can see

that alternative or different ideas are prompted by various social interactions. Simple notions of gender relations, class relations and governmental power are added to her story, which is still personal but gradually broadening. The final addition suggests that she has moved away from "I'm here because I chose to be" towards acknowledging that "I can see that my choices are constrained by decisions of other people and institutions". In the process of expanding her perspective, she has doubled the amount she has written, which gives her encouragement that she can write next time, and thus the possibility of writing better.

<p>Generative question: How is it that you are doing this course at this institution?</p> <p>Write <i>I don't really know why I'm here. I've had no life long ambition to be a primary teacher or anything and basically I'm here because I didn't want to go too far away. It's better than doing nothing.</i></p> <p>Share/Add <i>Being a girl, teaching seemed alright [sic]. Or hospitality. But my auntie's [sic] a teacher. My family didn't push me because they are not academic people. But they do provide me with economic support, and they want me to get a better job than them.</i></p> <p>Confront (Lynne does class brainstorm on personal factors, and structural factors, influencing Educational experiences and pathways)</p> <p>Reconstruct <i>I got into this course because I got an adequate TER for this course in the selection system. If the government and the universities had a different system, I wouldn't be here. I'm here because the government built a university here a long time ago. If these things were different, it wouldn't matter whether I wanted to come - I couldn't.</i></p>
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Figure 3. Sample of Student C's writing from WSACR.

Extracts from Our Stories of Using WSACR

Again, it is important to place the strategy and the sample of student writing in the context of the teachers' intentions, interpretations and practices. The following extracts from our stories, written in week 3, indicate some of the adaptations to the WSACR strategy that each of us made. They also suggest the emotional nature of the classroom for both teachers and students:

Lynne *As they are writing, I circulate around the room, prompting students who are gazing into space by posing questions. Or sometimes I write too, modelling concentrated writing. Once I wrote on the board – that was good and bad, because on the one hand, it modelled a style of writing; but on the other, they were so interested in what I was doing that they stopped their own writing. That particular day, I modified the process, and had them collectively act as my partner, and then as my "confronter". I hadn't thought this out in advance; I just formulated it there on the spot. Worked quite well too. Usually at the "share" stage, I nominate the pairings rather than allow them to chose friends who, I figure, are less likely to have different views and backgrounds from which to add alternative perspectives to the conversation. Being first semester in first year, most of them don't have a friend anyway. I remember one student telling me that the only time he spoke to anyone else was in my class. Really sad. So, much of the chat involves meeting another student for the first time. The hardest part for me is the "confront" stage. It's the real teaching part, because I never know in advance what the students will give me to work with. I have about five minutes to judge where their thinking is, present through questions or drawings or a story or something a key theoretical point designed to challenge them, but which also entices them to take the step of rethinking. So it has to be positive as well as discomforting. Some days I do it better than others; and some students respond better than others. I can tell when I've hit the mark: you see the faces say "oh yes", or "oh no", or "good heavens", but the eyes say "I'm in this, I'm connecting" and the pens will fly.*

Pat *One of the early activities is a semiotic analysis of a print advertisement. I first show an OHT that has headlines from various women's magazines, though not all are completely explicitly about women. Students are asked to respond in writing to the headlines, to say where they come from (in their view), and so on. They then share their views with their partner. There is general discussion on what words were more "suitable" for women's as opposed to men's magazines, and a general "light-hearted" response to the headlines, though usually some students indicate indignation at the way women's interests are being represented in such a narrow way. Then I show a video that focuses on print ads from women's magazines, and that also includes some statistics regarding the amount of advertising that children watch over their formative years, how much advertisers spend on advertising and so on. This video represents the 'confront' aspect of the strategy, as students do actually find it confronting. The expressions of shocked disbelief at the representations shown in the ads are written down in their journals, as a follow-on to the original comments regarding ads in women's magazines. Students are then asked to share with the class their overall responses to the notion of the ads. In one group, a student read from his writing: "You've got to look at the whole socio-cultural context. A capitalist society encourages materialism, and emphasises wants over needs". There was a palpable change of atmosphere in the room. This group then went on to discuss the construction of discourses and linked into one of their readings.*

Student Responses to WSACR

Students provided a range of comments regarding their experience of WSACR. In the following extracts, students explicitly made a connection between writing and confronting alternate and contradictory perspectives.

I really enjoyed the chance to interact with other people in the group. Writing and sharing helped me express my ideas and meet new people.

The group work in the tutes was great. It gave me heaps more confidence and knowledge, and I felt more comfortable hearing different views, even when they were different from mine.

In the above two comments, students focus on the opportunity this strategy provides for the social dimension of learning. They see as complementary the notion of getting to know people and getting to know people's ideas. This is reminiscent of Tinto's (1993) finding that social connectedness is just as important to successful learning as any intellectual endeavour.

In the following comment, however, we see the social connectedness which this strategy entails creating an initial discomfort for the student.

At first, I didn't like having to write things in class and let other people see it. But after a while, I got used to it, and liked it. It gave me a chance to think about what I thought before I talked about it to others.

The second part of the above comment draws our attention to two things: first, that this student is operating at the level of metacognition, that is being able to think about his/her own learning processes; and second, that the student finds that this strategy directly impinges on the quality of thinking about content. We find a similar emphasis in the following comment.

You see someone else's ideas and you think, Why didn't I think of that or I disagree with that, and so you have extra things to write about.

Finally, it is generally acknowledged that most students find the tyranny of the blank page to be overwhelming. One of the advantages of this strategy is that it supports and encourages students to write more, as they explore and tease out their thoughts and ideas.

Often I didn't think I would write much, but once we started writing and sharing our work it got easier to think of more things to write. Sometimes I ended up with a page.

In the following data, we can see that the overwhelming majority of students felt that this strategy benefited both their thinking and their writing in the Education units.

Table 2. Students' Responses to WSACR.

	<i>Not At All</i>		<i>A Bit</i>		<i>A Lot</i>		<i>Total Responses</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
c. Discussing my ideas in small groups helped me to get more ideas.	4	3	30	30	68	67	102	100
d. Discussing my ideas in small groups helped me to clarify my own ideas.	2	2	39	38	61	60	102	100
e. Discussing my ideas in small groups forced me to put my ideas into words so that others could understand them.	2	2	33	32	67	66	102	100

Overall student comments

Students provided a range of comments regarding their experience of involvement in literacy strategies in both units. In the following extracts, students explicitly made a connection between the literacy strategies they have been employing, and a metacognitive awareness of their literacy learning.

One of the aims of both units is to engage the students in a process of critical reading and writing. While this is not the forum to explore the multiple meanings of 'critical', we see as crucial to our understanding of the term that students interrogate the taken-for-granted assumptions about language, and within language. In the following two comments we see that students have recognised themselves as critical readers and writers:

I have been forced to focus on writing and to recognise the unsaid assumptions which I make.

It gave me some sort of insight into how to read 'educational writing' by academics, the jargon and discourse they use when writing.

However, not all students developed an awareness of themselves as critical writers and readers, as the following comment indicates. For the following student, a slightly larger vocabulary is identified as the main literacy outcome of the units, but without attributing to it any accompanying benefit of "better" writing, or better understanding of the nature of language use in constructing content as a result of this enlarged vocabulary:

I've learnt a few new words, but I don't think I'm a better writer.

The difficulty associated with getting students to respond to encouragement to read their textbooks and gain the associated increased knowledge and understanding is a common concern of tertiary teachers. Several of our strategies, not outlined in this paper, target academic reading as an area of literacy teaching in which we explicitly teach the processes of reading a text, in order to make sense of the content. This is not merely a technical skill, but an approach to reading that considers the language used by the writer to make meaning, the silences in the text, and the position the reader may be influenced to take. Some students, such as the following, found the reading strategies helpful:

I can read and understand things that I would once have skipped because I found them too hard.

But while the following student found the literacy strategies helpful, he/she alerts us to the dynamic that was occurring for his/her, and possibly others', learning, namely that of pressure of work overall that forces students to see their learning in strategic terms rather than at a megacognitive level. It raises interesting problems about the amount of content learning in the total study program for any tertiary student. As we read the comment, we can see that he/she had been successfully moving into the megacognitive domain, but could not continue with this level of learning if he/she were to survive:

When you first started explaining the strategies, I thought this is great because you are learning how to read and write, but after a couple of weeks, all the other work takes over, and you lose it.

The final comment to which we wish to draw attention here, also suggests a strategic approach, but does so in a way that raises issues about literacy development through practice over time:

This unit has helped develop my literacy skills because I've had to use them.

Almost all students felt that their literacy skills, their capacity for critical thinking about the content, and their understanding of academic culture had been assisted over the semester in the Education units. This is shown by the ratings given in the table below.

Table 3. Students' Responses to the Literacy Strategies.

	<i>Very Poor</i>		<i>Poor</i>		<i>Average</i>		<i>Good</i>		<i>Excellent</i>		<i>Total Responses</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
j) Development of literacy skills	0	0	0	0	12	12	62	61	28	27	102	100
k) Development of critical thinking	0	0	0	0	2	2	54	53	46	45	102	100
l) Development of understanding about academic expectations	0	0	2	2	7	7	61	60	32	31	102	100

DISCUSSION

From the evidence outlined above and our experiences as teachers in the two Education units, we are encouraged that teaching discipline content through an explicit focus on its constitution as a language is a fruitful approach. The approach continues to challenge us to explore our own pedagogical practices and to confront our assumptions about knowledge, learning and language. It raises issues of teaching as teaching skills, teaching as process, and teaching as content delivery. Conversely, it raises issues of learning as competency in skills, learning as a process of meaning making, and learning as accumulation of content. For tertiary educators in particular, the embeddedness of these literacy strategies challenges the orthodoxy of the academic as expert possessor and dispenser of discipline knowledge. Instead, it foregrounds their role as a teacher who needs to have an awareness of discipline knowledge as constructed in and through language, and of pedagogies which facilitate development of this literacy.

While we have isolated several strategies for this paper, and indeed for the TULIP project as a whole, we have tried to show through our teacher narratives that these strategies must be considered within the dynamic of the whole teaching situation within any one class, as the teaching/learning situation is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional process. The strategies, therefore, cannot be seen as recipes, and embedding them within one's teaching is not a seamless process. Indeed when lecturers from additional disciplines join the project in Phase

Two of TULIP, we expect the strategies to be further “massaged” as people with different teaching styles, teaching conditions and disciplinary communities of practice re-invent what they find useful. And yet, in devising each strategy for our own use, we thought of the procedure as a rational, logical development of steps based on sound literacy learning theory. When we each formulated the procedure for a session in which a strategy was to be utilised, we followed “good practice” in lesson planning which was rational and logical. When explaining each strategy to our Critical Friend at each weekly meeting, it was represented as a series of technical steps. But in practice, the reality of the teaching moment within the classroom dynamic meant that what actually happened bore little resemblance to the somewhat clinical and technical representation of each strategy. In communicating about our practice, we are confronting an interesting boundary between teaching as technique and teaching as artistry. In many ways, our teacher stories may be the form of communication which best allows permeability of this boundary.

One of the boundaries to be negotiated was that between different views of what counts as literacy, held by, in this instance, us as teachers and the students in our units. For the majority of students, literacy was seen as the generic skills of reading and writing, essay construction, knowing how to spell, how to construct sentences and so on. Based on this notion of literacy, some students entered our units with a self perception that they are either “good” or “bad” writers, or “good” or “bad” spellers, a perception that tended to influence their willingness to write and read. The consequent reluctance to “do” literacy on the part of some students, either because they felt they “couldn’t write” or because they felt they “already knew how to write” was one of the hurdles that our literacy strategies worked hard at overcoming. In contrast to the dominant view that the students tended to share with the wider community, we see literacy as a social and cultural construct, always changing and evolving. Therefore, we view students’ so-called literacy “standards” within broader parameters, rather than through any fault-finding deficit view, or “banking” view which has it that a discrete set of skills, once mastered, will allow one to know how to write for the varying academic discourses (Swales, 1991). Indeed, we do not see writing as just a skill with which one can present or analyse knowledge (Cartwright, 1998). We see literacy as constituent in the process of gaining knowledge and understanding in the first place. Coming to know the knowledge in a particular discipline is learning the language of that discipline. Therefore, becoming literate means learning the literacy of the discipline and recognising that language constructs the discipline. Understanding the discipline means learning a new language.

In some ways, each of us also had to learn new languages of new disciplines. Although both of us engaged in Phase 1 of TULIP are placed within the discipline of Education, we come from two sub-disciplines, each with its own “different ways of knowing, acting and subjectivity which are constructed differently by different knowledge communities” (Giroux, 1992, p. 43). We have had to learn to “talk” to each other about our common concern for and practice of tertiary teaching. The challenge of such dialogue, according to Giroux, is to “develop a shared language around the issue of pedagogy and struggle, develop a set of relevancies that can be recognised in each other’s work, and articulate a common political project that addresses the relationship between pedagogical work and the reconstruction of oppositional public spheres” (Giroux, 1992, p. 159).

One of the benefits in the cross-disciplinary nature of our project is that lecturers from differing disciplines will be discussing issues common to all tertiary teachers, and identifying constraints and possibilities in their work which derive from working within similar institutional circumstances and from teaching similar cohorts of students. While sharing diversity of views and commonality of experience is fruitful, we see the dialogue between our colleagues and us as a particular challenge. We all say the word “literacy”, or “teaching”, or “knowledge” and are committed to the aim of improving student learning. Nevertheless, as soon as we begin to talk about one of these areas, it is likely that there will be diverse and indeed conflicting understanding about literacy, literacy teaching and even discipline knowledge. The literacy strategies which our participating lecturers will be trialing emerge from our version of what counts as literacy and teaching. So, one of our major priorities is the need to create a shared language in order to be able to talk across disciplines.

CONCLUSION

What we have tried to do in this paper is to foreground some of the activities and outcomes from the first phase of TULIP. We have also tried to show how the differing understandings have resulted in positive and unexpected insights into our own understandings, working cross-institutionally, cross-disciplinary, and cross-culturally (in terms of academic culture).

One of the positive benefits has been that of working collegially across discipline boundaries, and cross-institutionally, and the insights this has provided which informs our teaching and research. In endeavouring to make our pedagogical and theoretical understandings clear to each other, we have had to ensure that we recognised the implications such perspectives might have for our classroom teaching and research. This has meant confronting, at times, our own taken-for-granted assumptions regarding teaching and learning, interrogating our sometimes strongly held views on effective pedagogical strategies, and problematising the theoretical understandings of our own disciplines. We have gained insights into our own teaching that have emerged from a process of re-constructing narratives about teaching that are emancipatory and challenging. Indeed, teacher narrative, we have found, has provided a powerful means for sharing our insights, for questioning each others understandings, and for validating and celebrating the art of teaching (Clandinin, 1986).

A further, and indeed significant, benefit has been that of working with our students. Our teaching of students has been informed by our perspectives on teaching and learning, and in turn, our classroom experiences have challenged these perspectives. We see our literacy strategies as the means by which students can engage with and question the content of the discipline; through writing responses as they write their way to understanding. For many students, however, thinking through writing is not part of their understanding of how tertiary learning should occur. Indeed, many students experience a sense of cognitive dissonance when they are confronted with our literacy strategies which are different from what they expect tertiary learning to be – that is, finding the ‘right answer’ from a textbook. Nevertheless, we see ourselves engaging in a pedagogy that is both within and against the academy, and that encourages students to become deep learners (Gibbs, 1994). Theoretically, we hold to the view that in teaching one must transgress (Hooks, 1994) the boundaries, which will ‘take them [students] beyond their current horizons to consider perspectives and issues that they would not normally entertain’ (Zeichner & Liston, 1991, p. 193).

As mentioned previously, action learning and action research are a feature of our Project, thus we envisage that there will be a range of stimulating and challenging dialogic encounters as we trial the literacy strategies with our colleagues and their students. It is our belief that academic staff, through their pedagogy, can provide powerful instances of learning and teaching, that they can model and scaffold for students effective strategies for learning and for achieving success in their particular disciplines. By integrating teaching techniques from the field of literacy into the teaching of other disciplines we believe that students will be initiated into the academic community in ways that are not premised on a discourse of deficit, but which place the student in a supportive context where they will be encouraged to explore intellectual challenges, and to learn to construct and make meaning through the language of their discipline. Based on the evidence to hand, and our experiences so far, it seems that our approach does facilitate successful literacy learning for first year students.

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Learning and teaching the culture of criticism and argument in Public Health

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Abstract

This paper describes the collaboration between a lecturer in Public Health Management and a learning support lecturer in teaching students how to write critical, argumentative essays and project proposals. The collaboration began after the subject lecturer identified problems in student assignments of plagiarism, uncritical use of sources, lack of argument and unclear essay structure. The Learning Centre was invited to take a weekly 45-minute session in the remaining six weeks of the subject to teach students how to become more critical readers and writers. This work continued in a second semester subject, *Sustainable Health*.

The paper discusses some cultural, epistemological and linguistic dimensions of learning to argue and criticise in the discipline of Public Health. It analyses essayist argumentation not as a universal skill but as a cultural discourse which has to be learned, but may be resisted. It examines the problems critical reading and writing pose for students who already have academic qualifications and considerable professional experience, but whose previous learning has not required a critical-analytical approach. The paper also describes and discusses the teaching and learning strategies used in the critical analysis sessions, including questionnaires about students' awareness of the conventions of academic writing, and text modelling and analysis activities which aim to develop skills in understanding the structure, register and logic of 'expert' and student texts. Some limitations of the program are discussed, including the personal and systemic barriers to achieving substantial change in cultures of learning, but the paper concludes that the collaboration achieved significant changes in students' ability to critically analyse texts and topics.

INTRODUCTION

The postgraduate Public Health Management program at the University of Western Sydney (UWS) Bankstown campus caters for both local and international students with professional backgrounds in all health disciplines. A key factor in the field of public health education should be to detect unmet educational needs and emerging opportunities, in order to guide public health priorities to create new programs of academic excellence (Benzevel, Judge, et al., 1995). Academic quality should be defined not only as strict adherence to the highest standards of higher education and research but also as the realisation of all possible efforts to teach and translate knowledge into action (Frenk, 1992). This paper will focus on the input of public health knowledge into practical educational decisions and applications, and the input of linguistic knowledge into the teaching of public health. It describes the collaboration between the subject lecturer and a learning support lecturer in teaching students how to write critically, with a particular focus on argumentative essays and project proposals.

The paper briefly defines public health as a discipline, and outlines:

- the rationale for collaboration and the problems faced;
- strategies adopted to address the issues;
- the theoretical basis of intervention;
- outcomes and evaluation;
- future directions.

PUBLIC HEALTH AS A DISCIPLINE

Public health is a socio-political concept aimed at the improvement of living and working conditions of the population. It encompasses three main concepts:

- protecting the public with clean air, safe water, sewage disposal, infection control
- prevention of illness, for example by immunisation programs, and
- promotion of lifestyles conducive to health by exercise, diet, minimising smoking and alcohol abuse.

These concepts have been enshrined by the World Health Organisation, *Global Strategy for Health for All by the Year 2000*, developed in 1981 (WHO, 1981).

Public health also includes the development of primary health care and rehabilitation and depends on development and collaboration between different sectors and agencies (Ashton & Seymour, 1992, pp. 21-22). Activities of public health are geared to the public interest of the population as a whole and are usually funded by government.

Public Health students and practitioners need high levels of oral and written communication skills in intercultural contexts. They need to be familiar with legislation, health policy and education practices, and be able to write texts, such as project proposals, discussion papers and project reports, which contribute to their professional work. Because Public Health is based on social and epidemiological research, practitioners also need to master research genres and methodologies in empirical as well as sociological paradigms.

PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM SUBJECTS

The critical analysis tutorials were conducted in two subjects.

- *Health Advancement* explores and critically evaluates theory and practice in Public Health, Primary Health Care and Health Promotion. Students develop, implement and critically evaluate programs.
- *Sustainable Health* explores the basic philosophies of the sustainable nature of environments, organisations and services related to contemporary management of organisations. Students utilise previous knowledge and skills in the consideration of the content of the subject.

The aim of public health education is to give public health professionals a flexible framework encompassing not only the epistemology and ideology of the paradigm but also the main approaches of theory and practice within the social, political, economic and ecological environmental context. Knowledge should be gleaned from past experiences and acknowledgement given to the real threats to public health by vigorously analysing what programs, strategies and policies will be the most appropriate and will best ensure a healthy sustainable future (Brown, 1992; Braidotti et al., 1994; Galbally, 1994).

THE RATIONALE FOR COLLABORATION

The collaboration began after the subject lecturer identified problems in significant aspects of the first two essays written in the autumn semester subject *Health Advancement* including:

- Literacy or critical thinking problems;
- Plagiarism and uncritical use of sources;
- Lack of argument and discussion;
- Unclear essay structure.

After an initial meeting to discuss the problem and possible approaches, the lecturers met weekly to refine strategies and develop materials which complemented the schedule of class activities and assignments.

THE PROBLEM

The two essays from *Health Advancement* revealed student-related and administrative problems.

Student issues included:

- Limited understanding of critical analysis;
- Poor writing skills;
- Poor comprehension skills;

- Language and cultural barriers.

These are elaborated on in the following sections.

Student Issues

Critical Analysis

The first essay required a critical analysis of public health issues. All submitted essays were descriptive in nature. Despite explanations in class and in course materials, the significance of the requirement of a critical analysis was not understood. No student asked for an explanation of critical analysis, and students claimed to have no prior experience in critical writing or analysis. This lack of enquiry and familiarity with the concept could be the result of class dynamics of first time university students settling in and assessing higher education requirements. It may also indicate that students did not see any distinction between critical analysis and the descriptive analysis which they apparently saw as sufficient for other subjects.

Poor Writing Skills

Analysis of the writing skills in the first essay showed:

- Inadequate topic definition;
- Unwieldy and cumbersome sentences;
- Lack of flow or logical linkage of ideas and themes;
- Inappropriate use of personal voice in scholarly writing;
- Poor skills in referencing and use of literature.

Poor Comprehension Skills

Analysis of student essays indicated poor comprehension skills:

- All twenty-two essays failed to address the question set.
- There was a failure to follow the format of the question as set out in the criteria requirements for the essay.
- The course guide, which gave further information about academic writing, was not utilised.

Language and Cultural Barriers

Class and student dynamics emerged as major underpinning reasons for the essay problems:

- Twelve of the twenty-two students were overseas graduates with very limited understanding of Australian academic requirements.
- Ten students spoke English as their first and only language. Of the remaining twelve students, English was, on average, their third-language spoken.
- Both local and overseas students were unfamiliar with common expectations and language features of postgraduate writing.

Administrative Issues

There were a number of administrative issues contributing to the student difficulties:

- General and course information appeared not to have been received by many students prior to enrolment, or students did not take advantage of this information.
- Students were not aware of the academic resources provided by the Learning Centre, including writing workshops, individual consultations and printed and web-based guidelines for academic writing.
- Students did not attend orientations to library facilities or technology required for higher learning and research, such as computer catalogues, databases, internet access and video conferencing.
- Some students had either very basic or no typing and word processor skills, and limited awareness of the function of Computer laboratories.
- Of the twenty-two students, seven (of whom three were overseas students) entered the class in the third or fourth week of the first semester, only one week before the first assignment was due.

The Learning Centre was invited to take a weekly 45 minute session in the remaining six weeks of the subject to teach students how to become more critical readers and writers. This work continued as a weekly workshop in the second semester subject *Sustainable Health*. The subject lecturer delivered the same material to a third subject *Contemporary Health Issues*.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS SESSIONS

Theoretical framework

The central challenge for the Learning Centre sessions was to develop a framework and strategies for explaining and teaching critical analysis. Adopting a sociocultural rather than cognitive perspective, critical analysis was interpreted as 'disciplinarity'. This interpretation is similar to the second level of Barnett's (1997) three-level analysis of criticality in higher education. The lowest level, 'critical thinking', is inadequate because the notion of decontextualised individual cognitive processes (see for example Ennis, 1987) neglects the crucial social dimensions of thinking. The 'disciplinarity' approach is comparable to Barnett's second level, 'critical thought', or socially constructed, context-dependent reasoning. Barnett's third level, *critique*, or criticism of the discipline, was judged to be beyond the practical possibilities of a short-term program. Nevertheless, in its focus on the language of Public Health texts, the program attempted to provide students with some of the basic tools for the development of a metacritical perspective.

Treating critical analysis from a sociocultural perspective as reasoning shaped by context discourages deficit models of learning. Students' difficulties in writing analytically and argumentatively can be viewed as a lack of familiarity with particular conventions of literacy, rather than as an inability to be critical. Adopting the metaphor of 'interlanguage' (e.g. Selinker, 1992), students' texts are more productively regarded as applications of already-learned language practices, or approximations of new genres, not as 'bad' essays.

A sociocultural and language-focused approach to teaching critical analysis is consistent also with the Vygotskian notion that individual higher mental functioning derives from social life and is mediated by language (see Wertsch, 1991). To elaborate the linguistic framework of this approach, the program drew on systemic functional linguistics (SFL) (e.g. Halliday, 1994; Martin, 1992; Hasan, 1984). SFL provides a socio-semantic explanation of texts and their relationship to the contexts of culture and situation, and provides a useful tool for mapping text development, explaining significant language choices within stages of a text, and proposing reasons for these choices. In practical terms, SFL provided a resource for class discussion of the purposes and generic structures of essays and proposals, the linguistic evidence and expression of important cultural or disciplinary values, and the meanings and linguistic forms of salient aspects of register.

Teaching and learning activities

An overview of the content of the critical analysis tutorials in two subjects, *Health Advancement* (HA) and *Sustainable Health* (SH) is provided in Table 1. The program included a questionnaire, analyses of published texts in Public Health, feedback on students' own writing, and discussion of the cultural frameworks and characteristic language features of essays and proposals.

Table 1. Overview of critical analysis tutorials in *Health Advancement* and *Sustainable Health*.

Subject	Tutorial topic	Aspects of critical analysis / literacy fostered
HA	Questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of different cultural expectations of writing
HA SH	Analysis of 'expert' essays & research reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying thesis and key elements of argument • Staging of texts and paragraph structure • Identification of theoretical framework • Substantiation of arguments • Critical discussion of evidence; comparison of theories and claims • The register of argument: conjunctions, modality, attitudinal lexis
SH	Analysis of project proposals & reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying purpose • Staging and paragraphing • Awareness of the ecological and administrative orientations of Public Health • Role of literature review in establishing context for the proposal
HA SH	Subject assignments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generic structure and purposes of essays and proposals • Structure of particular essay or proposal - addressing issues raised by assignment question, topic or instructions • Definitions and theoretical framework • Analysis and synthesis of sources • Self-evaluation, using checklists and text structure diagrams • Guided reflection: peer and tutor feedback on drafts

The program began with a questionnaire. Students were asked to identify from a list of fifteen items which academic conventions and skills lecturers in current and previous studies considered to be most important and which ones they had difficulties with. They were also asked to define *an essay*. Three conventions which were regarded as important in both current and previous studies were *wide reading*, *independent research*, *referring to theory* and *making use of ideas from specialist journals*. Three items which appeared to be more important to current lecturers were *referencing*, *referring to theory* and *complex argumentation*. The most pronounced increases in perceived importance were in *referencing*, *comparing and contrasting different writers*, *complex argument* and *impersonal language*.

The most difficult activities were *writing critically and argumentatively* and *knowing when it is acceptable to include your own opinions*. The least difficult were *using the catalogue*, *comparing readings* and *making notes and summarising*.

These results, together with the evidence of students' definitions of essays as information reports with an introduction-body-conclusion structure, appear to confirm that problems with the first 'critical analysis' assignment had important cultural and linguistic dimensions. Whereas students' writing in previous information-based courses had typically consisted of 'knowledge-retelling' activities such as summarising or quoting with or without references, their first essay in this subject demanded that they develop arguments and apply Public Health theory to current issues. Because of their unfamiliarity with this genre, an analysis of essay-type 'expert' texts appeared to be a useful way of providing direction for their own writing.

Analysis of Public Health texts

In the design of the program, the subject lecturer provided an overview of the field of Public Health, some of its key journals and genres. Text analysis by the Learning Centre lecturer aimed to uncover ways the theoretical, academic, legislative and practical bases of the discipline are sustained, developed and debated in the language of essays and research articles, in documents such as WHO reports, and in proposals for funding. One of the most interesting features of many Public Health texts is the interplay of diverse paradigms, especially empirical science and social critique. This complexity presents a challenge to students, who must begin to learn the multi-faceted and often overlapping genres and roles of health worker, community advocate, medical researcher, educator and project manager.

The four genres selected for the critical analysis program - the issues essay, the research report, the project proposal and the project report - are important tools for constructing those roles. The texts used for analysis and comparison in *Health Advancement* were two 'issues' essays from *Social Science and Medicine (SSM)*, and two research reports from the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health (ANZJPH)*. In *Sustainable Health*, the class examined an essay, two authentic project proposals and, in less detail, a project report. The small number of 'expert' text-types used does not allow even a simplistic taxonomy of Public Health texts to be developed, but some important and perhaps characteristic features can be identified. Drawing on SFL, the texts were analysed firstly at a macro level of functional stages and argumentative moves, and later at a micro level of register and lexicogrammar. After the analysed texts were discussed, students attempted a similar stage analysis of another text in the same genre. The analyses were not just structural, but attempted to demonstrate how the epistemology and critical-analytical orientation of the discipline could be traced in the staged development of an argument, report or proposal, its location within a carefully defined theoretical framework, the use of rhetorical strategies such as comparison and contrast, claim and evidence, and the lexicogrammatical features which realise these strategies.

The following brief analysis of one of the *ANZJPH* texts, "Taking a count: The evaluation of genetic testing" (Hall, Viney & Haas, 1998) shows some of the interplay of competing ideologies and its traces in genre, argumentation and grammar. The authors argue that 'conventional' (i.e. scientific) evaluation of genetic testing focuses on health outcomes for individuals and neglects significant social outcomes, such as the impact of information about birth defects on families, and conclude that this omission makes the evaluation incomplete. Some of the strategies used to develop this argument include:

- A staged *generic* structure: background ^ thesis ^ definitions ^ incidence of genetic disorders ^ information and health outcomes of testing ^ theoretical framework ^ benefits & problems of testing (individuals, special case of prenatal screening, effects on families, social effects) ^ conclusion (^ = is followed by);

- An *ideological* stance and framework which makes a case for consideration of ‘social’ perspective alongside the dominant empirical and economic perspectives;
- A *rhetorical* structure in which claims are supported by research evidence and are used to challenge claims which rely solely on narrowly scientific and individualistic evidence;
- Frequent use of *logical* relationships of contrast and comparison to signal the critical analysis of evidence;
- *Interpersonally*, the authors establish a critical stance toward the ‘scientific’ evidence through the grammatical resources of modality and attitudinal lexis.

An example of the micro-level register analysis of the essay text from *ANZJPH* can be seen in Figure 1 below from a handout to students.

1 Logic At the paragraph and sentence level, the basic argumentative or critical strategy is contrast. Look at how often the writer uses the word ‘but’ or ‘however’ to contrast different approaches to evaluating testing genetic testing. The strategy is not to deny the value of the economic or health benefit approaches, but to put into play another way of seeing the issue.

2 Attitude and evaluation ... Look at the way the writers indicate their attitude to previous research and to their own in the paragraph below:

In the case of prenatal screening programs ... success is **generally** measured as the number of cases avoided, although **in some cases** it is measured as a cost per affected pregnancy detected. This is a **simplistic** approach to a **complex** issue ... **Sometimes** the effect on the parents of caring for a disabled or diseased child is considered. Thus parents’ quality of life is **considered**, but that of a child with the disorder is **ignored or in effect set at zero**.

Figure 1. Extract from handout to students.

Similar analyses were made of project proposals and, in lesser detail, research reports and project reports. One of the main challenges for teachers using this kind of modelling is to find an appropriate balance between simplified descriptions of generic structure and the context-specific structures, argumentation and language choices of particular texts. The program attempted to achieve this balance by shifting the focus of attention in class discussion from the general (for example, questions of the social purpose of particular genres) to the particular (for example, the reasons for the choice of *this* word or *this* quotation in *this* text, or the range of choices available for *this* assignment).

Analysis of student texts

These crucial text features were also used to guide critical reflection on students’ own texts. Some students agreed to let their marked essays be read and discussed in class, and one tutorial in the series was devoted to discussion of the structure and argumentation of these student texts. Students were also invited to bring drafts to the Learning Centre before the essay or proposal was submitted to their lecturer. Feedback on these drafts focussed principally on text structure, argument and citation. To encourage students to develop skills in reading their own essays and proposals critically, they were given ‘self-evaluation checklists’. The essay checklist contains statements such as: “*I have:*

- *read critically, aiming firstly to understand the literature and then to summarise, synthesise and evaluate it;*
- *developed a plan for the essay which maps its parts and their function in the argument;*
- *written an introduction which tells the reader my thesis (my position on the question) and which outlines the way the essay will be developed;*
- *outlined omissions or problems with previous research;*
- *identified my assumptions or critical perspective;*
- *used evidence which principally includes academic journal articles;*
- *synthesised readings, or compared and contrasted them.”*

OUTCOMES OF THE PROGRAM

Between the idea / And the reality / Between the motion / And the act / Falls the shadow (TS Eliot, The hollow men, 1925)

The critical analysis program achieved some of the goals set for it. It made a considerable difference to the writing of some students in the three subjects. As they continued through the program, these students were able to write, often for the first time, essays and proposals which displayed structural unity, an awareness of conventions of argument such as citing disciplinary sources, and the use of theoretical frameworks for analysis drawn from the discipline. Student evaluations too were positive, although they commonly suggested that an orientation to academic writing expectations should be given at the beginning of the course.

Nevertheless, some students' assignments did not show the results hoped for. In *Sustainable Health*, some essays and proposals did not have an appropriate generic structure; some quoted without referencing, or sources were used uncritically (i.e. the sources were not synthesised, or they were not fitted into the student's own analytic framework). The consequence for two students was that assignments had to be resubmitted. Another three students did not hand in assignments on the due date. In all these cases, the linguistic, administrative and skills issues described earlier in the paper continued and interfered with some students' ability to attend class or to make full use of the resources discussed in class. The students who handed work in late were not only struggling with the cultural dimensions of academic literacy; they were also coping with practical difficulties like two-hour trips by public transport to the university, looking for part-time employment, and learning basic skills of computing and electronic research. Furthermore, some students were studying for the Masters degree primarily as a means of enhancing career opportunities, and this pragmatic orientation may have been at odds with the teachers' goal of developing critical thought. Some may even have resisted critical analysis, not seeing it as important to either past or future studies or professional life.

If, as Vygotsky argues, sociocultural action is mediated through language and if, as social semioticians like Halliday have argued, culture constructs language and language constructs culture, then the mixed results of our project are not surprising. The students who could not do critical analysis were not intellectually inferior to those who could; the main problem was, as Fox (1994, p. 125) suggests, they had been socialised by family, teachers and history, into different (not inferior) relationships with texts and authorities. For many of the students, previous and even concurrent studies (for they reported that critical analysis was not expected in all subjects in the degree) allowed and encouraged them to read compliantly and to write as knowledge-retellers. Perhaps the fact that so many students were able to adapt to the 'Western' version of academic culture and literacy is surprising. Their previous cultures of learning, and the current lack of systematic attention to what they know, what they need to know, and how to help them get there, will continue to erect barriers to 'doing' critical analysis. Without a consistent teaching focus on the complex cognitive and textual strategies of argumentation, synthesis, analysis and evaluation in a wide range of subjects, students may have too few opportunities and too little time to become skilled and critical readers and writers.

CONCLUSION

On the whole, the critical analysis program was reasonably effective. Many students became more critical readers and writers, and the integration of content and language learning, combined with the professional collaboration and professional development of the teachers, provides a model for further course development. This development could take two forms. First, we hope to broaden the range of contexts in which critical analysis and academic literacy are taught. This would mean that a language and culture-focused pedagogy becomes part of a wider range of subjects in Public Health, with subject lecturers using resources and strategies such as explanations and discussion of the cultural context, purposes and register of academic texts. Secondly, it is important to assist students and lecturers to identify the cultural and personal knowledge, skills and literacies which students bring with them to tertiary study, and to systematically build on and extend this heritage. As part of this goal, a staged development of genres can be aimed at, beginning with those already familiar to students. If these goals are achieved, students should become more confident users and critics of the modes of thinking and writing in Public Health.

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What difference does a discipline make?

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Abstract

Disciplines indeed make a difference to the development of students' learning and academic literacy. The university community is not homogeneous, but rather consists of specialised communities of 'tribes and territories' that are formed around different frameworks of knowledge. The members of these communities share ideologies, practices and discourses that students are expected to acquire, often tacitly. The different discourses are built through different genres, forms of thinking, citation practices and grammatical choices. Although generic skills give some understanding of and guidance in the culture and expectations of university, and some general guidance in writing and reading skills, they are not enough to give students an understanding of the essence of their specialised field. When disciplinary cultural practices are examined, a better understanding of critical literacy is possible, for both students and language and learning specialists. Having an understanding of their own discipline and its tacit knowledge can also make a difference to the teaching of language and learning specialists.

INTRODUCTION

All learning and language occurs within a context, and every context has its own culture. At university the context is represented by a culture of signs, symbols and traditions. Within this culture there are universal assumptions and expectations that apply and which distinguish the university from other learning cultures. Some of these assumptions are that students will work within the specialised and reflexive, rather than the everyday, domains of learning (Macken-Horarik, 1996), that they will move from knowledge reproduction to knowledge construction, and that they will demonstrate their own knowledge through use of the literature and discourse of the field. However, the university context is not homogeneous. As students become socialised into the university they discover that it consists of sub-cultures that have evolved from different epistemological purposes. These sub-cultures are the disciplines.

The disciplines are communities of 'tribes and territories' (Becher, 1989) which have allegiances to a variety of ideologies and discourses and are sites for a variety of social practices. These allegiances form around clusters and frameworks of knowledge with various aggregations ranging from the broad disciplinary groupings (such as the Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities and Applied Professions) to small segments, or specialisms (Becher, 1989). King and Brownell (1966) define a discipline as a community which has a tradition, a particular set of values and beliefs, a mode of inquiry and a conceptual structure.

Even within knowledge communities, there are sub-communities, or specialisms, that are distinguished from one another by different philosophies. An example of this is Law where, in the area of jurisprudence, there is a belief that the law is certain, stable in its doctrine, and has a degree of consensus (Simpson & Charlesworth, 1995). In comparison, the specialism of critical legal studies questions the internal logic and political neutrality of Law (Smart, 1989). Sometimes specialisms from different disciplinary fields have more in common with other fields than their own. This cross-over occurs because one theory can inform diverse fields. An example of this practice is chaos theory, which is shared by such disciplinary communities as physics, psychology and sociology. Every time students enter a different disciplinary or sub-disciplinary field, they become social subjects within those cultures and are expected to have some understanding of the practices and the essence of the culture. In order to participate and to be successful learners within their disciplines, students need to have some understanding of their disciplinary culture, its epistemology, what is valued as ways of working and acceptable as evidence, and have at least a basic understanding of the discourse of their field.

The next section will explore the nature of the knowledge in these disciplinary cultures and the implications of these contexts for students' learning. These cultures will be examined broadly at the level of the disciplines. There is some danger in working with generalisations in this way, but, because of the complexities of the disciplines already mentioned, a detailed examination would be too complex for this paper. Despite this, at the

broad level, there are patterns in the epistemologies and discourses that, when identified, can be useful to guide students through these specialised fields, and which also raise issues about the applicability and appropriateness of teaching generic skills. Becher's extensive cultural and ethnographic study of disciplinary knowledge and practices (1987, 1989, 1990) is here drawn upon for an understanding of the epistemology of the different fields, and some of the language characteristics that will be discussed are based on an earlier study by Parry and Pittman (1996). The broad fields that will be examined are the Sciences, the Humanities and the Social Sciences and, all the text examples used gained a 'High Distinction' grade, indicating their acceptability in their disciplinary field.

THE DISCIPLINARY CULTURES AND THEIR PRACTICES

The disciplines are concerned with building knowledge about different aspects of the world and there is a close association between the knowledge communities and their knowledge forms. The epistemological focus of the Sciences is on the physical world and there is a particular concern with describing, and organising this world through descriptions, taxonomies and classifications, and explanations (Halliday & Martin, 1993). In order to do this, there is an emphasis on clarity of criteria, universality of laws, validity and consistency. According to Kuhn (1970), the knowledge grows in a cumulative fashion.

New claims are made dispassionately and under the guise of objectivity (Becher, 1989). A common belief about the Sciences is that the knowledge is factual and firmly based and that the members in this field share a uniform framework of thought and an understanding of the methodology and technical language. Bazerman (1988) argues that the acceptance without question of data-gathering techniques is evidence of this uniformity of thought. Observations are highly valued as a form of evidence and the way they are reported can help to perpetuate an (often tacit) assumption in the Sciences that the world 'out there' has an existence separate from the social world of the research-process and the researchers' opinions. Text 1 is an excerpt from the literature review section of a student's report and contains evidence of some of these features:

Text 1:

Seagrasses are a small group of angiosperms which live and frequently form extensive, dense meadows in shallow, sheltered marine waters. Their ability to live in a saline environment, to maintain normal physiological functions and reproduce when completely submerged and their well developed anchoring system distinguishes them from terrestrial angiosperms (Howard & Edgar, 1994).

In Text 1 the writer is concerned with reporting existing knowledge. The writing is descriptive and the knowledge is reported with apparent objectivity and with a high degree of certainty. This is evident in examples such as *seagrasses are ...; which live ... in shallow sheltered marine waters; their ability to ... distinguishes them*. This certainty, or 'factual' writing, is one of the conventions of the sciences that is perpetuated and gives the impression that the knowledge is a 'given' and therefore hard to challenge. Although there is a body of knowledge that recognises the Sciences as a social construction (e.g. Knorr-Cetina, 1981; Mulkay, 1979), in practice, it is often ignored when it comes to lecturers' expectations of students. As the assignment progresses, students are expected to 'factually' report their findings from observations. These findings become 'facts' (Latour & Woolgar, 1979) and build on existing knowledge, thus contributing to cumulative knowledge building and also to maintaining the status quo (Parry & Pittman, 1996).

The knowledge in the Humanities is usually built through personal interpretations in order to provide deeper layers of understanding about the world of human experiences (Parry, 1997). Becher argues that a store of detail is collected and the knowledge meanders and evolves. This disciplinary field is concerned with particulars, in comparison with the Sciences, which focus on universals (Becher, 1989). Some of the specialisms represented in the Humanities include literature, art, history, music and some areas of archaeology, psychology and law. Since the disciplinary field is concerned with interpreting human experiences, the knowledge claims are highly personal and value laden, and methodological frameworks are not strongly emphasised. Instead, the knowledge and, therefore, also the arguments in assignments, are built through complex forms of reasoning in which judgment and persuasion play an important role (Becher, 1987). In the example in Text 2 below, the student is examining a novel:

Text 2:

The 'active' hero is the character of Noboru a mere 13 year old child, son of the desired and reciprocating woman, Fusako. The contrived tension by Mishima is apparent in the fluid use of his dichotomy of active hero/passive hero, as a reading under Marxist theory this would place Ryuji's role as 'active' due to 'alienation of the individual' (Selden & Widdowson, 1992:83) and it is his distancing from the sea that motivates and causes narrative action and shocking denouement. He is the ultimate hero in death, deliberately poisoned by the child Noboru, impelled to act and empowered through gang membership. Mishima's definition of disturbed character traits appear akin to those of other Western I-novels with Mishima's action being slightly different in that he clinically probes the darker sides of human psyche and takes negative interior qualities of modern adulthood- - obsession, loss of innocence and inner torment – and reconfigures them in the fatherless child, Noboru. For example, the killing of a kitten and its dissection blended with glorified sexuality is a marker of Noboru's entry into manhood, acknowledged by the Chief of the gang (47 – 51).

The paragraph consists of detail, an example of which is the first sentence. Many of these details consist of the writer's own interpretation and judgment (e.g. *contrived tension; fluid use of his dichotomy of active hero/passive hero; he is the ultimate hero in death.*). The writer is arguing for the reader to accept this perspective, thus there is argument to change the status quo (Parry & Pittman, 1996). However, in this field, there is a diversity of criteria and a lack of consensus about what constitutes a credible contribution to the field, which means that the writer has to establish some common ground with the reader. In order to do this, the topic or object under investigation is contextualised in some way. This contextualisation often involves giving some historical background or recounting of previous events, by telling a 'story' about the object, or, as is the case in Text 2, by exploring a possible 'reading' of the text (*as a reading under Marxist theory this would place Ryuji's role as 'active'*).

The epistemological roots of the Social Sciences derive from both the Humanities discipline of moral philosophy and the discourse of the physical sciences (Wignell, 1998), therefore this field contains elements from both the Humanities and the Sciences. This is evident in the variety of specialisms in the Social Sciences which range from sociology, management, some branches of law and psychology, through to applied professions such as education and nursing. The purpose of the Social Sciences is to explain the social world (Lewins, 1992) and so, cause and effect relationships play a major role in the explanations. Wignell (1998) has found that, in contrast with the Sciences, the objects being examined in the Social Sciences are processes rather than things.

Becher, Kogan and Henkel (1994, p. 76) describe the Social Sciences as 'incorrigibly disunited, subversive and lacking a stable theoretical core or tradition'. Social phenomena are 'shot through with indeterminacy and open-endedness' (Bohman, 1991, p. 1). There are no universal laws and criteria for judging the reliability and validity of the knowledge in the Social Sciences, as there are in the Sciences. Thus, knowledge is open to scrutiny and appraisal and writers therefore have to establish common ground with their readers. This common ground, in contrast with the Humanities, is found in models, protocols, constructs and frameworks. The fields therefore are theory dependent and use advanced methodological skills. This is evident in Text 3 below in which the student is exploring the concepts of power and class through two perspectives - Marxism and functionalism.

Text 3:

Marxist theory momentarily converges with functionalism in acknowledging the interdependency of stratified classes, in Marxist terms, between the two great economic classes. However, as indicated by Biestedt (1974), from this point a fundamental divergence of theory occurs. While functionalism attempts to legitimise inequality on the basis of naturally determined superiority, Marxism contends that this interdependency constitutes an equal importance of roles, which therefore necessitates equal reward (Wright, 1994). Without one, the other cannot survive. It stands to reason, then, as argued by Lenski (1966), that it is the labour, fundamental to the capitalist system, which holds the greatest power.

In Text 3 the writer relies, not on her own voice, but on the voices from the literature, or the theory, to make knowledge claims and to establish common ground with the reader. The purpose of this assignment is to explore the world through two perspectives and to contrast these perspectives. This contrast is not only a way of scrutinising knowledge but also helps to add to existing knowledge by providing another perspective. This

practice is rarely found in the Sciences and requires a particular form of thinking - it has a strong focus on appraisal and critical thinking. In the Sciences, critical thinking is based on using laws and clear criteria as benchmarks; in the Social Sciences, the definition of terms and theoretical perspectives are often used as benchmarks.

Of course, as acknowledged earlier in this paper, not all specialisms can be allocated to one broad disciplinary 'box' such as Sciences, Social Sciences or Humanities. The matter is much more complex and beyond the scope of this paper. There are also communities of applied disciplines and professions (e.g. Engineering) and sub-communities and specialisms that have elements of more than one of the broad disciplinary groups (e.g. Architecture, Land Use Management). An added complexity is the influence of ideological and/or philosophical perspectives such as postmodernism, feminism or critical theory on the knowledge claims made in a discipline or specialism. Despite these influences, the point being made here is that knowledge is examined in a cultural context that has mores, values and practices that distinguish one context from another. These influences are evident through the discourse and types of texts produced in these contexts.

DISCOURSES AND TEXT TYPES

The different cultural contexts of the disciplines are represented through their discourses. Discourses are more than just the choice of language, or vocabulary, they are social practices. Gee (1990) argues that a discourse includes ways of speaking, behaving, reading and writing, that are commonly accepted by the social group. This discourse includes both disciplinary practices and disciplinary knowledge. There is a developing body of literature within the framework of linguistics and discourse analysis that is mapping the construction of disciplinary discourses in texts used in the workplace, as well as in different educational settings. This literature includes Maley's (1994) work on the language of Law, genre analyses of Business texts in Bhatia (1993), Halliday and Martin (1993) on Science and Veel and Coffin (1996) on the discourse of secondary school history. These discourses are evident in the types of texts that are produced.

Writers use their disciplinary discourse to negotiate their stance with and gain acceptance in their discourse community. The writer thus engages in a goal oriented social process that progresses in stages to produce a genre (Martin, 1992). Examples of genres are reports, explanations, descriptions, narratives and recounts, and they reflect the purpose and some of the ideologies of the disciplinary contexts. These texts are, as Halliday argues, neither neutral nor generic, but are instances of meaning in the particular contexts, and this relationship between the context and the text is dialectical; that is, language is not merely a conduit for the context: 'The text creates the context as much as the context creates the text' (Halliday & Hasan, 1985).

Since the purpose of the Sciences is to describe, classify and explain the physical world, the genre which helps the writer to achieve this purpose is the report. This, in turn, contains a technical and abstract language that characterises the Sciences. The technicality is built using taxonomies and classifications that order the world (Martin, 1993). Text 1 contains an example of a taxonomy in the statement, *seagrasses are a small group of angiosperms*. The report genre also determines the way in which the argument is built in the Sciences, from the bottom up (Becher, 1987). The writer lays the foundations through the method and results and then begins to discuss the implications and presents propositions to explain the findings.

In the Humanities, the most frequently-used genres that assist the writer in persuading the reader to accept another perspective are the narrative and recount which, in turn, build a discursive form of exposition in the form of an essay (Parry & Pittman, 1996). Narratives aim at clarity through their descriptions. The narrative element can be long sections of text or as short as a sentence, as in this example from Text 2:

The 'active' hero is the character of Noboru a mere 13 year old child, son of the desired and reciprocating woman, Fusako.

The narrative enables the writer to build visual images as it progresses, and it moves from the more visual descriptions of events to an abstract and metaphorical interpretation of the events. Examples of these abstract metaphors from Text 2 are *dichotomy of active hero/passive hero, Western I-novels, obsession, loss of innocence and inner torment*. The language of the Humanities is therefore highly abstract and metaphorical.

In contrast, the Social Sciences use a discourse that is technical, abstract and metaphorical (Wignell, 1998). Since the major purpose of this disciplinary field is to explain the social world, the dominant genre is the exposition, in essay format, which relies upon explanation with justification. Explanations enable the writer to demonstrate how and why events are related, but the writer is also expected to justify the explanation. This strong focus on explanation means that cause and effect relationships are explored in detail. The argument is discursive, formed by references to knowledge claims and propositions mentioned previously, and evidenced in language examples such as: *as can be seen from Smith's example, in the previous section, however; even though the definition*. The discursiveness is also built through detailed explanations which are used to negotiate a position.

This complexity of the disciplines creates a dilemma for students. They are expected to not only take on the knowledge of their field of study, but also to conform to some of its practices. However, the matter is not as straightforward as teaching students the differences between the discourses. There is also the tacit knowledge that accompanies the culture of the disciplinary field. Citations are used in this paper to demonstrate the implicit knowledge needed to become accepted into a disciplinary group.

TACIT KNOWLEDGE AND CITATIONS

Disciplinary cultures are constructed through attitudes, values, beliefs and mores, some of which are tacit. It is particularly the 'taken-for-granted' issues with which students have the most difficulty and the reason that they often seek help from language and learning advisers. These 'taken-for-granted' aspects are the tacit knowledge of a discipline. An example is the use of citations. Ravetz (1971, p. 256) argues that the 'etiquette of citation will depend very strongly on the particular characteristics of the field and ... on the style of the local community'. In the Sciences, the citations tend to focus on the knowledge or findings, reflecting the value placed on knowledge as a form of evidence in the Sciences, as in Text 4 below:

Text 4:

Most Australian coastlines developed during the later Holocene phase of relatively stable sea-level (stillstand). During this stillstand saltmarsh, mangrove and seagrass communities (intertidal wetlands) have built up depositional terraces along sheltered parts of the coastline (Bird, 1988). The unconsolidated sediment and the small transverse gradient of the intertidal zone makes these plant communities very prone to erosion and sensitive to changes in sea-level (Vanderzee, 1988). Intertidal wetlands have adjusted to previous sea-level fluctuations but the consequences of a rise in the near future may be different from those of the past (Adam, 1995).

MacRoberts and MacRoberts (1984) report that science writers either do not cite at all, thus avoiding confrontation, or they cite perfunctorily and without comment. They claim that these techniques are interpreted by readers 'in the know' as a negative reference. Martin also found that in the Sciences 'contentious interpretations are either dressed up as if uncontentious or are omitted' (1993, p. 197).

In comparison, in the Social Sciences the source of the knowledge is integrated with the writer's propositions and knowledge claims, and disciplinary alignments and/or influences are often explicitly stated. Theoretical/disciplinary alignments are evident through expressions such as: *this work is based on Bloggs' framework; the concept of leader needs to be set within the context of the argument developed by Bloggs (1987); Bloggs' perspective on X has influenced this paper*. Text 5 below, from an education student, contains evaluations and the writer's perspective on the knowledge (underlined).

Text 5:

Still other conflicts abound regarding the paradigms. Walker and Evers (1994) mount complex logical arguments as to whether the conflicting paradigms are incommensurable, exist in unity or are technically complimentary ... The very postulates of some paradigms, and whether they exhibit logical disjunctions are questioned by Guba (1990). This issue is particularly important in education where the critical paradigm (and related research styles) seems to be prominent (Bessant & Holbrook, 1995).

Explicitly citing, and in some cases evaluating the source, assists the writers in the Social Sciences to take a position within the established literature and this literature is highly valued as evidence. In Text 5 the writer is

participating in two highly valued generic practices at university - demonstrating knowledge of the literature and taking a position, or creating a niche - but is doing so in a way that is appropriate for, and peculiar to, a particular disciplinary field. Thus, part of the tacit knowledge in the Social Sciences is the value placed on attitude and appraisal of sources. Generic skills cannot teach students this tacit knowledge, and in fact, often the generic skills taught in referencing and citations focus more on form than function.

Even within disciplines there are fields that have developed highly specialised forms and functions of citations and referencing that reflect and assist in knowledge-building in the field. An example is the high value placed on paraphrasing, rather than quoting, in many of the Social Sciences, but this is not usually the case in Law, as Korner (1998) demonstrates. In this specialism she found that quotes are used in a variety of ways, and just as frequently as paraphrases. This reflects the value placed within this disciplinary field upon precedents and judgments as forms of evidence. However, and more importantly, if the writer wants to create the appropriate 'tone', these quotes (acting as the outside 'voices' in the text) are often woven with the writer's voice into one sentence (Pittman, 1999) as in the example below:

In the case of Andrews, controversy surrounded the judgment of Lord Atkin who stated that 'of all the epithets that can be applied' to the degree of negligence 'reckless most nearly covers the case'.

When students select the appropriate citation practices for their field they begin to build a tone and discourse that are acceptable within their disciplinary community.

In order to be successful in their field, students need to know these practices, which are often an intuitive understanding of the essence of their own discipline rather than an explicit knowledge. Failure to have this intuitive understanding is often unconsciously used as a sorting device in academic study and taken as evidence that the students have not gained the explicit knowledge of their field (Gerholm, 1990). The tacit knowledge takes the practices of disciplines beyond the scope of generic workshops.

ROLE OF GENERIC SKILLS TEACHING AND IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE AND LEARNING ADVISERS

There are 'levels' and degrees of generic knowledge and skills. At the level of the university, generic knowledge about the university culture, its expectations and values can assist students' socialisation into a new learning environment. The knowledge is useful in understanding the overall purpose and context of university, and the expectations of students. Generic knowledge can also be useful within a discipline, where the characteristics of a specialism may cross disciplinary boundaries and reflect more characteristics from another disciplinary area than from its own. An example of this would be in the cross-disciplinary specialism of Land Use Planning which contains elements of both the social and the scientific. Even in developing fields, generic skills can be helpful for the students until the sub-specialism develops its own identity.

Although Becher argues that some generic skills are inappropriate or inapplicable to some fields of study - for example, rapid reading methods are of little use to students in fields such as mathematics, and philosophy (Becher, Kogan & Henkel, 1994) - generic skills provide a guide for students. Having a general understanding, for example, about how the academic essay differs from a school essay at least gives students some direction for their learning and a glimpse at the cultural context of the university. Likewise, being given an understanding of the range of functions of citations can assist students' understanding of the role of citations in knowledge construction. The generic skills can also be a solution to the problem of limited resources amongst language and learning specialists when it is not possible to provide a staff member specialised in all fields. Teaching generic skills, thus, gives the students guidance and provides them with a form of 'benchmark' that they can use to identify the practices in their own field.

However, just as content specialists may not be able to make their tacit knowledge explicit so, also, language and learning advisers must be aware of the influence of their own disciplinary culture and tacit knowledge upon their teaching. They need to be able to identify their own disciplinary alignments, values and ideologies and their accompanying practices. How do the advisers know that the skills they are teaching are not, in fact, some of their own tacit knowledge? Quotes and paraphrases are a case in point, where students are taught generically that paraphrasing is expected and acceptable. Yet, in Law quotes are highly valued, perhaps more so than

paraphrases in some specialisms such as jurisprudence, where legislation and judgments are the major form of evidence in assignments.

Another issue to consider, particularly in light of on-going discussions (e.g. Ballard, 1994; Lee, 1997), is the professional status of language and learning advisers and their own knowledge base. Staff in this area come from many disciplinary fields; however, they have a common aim - to support students' learning, and academic language and literacy. Thus, they are working with the knowledge field of language and learning that contains its own epistemology and theories. Language and learning advisers should, at least, be grounding their own teaching within the literature so that they are able to identify the theories of language and learning that inform their teaching. This would avoid the problem of teaching writing, for example, from a series of motherhood statements, folklore and their own experience as students. Thinking of literacy as a generic skill contributes to the 'literacy culture shock' (Nevile, 1996) experienced by students as they enter university or cross-disciplinary boundaries. Green (cited in Reid, 1997) argues that generic skills tend to teach only the operational and cultural dimensions of literacy and to ignore the critical literacy that comes from examining the cultural practices. This learning can only occur within disciplinary boundaries.

Teaching generic skills, particularly outside disciplinary boundaries, has the potential to marginalise language and learning specialists and, as Lee (1997, p. 76) argues, perpetuates the belief that literacy is 'autonomous, generic, generalisable and technical' rather than a social practice. Working with content specialists provides language and learning specialists with access to the pedagogy of the discourse and thus, provides an opportunity to make the discourse explicit, to have an impact on the pedagogy and to work in collegial situations where their work is sanctioned.

CONCLUSION

Disciplines do make a difference to the ways in which students are expected to learn and operate within their disciplinary culture. Disciplinary contexts are organised around specific social practices, knowledge and ideologies. They thus contain discourses that encompass ways of thinking, reading, writing and speaking which cannot be achieved in a few broadly-based sessions on how to write an essay. To fully understand a subject it is necessary to immerse oneself in the discourse. Although there is a place for generic skills teaching, generic skills and knowledge are not enough. Students and the language and learning specialists both need to understand the function of language and expectations of learning within these disciplinary contexts. This issue is becoming increasingly important with the proliferation of multi-disciplinary degrees.

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Generic vs context embedded study skills support: A tale of two essays

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Abstract

This paper describes a short program of essay-writing instruction that has been embedded into a unit in The Faculty of the Sciences, UNE, from 1996-1999. The program was evaluated using three approaches. A quasi-experimental comparison of marks for a subsequent essay in another unit was undertaken, comparing students who had attended the essay-writing workshops to those who had not. This revealed that over the four years there were no significant differences in the marks between the workshop and non-workshop groups. Results from student interviews and an anonymous questionnaire in 1999 suggested that the students thought that they had benefited from the workshops. It is argued that lack of transfer of the essay-writing skills is one probable cause for the lack of apparent workshop effect. This suggests that there are constraints to the utility of context-embedded study skills support, and that a combination of linked generic and context-embedded programs could optimise student learning.

INTRODUCTION

Context of this study

This study took place after the researcher delivered two essay-writing workshops to a group of first year science students. The workshops were integrated into a unit curriculum, linked to a particular essay, and the program had been in place for some years. This program is one example of the efforts of The University of New England to enhance integrated study skills support within disciplines and faculties. This process is in the relatively early stages in the Faculty of the Sciences and has been described by Muldoon (1999). This paper is an extension of a report by Quinn (1999), and aims to assess the effectiveness of the workshops in achieving the objective of enhancing student essay-writing skills.

Study skills and 'life-long learning' skills

Providing explicit study skills support for first year tertiary students has become increasingly common in the past couple of decades. The perceived need for this support has increased, partly in response to the current climate of mass tertiary education, inadequately skilled students enrolling at university, increased attrition rates, decreased funding and increased pressure to attract and maintain students (Zuber-Skerritt, 1986; Nevile, 1996; Garner, 1997; Brown, 1999; MacKechnie, 1999; Najar, 1999). Encouraging and accepting a wide range of students into universities places ethical obligations on tertiary institutions to support them, and the financial incentives to tertiary institutions in increasing retention rates and being seen as an attractive learning environment are growing.

There are also moves in many universities to recognise the importance of students developing 'life-long learning skills' during their degree programs. These skills encompass the range of study skills often taught by learning support units in tertiary institutions. The University of New England has instituted its "Attributes of a UNE Graduate" policy, which aims to incorporate learning of these life-long skills into the various degree programs. One of the attributes UNE graduates are expected to develop is good written communication. One of the more common forms of written communication within a student's university career is the essay. This is partly because of the value of essays in encouraging various skills of written communication, information literacy, and the sort of deep learning described by Campbell et al., (1998) and Scoullar and Chapman (1999). The link between language and learning in essay writing has received some attention, with some evidence (Nightingale, 1986; Taylor & Nightingale, 1990) indicating that writing problems stem from students not understanding the material. Conversely, some studies reviewed by Mahalski (1992), suggest that writing problems hinder the understanding of material. It appears that language and learning are often inseparable (Mahalski, 1992; Najar, 1999). The skill of essay writing is a complex task, involving an array of micro study skills such as reading, note-taking, sentence construction, organising ideas and so forth. Along with other language and learning tasks such as writing reports, giving oral presentations, and so on, essay writing is both a study skill and 'life-long learning' skill that needs to be explicitly addressed in tertiary teaching programs.

Generic writing programs

Efforts aimed at assisting university students to develop writing skills have often been incorporated into generic study skills programs and/or study guides (e.g. Brown, 1999; MacKechnie & MacKechnie, 1999). There are some significant advantages of the generic approach, which perhaps led universities like UNE to adopt this strategy in the first place. Generic programs are relatively easy to implement: they require relatively few resources (Hoffman, 1998), do not require sometimes delicate collaboration with existing teaching staff within a multitude of different course units, and do not call for reduction in unit content, which is the concern of many unit coordinators. Generic programs can teach learning skills applicable across a range of disciplines (Derry & Murphy, 1986). At UNE, those involved in existing discipline-specific study skills support expressed a need for some generic programs to complement their efforts. Some evidence suggests that generic essay writing assistance increases students' confidence in their own ability (MacKechnie & MacKechnie, 1999), has provided short-term benefits (Brown & Atkins, 1988), and correlates with enhanced performance outcomes for some students (Mahalski, 1992).

Despite these advantages, the overwhelming weight of evidence suggests that generic support is not the most effective means to the end of improving written language and learning skills. An important aspect of the role of a tertiary student is to learn the appropriate academic discourse (Bush, 1996; Neville, 1996), and generic writing programs have been widely criticised for separating the learners from the discourse of their particular disciplines (Biggs, 1987; Tait & Entwistle, 1996). This creates difficulties for students transferring the skills learned in generic programs into their own contexts (Derry & Murphy, 1986; Chalmers & Fuller, 1996; Tait & Entwistle, 1996). Studies reviewed by Hoffman (1998) suggest that the general nature of generic programs leads to lack of meaning, interest and focus for the students, who resist the advice, and resist reading any associated material. Much evidence suggests that students do not put the skills or tactics taught in generic programs into practice, and that these programs are fundamentally ineffective (Hadwin & Winne, 1996; Hattie et al., 1996; MacKechnie & MacKechnie, 1999). Further, these programs may be detrimental to student learning because their prescriptive, idealised advice encourages a surface approach to learning (Martin & Ramsden, 1986; Hoffman, 1998). On the basis of these difficulties, these authors and many others advocate that study skills programs, including essay-writing programs, should be embedded in the context of the students' degree programs.

Integrated writing programs

There are many ways that such skills support can be integrated. Phillips (1994) describes a continuum of integration, from putting academic skills instruction entirely into the hands of academic subject specialists, through various degrees of subject and skills specialist collaboration, to having academic skills specialists teaching skills 'keyed' to particular disciplines. Another strategy described by Zuber-Skerrit (1986) and MacKechnie and MacKechnie (1999) is to develop entire study skills units as a credit-bearing, integral part of undergraduate degrees. The extent of the study skills intervention can also vary; from single sessions, to short workshop programs such as that described here, through to on-going semester-long schemes such as described by Buckland (1999). Yet another possibility described by Derry and Murphy (1986) is to link traditional subject-matter lessons with previous generic skills training by short hints and reminders.

There are many advantages of integrating essay writing and other study skills programs into courses and specific units. Context-embedded programs enhance student motivation and focus (Zuber-Skerrit, 1986; Garner, 1997), particularly if they contribute directly to grades in a subject unit (Hadwin & Winne, 1996). Two recent reviews of study skills programs by Hadwin and Winne (1996) and Hattie et al., (1996) found that there was some empirical support for the effectiveness of some context-embedded programs, but that generic programs were scarcely justified. Both reviews concluded unambiguously that study skills instruction should be tied directly to the teaching of content.

In the specific case of essay writing, there are many arguments in favour of combining the teaching of writing skill with subject content. This is based on the two-way link between language and learning and the relative specificity of different academic discourses (see Biggs, 1987; Tait & Entwistle, 1996; Hoffman, 1998). One of the principles underlying Nightingale's (1986) recommendations to improve students' writing is to teach students about the language requirements of different disciplines. Campbell et al., (1998) reinforce this point; the relationship between students' understanding of content and their ability to write about it needs to be emphasised. These suggestions can only be realised by context-embedded writing support.

Despite the growing evidence in favour of embedding teaching of writing skills into the context of the learner, this strategy has some potential problems and constraints. Garner (1997) viewed academic subject specialists as,

at best, barely competent communicators, and therefore as having limited utility in the role of teaching study skills. It is difficult, though, to agree that academic subject specialists are generally poor communicators, and that academic skills advisers are necessarily any better. Integration of study skills within units requires negotiation and collaboration with subject specialists, who are sometimes sceptical of the worth of both skills specialists, and the theory and research underpinning their efforts (Garner, 1997). The latter is probably one reason why context-embedded study skills support is not more common in tertiary institutions, together with the reluctance of many unit coordinators to reduce the time available to teach content. Another potential problem with specific context-embedded programs is the risk that if students are taught particular procedures geared to specific tasks, they may not be able to transfer that skill to other related activities (Garner, 1990; Hadwin & Winne, 1996; Najjar, 1999).

In summary, writing skills are one of the desirable attributes of tertiary graduates, and there are many imperatives leading tertiary institutions to explicitly help students to develop these skills, along with a suite of other 'life-long learning' skills. Such support has traditionally been provided in the form of generic skills programs, but on the basis of mounting evidence, these are increasingly being integrated into courses and units.

Aims

The aims of this study are to:

1. describe one example of a relatively short essay-writing support program which is embedded within a unit in the Faculty of the Sciences at UNE,
2. assess the effectiveness of the program by measuring essay-writing performance of the relevant students against another group of students who did not attend a similar program,
3. investigate the students' perceptions of the value of this program, and
4. use this information to further inform the debate on generic vs. context-embedded academic skills instruction.

METHODS

Role of researcher

In this study, the researcher had the advantage of being an academic staff member of both the Faculty of the Sciences and the Academic Skills Office, and had been involved in the teaching of one relevant science unit (Biology 110: BISC) for some years. The advantages that this afforded included access to student marks, insider knowledge about the unit structures, enrolments and assignments, established links with staff of the two relevant units, and familiarity with scientific discourse.

Description of essay-writing workshops

Essay-writing skills have been incorporated into the curriculum of the first semester, first year science unit, Rural Science and Natural Resources 110 (RSNR), and delivered by Academic Skills Office staff since 1996. There are two workshops specifically geared towards the students' first assessment essay, which is worth 25% of the total mark for the unit. Students have a choice of essay topics, which are given in the Unit Handbook along with comprehensive notes on academic writing, the importance of referencing and so forth. Some examples of the essay topics include:

*Discuss the value of maintaining native fauna and flora for sustainable farm productivity.
Evaluate the use of chemicals in irrigated agriculture and their likely long-term effects on the ecological balance of these regions.*

The format of the workshops has been fairly consistent since 1996, with some changes in organisation due to changing student numbers. In 1999, there were two 1.5 hour workshops given, each of which was repeated. These were timetabled into two 3 hour practical sessions early in semester one. The class was split into half, with one group engaged in unit-related practical activities while the other group was involved in the essay writing workshop. The groups then swapped activities. Although it had been suggested to the students by the unit coordinator that they have drafts to work on during the workshops, very few students did.

The sessions were planned to encourage the students to see the importance of some of the ingredients of a good essay, and to supply the students with some ideas about how to achieve this. The first session focussed on

analysing the question and its relevant issues. Task words such as 'describe', 'discuss' and 'analyse' were investigated, using the actual essay topics as well as another example. Then, students were asked to identify issues important and irrelevant to each question, including the example. The relevant issues in the example question were then converted into a rough essay outline, by asking the students to brainstorm the relevant ideas and organise them into logical sequence.

In the three weeks before the second session, the relevant issues for the example question were researched, an essay outline drawn up and a short example essay written by the workshop presenter. Some of the paragraphs were then jumbled, had references removed and had irrelevancies introduced, to use as exercises. The example had the additional benefit that the students were exposed to the style of writing they were expected to produce. This was intended to help the students to pick up the subtleties of the discipline-specific discourse, including referencing conventions. Some of the advantages (and potential problems) of using example essays in this way are described by Brown (1999).

The second session focussed on two other common problems related to clarity of argument, essay structure and paragraph use. Students were shown the example plan, and how it directly followed from their organisation of relevant issues in the previous session. This led directly into discussion about how to convert the plan into a well structured essay by writing good paragraphs, the importance of which is described by Nevile (1996). Referencing was discussed in the context of developing well-supported points of an argument; as pointed out by Nevile (1996), students are often unaware of the functions and conventions of referencing in academic writing. The features of paragraphs were discussed, then groups of students wrote their own paragraphs, some of which were read out and discussed. Next, students completed the paragraph exercises from the example essay. Finally, introductory and concluding paragraphs were compared and discussed, as the role of these often seems to be obscure to students (Mahalski, 1992).

The students submitted their essays about a fortnight after the final workshop. The essays were marked by unit staff, and the students had the opportunity to resubmit their essays after addressing the concerns raised by the markers.

Assessing workshop effectiveness via comparison of essay results

The efficacy of the workshops could not be directly quantified, as all students submitting the RSNR essay attended the workshops (no true control group), and no pre-testing had been undertaken. However, there were data available allowing a quasi-experimental investigation of workshop effectiveness. All the students who took part in the workshops were also enrolled in another unit, Biology 110 (BISC). This unit also contained many students who did not take RSNR and who had not been involved in any integrated, discipline-specific essay-writing workshops within their science degree. BISC has also had, for the past four years, an essay as its first assessed assignment. This was given out, serendipitously, shortly after the RSNR students had written their essays. Figure 1 represents the relationship between the two units, workshops and essays.

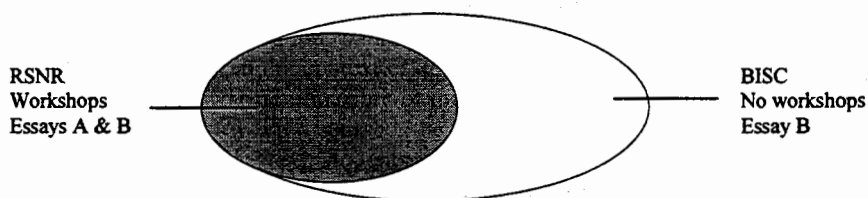


Figure 1. Relationship between students enrolled in RSNR and BISC examined in the current study.

The idea underlying this comparison was that if the workshops associated with essay A were effective in improving essay-writing skills of RSNR students, then this group should have achieved better in essay B of the unit BISC than non-RSNR students. The major limitation to this idea is its implicit assumption that the students would transfer their newly learned skills to a different but related task. As pointed out by Najjar (1999), there is much evidence showing that transfer does not often happen, but she also states that 'one of the main assumptions of formal schooling is that knowledge does transfer'. Accordingly, the specific hypothesis being tested in this part of the study is:

Hi: That RSNR students gained a higher mean mark in the BISC essay due to transfer of essay writing skills learned in RSNR workshops.

Ho: There is no relationship between essay marks for RSNR and BISC students and the essay writing workshops in RSNR.

To test the null hypothesis, the student marks for the BISC essay B from 1996-1999 were analysed, using an unpaired t-test to compare the mean essay mark of the BISC students also enrolled in RSNR (workshops) against the mean essay mark of the students not enrolled in RSNR (no workshops). To test that there were no underlying differences in general academic 'ability', semester one theory exam marks were also compared across the groups, using unpaired t-tests. Exam marks were not available for 1999. All students who submitted the essay and sat the exam were included in the analyses (Table 2).

There were some other limitations and constraints to this study apart from its necessary assumption of transfer. Firstly, the RSNR essay-writing intervention was relatively short at two 1.5 hour workshops plus resubmission after feedback. Secondly, the BISC essays were somewhat different to those in RSNR. The BISC students chose between a number of articles about topical biological issues, mainly from the *Sydney Morning Herald* or *New Scientist*. The students had to summarise their article, research additional information about the topic, and write an essay which showed their understanding of the issues and incorporated responses to some guiding questions. This is an example of an essay as 'arrangement' (Hounsell, 1984) rather than 'argument'. Thirdly, during the year of the study, there were also one-hour generic essay writing workshops open to all students, and it is not known how many or which students in this study attended these. It is unlikely to have been many. Finally, the two groups were not random samples, and it is not known what selection effects may have been operating. However, despite these limitations, the questions posed are still important. If there is no transfer of skills to related contexts, then, arguably, the learning may as well not have taken place. The data available are highly reliable, covering four replicates of the workshop program over four years, and the program was reasonably representative of many study-skills interventions, and better than many in its time-span and level of integration.

Students' perceptions of the program's value

This part of the study aimed to obtain some qualitative data from students on the value of the 1999 workshops, and to compare these with the quantitative data described. The limitations to this part of the study were that it was restricted to 1999, that the students knew the researcher and that she would be marking their next major assignment. Initially, ten students who had been enrolled in both BISC and RSNR in 1999 agreed to be involved in semi-structured interviews on the subject of their essays. The students were purposely selected to encompass variation in sex, degree enrolment and BISC essay mark. Interviews were conducted at the student colleges or in the BISC lab, were taped with the permission of interviewees, and took place in mid second semester, 1999. To check that the positive sentiment expressed reflected their genuine views rather than politeness or concerns about their assignment mark, some corroborating data were sought. About a fortnight after the last interview, a short anonymous questionnaire was distributed to students who had been enrolled in both BISC and RSNR, during a practical session for the second semester unit BISC 120. Students completed their questionnaires by circling one of a series of possible responses to five questions, then placed the completed questionnaires in a pile at the front of the lab.

RESULTS

Assessing workshop effectiveness via comparison of essay results

For all years of the program, the students who attended the essay writing workshops in RSNR performed no better in the subsequent BISC essay than the students who had not had integrated essay writing support (Table 1). This would indicate that the null hypothesis should be accepted and the hypothesis that RSNR students gain higher marks in the BISC essay, due to transfer of essay writing skills learned in RSNR workshops, should be rejected. So, it seems that either the students learned little or nothing from the workshops, or could not transfer anything they had learned to the BISC essay.

Table 1. Unpaired t-tests for workshop and non-workshop means for BISC essay and exam.

Year	N + W'sh	N - W'sh	t and p values: essays	t and p values: exams	Workshop presenter	Essay B marker
1996	40	135	t= -.841 p= .4016	t=-2.457 p= .0150*	A	D
1997	30	120	t= -.396 p= .6927	t= -1.897 p= .0597	B	D
1998	26	135	t= -1.185 p= .2378	t= -1.040 p= .2997	B	D
1999	78	95	t= .170 p= .8575	Not available	C	E&F

* indicates statistically significant result, with the workshop mean result significantly higher than the non-workshop group.

Students' perceptions of the program's value

Student feedback on the 1999 workshops was generally positive. For most students, it was their first university essay and they spoke of the process as "a good learning experience", and mentioned that university essays were "heaps different" from what they had done at school, particularly in the referencing requirements. They were appreciative both of the "guidance" in the workshops and the opportunity to "fix it up" and resubmit. Some representative comments are given below.

Did writing essays help you to learn?

As you're going through your essay, you're thinking about it more. Probably the start of my essays are different to the end of them because at the start I'm sort of writing, blah, blah, but at the end of them I've thought about that and my thoughts at the start could have been wrong. It makes you think about it, turn it over in your brain. If you hear it it just goes in one ear and out the other, but actually sitting down and writing about it and thinking about it is much better.

Were the workshops useful?

They were good with the referencing and things like that, it just made them clearer, how to go about referencing and the fine differences ...

Everybody thought it was really good.

They were good. I've been writing essays for years and it's just the structure. Once you've got the basic structure to an essay which you know how the introduction's supposed to be structured and how you structure all the body and how you do the conclusions every essay's the same, its just working out the different points. But I learnt to write essays in year 11 and 12 but a lot of people don't. They confirmed what I'd already learnt which was good.

Absolutely. 100% sure of that ... I had no idea whatsoever, I just thought they were absolutely fantastic.

What were two main things that you learned from the workshops?

To have a plan of what you're going to actually write about. And keep it in order and don't divert off ... keep it structured basically.

Referencing and how to structure the actual paragraphs.

A lot of it I knew from school, but bits & pieces were useful. The bit about writing the body, and then going back to the intro and conclusion; I did that.

Little bits of scientific writing and little bits on tense & stuff because in school you're not taught a lot about grammar and nouns and how to structure sentences and things. I learnt some stuff from that, which was good.

Because I did Arts last year it might have been a little less scientific. It might have been written in a more ... perhaps not in such a straight manner, rather than, I mean the language would have been more flowery, you know what I mean?

If you were in charge, how would you help students learn to write essays?

Probably have the workshops ... it was good just to refresh our memories and give the few little hints and help us with the referencing because a lot of us haven't had to do that before ...

I think the workshops are about the best thing you can do. The only other thing to do would be to have where you could submit and get it looked at and any problems pointed out because most of the time you can see in a workshop that they're telling you what to do, but it doesn't count or relate it to your own specific problems.

Get you to do a workshop, I'm serious. I mean somebody's got to spend time with doing essays and writing the right way, I really do. I mean it helped me tremendously.

I think you definitely need them. Not as much for me, but for other people that haven't had that background. I knew a lot of it but it gave me an idea of what I had to do like that's how I'm writing essays, but that's good, that's how I need to write them. You need them.

In summary, these students saw the connection between essay writing and learning, and valued the workshops, more or less depending on how much they already knew. The most frequent comment about what they learned was referencing, and two students mentioned some conventions of science essays that they had not been aware of. Every one of the students interviewed said that they would run the workshop if they were in charge of the unit.

Student responses to the questionnaire are summarised in Table 2 below, and these mirror the tenor of the student responses during the interviews.

Table 2. Percent responses to all items in student questionnaire. N = 40.

Question	% response	% response	% response
How useful to you were the workshops in helping you to write your RSNR essay?	Very 31	Slightly 67	Not much 2
How much did you learn from the workshops?	A lot 21	A bit 63	Not much 16
Did the RSNR workshops or the handout help you with your biology essay?	A lot 18	A bit 52	Not much 30
Do you think the workshops should be run again next year?	Yes 49	Maybe 38	No 13
Should there be more workshops on academic/essay writing as part of RSNR?	Yes 34	Maybe 37	No 29

Only 2% of respondents did not find the workshops at all useful, though 16% of students felt that they didn't learn much. The most negative response related to the extent to which the RSNR program helped with the biology essay, with 30% of students finding that it did not help. Half the students thought that the program should be run again next year, 38% were unsure and 13% said no. There were a few comments made by some respondents on this point that expressed concerns about adding to the unit workload, and the compulsory nature of the workshop sessions. Only a third of respondents definitely did not want more workshops, with most students either in favour of more, or unsure.

DISCUSSION

The workshop program

In retrospect, there are several things that could be done to improve student learning in the RSNR essay writing program. It would be valuable to have some real sample student essays from previous years, that the students

could mark and discuss with their peers, as suggested by Mahalski (1992) and Nightingale (1986). It would be beneficial if the students had a draft of their essay by the second workshop, so that they could use more of their own writing, and the activity could become even more relevant to the assignment. Student attitudes are known to be a major determinant of outcome (Biggs, 1987), and while some attention was paid to this in the workshops, more could have been done. Some discussion of different conceptions of essays could have promoted more awareness of alternative requirements and strategies, and encouraged deeper learning and, more likely, transfer. As pointed out by Martin and Ramsden (1986), there is limited value in teaching students how to write essays without confronting their current conception of what an essay is. In addition, to do all this, it would also be useful to have more time devoted to the workshops.

After the unit coordinator was shown the results from the essay comparison, the question was asked "Are we wasting our time getting you down here?" The answer would have to be "No", despite the limitations of the program already described. The comments from the students indicate that many valued the workshops quite highly, and did learn something from them. If they didn't learn enough, the solution is not to reduce the effort put into the program, but to do it better, and if possible, expand it within that unit or other related units.

Implications of essay comparison and student feedback

The results of the essay mark comparison (aim 2) indicate that either the students did not learn anything from the RSNR workshops, or could not transfer what they had learned to the BISC essay. The results from the student feedback (aim 3) suggest that, in general, the students thought that they had learned something from the workshops. If they are right (and this would be the most parsimonious conclusion), then the problem probably lies with lack of transfer. The student questionnaire responses also accord quite well with this, with the most negative response relating to the question of how useful the program was to their BISC essay. So, the general message from this study seems to be that the students, although learning something from the RSNR workshops, did not use these skills in a subsequent, different essay. This finding accords quite well with suggestions from the literature. Garner (1990) suggests that a particular routine or strategy remains connected to the context in which it was taught, that learners rarely transfer it to a new situation and that 'the generality of strategy use commonly assumed by researchers is illusory...'.

Reasons for lack of transfer

Najar (1999) offers several explanations for lack of transfer that are particularly pertinent to the workshop program described in this study. One reason given is poor initial learning due to relatively brief instructional programs. This seems very likely to have been the case in this program, which consisted of only two 1.5 hour essay writing workshops, plus feedback on draft and resubmission. Lack of practice also often limits learning of skills and therefore skill transfer (Salomon & Perkins, 1989, cited in Najar, 1999), and this was also a short-coming of the workshop program. Another reason for lack of transfer is the lack of explicit hints or instruction for transfer (Brown et al., 1983, cited in Najar, 1999), and there were no cues for transfer supplied to the RSNR students before the BISC essay in this study. Finally, increasing the likelihood that learners will abandon less effective existing strategies requires many demonstrations of the advantages of new strategies (Najar, 1999), and this also was not possible within the constraints of the RSNR workshops.

Promoting transfer

The ability to transfer study strategies is essential for the goal of life-long learning to be realised, but there is a significant gap in our knowledge about how to facilitate transfer of these skills (Hadwin & Winne, 1996). The importance of providing enough time and practice for learning, and enough hints for transfer to occur, has just been mentioned. A suggestion about how to enhance transfer of skills has been given in a review of training studies by Joyce and Showers (1988). They found that theory explanation, demonstration and feedback together resulted in very little transfer of training, but that a dramatic increase in transfer took place after in-class coaching was added to the list of training components.

Hadwin and Winne (1996) make the following recommendations aimed at promoting transfer of study skills in general:

1. Equip students with study tactics they can use in various contexts.
2. Teach students about different goals and alternative tactics that can be used to achieve these goals, to encourage deep, strategic, self-regulating learning. This is very similar to the emphasis placed by Najar (1999) on students having a repertoire of task-specific and general strategies that can be called upon in different situations, along with the metacognitive nous to recognise and apply these appropriately.
3. Blend instruction about study strategies into course content.

It seems that recommendations 1 and 2 could easily be addressed in generic skills programs. However, Hadwin and Winne (1996) advocate that this study skills instruction should be 'blended' with the academic content of students' regular courses, because of many of the advantages of integrated programs that were outlined at the beginning of this paper. By 'blending', they mean 'when study methods are used within the context of the day-to-day work in their courses'. However, results from this study suggest many potential obstacles to entirely embedding study skills instruction into unit content. For any given skill, for example essay-writing, how much time out of the unit curriculum will be needed to enhance transferable learning of this skill? The results of this study suggest somewhat more than three hours. In the case studies described by Chalmers and Fuller (1996), the most common difficulty with incorporating study skills instruction into traditional units was lack of time. If teaching, feedback, practice and coaching in this one skill need to be provided for genuine learning and transfer to occur, this would have to occur across different units as, at least in science, there is rarely more than one essay per unit. This would require considerable commitment, thought and coordination on the part of many people to ensure continuity of learning, avoid overlap and contradiction, and ensure that all students achieve more or less equivalent skills instruction. If the effort and time taken to prepare, teach, practice, coach and coordinate one skill is multiplied by the large number of life-long learning skills required, then this becomes a very daunting task indeed within context-embedded programs.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study, in conjunction with the literature, are that teaching academic skills by embedding instruction into the context of units may not always be a feasible option, based on the time and effort required to teach students transferable adaptable strategies. Yet generic programs are plagued by the disadvantages so thoroughly catalogued in the literature. So what is the answer? One appealing compromise solution offered by Derry and Murphy (1986) is to have a program of short, generic skills training followed by 'prompting in the actual instructional environment'. This, they suggest, could lead to development of 'executive control skills', analogous to the self-regulating strategies mentioned by Hadwin and Winne (1996). Variations of this approach could maximise the advantages of both generic and context-embedded programs, without most of the problems involved with using either method in isolation. If the 'prompting' is extended to include some practice and coaching within subject units of previously taught strategies, then transfer of learned skills might more readily take place. The generic sessions could be made slightly less generic by being targeted to particular faculties or degree programs, thus maximising their relevance to students. Some skills, particularly microskills, could still be embedded into units. This combined, linked approach would still require considerable coordination, and the goodwill and participation of academic subject specialists. However, it may be one workable solution to the difficult task of ensuring that tertiary graduates are equipped with the life-long learning and study skills we value so highly.

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Working with research students

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Abstract

Students doing research degrees are faced with increasing pressure to complete in the minimum time while at the same time less and less resources are made available for supervision within departments and for assistance from support services. For us at the Learning Assistance Unit at the University of Queensland, which has a relatively high proportion of postgraduate research students, many of whom are international, the pressing question is how we can best help. Our experience tells us that research students can have a variety of problems including conceptualising the research process, developing and sustaining the argument throughout the whole thesis, writing in English (for students whose first language is other than English), and dealing with supervisors. In response to these problems, we support research students through workshops, a web site, individual and drop-in sessions, and student evaluation shows a high student satisfaction with this assistance.

INTRODUCTION

PhD research can be exhilarating, challenging and even enjoyable, but as a large survey of PhD students in the US found, the PhD experience can also be stressful (Anderson & Swazey, 1998). Marshall and Reason (1993) believe that confronting problems is a necessary part of writing a successful PhD and if students do not face at least one crisis, then 'they are not achieving the depth of learning they at least unconsciously sought when they joined [the PhD program]' (p. 121). They go on to write that it is the students' 'engagement with seeming chaos' (p. 121) and 'the personal processes and associated distress stimulated by the inquiry' (p. 122) that ultimately lead to the gaining of deep insights.

Although it may be true that facing problems and feeling stress enhance the learning experience and improve the research, students suffer through this process and may feel isolated, disillusioned, abandoned and even inadequate. It is also perhaps true that it is this 'suffering' which leads to many PhD students failing to complete the degree.

Traditionally, it is the supervisor who is meant to be on hand to lead the students through these inevitable problems, but in many instances students do not wish to reveal their perceived inadequacies to the supervisor who is seen to represent the authority of the university and who also may be thought to have power over future career prospects (Grayson, Miller & Clarke, 1998; Parry & Hayden, 1994; Marshall & Reason, 1993). In addition, the heavy workloads of many supervisors and in some cases lack of expertise in the area of supporting students through the learning process, mean that supervisors do not (or cannot) always adequately fulfil this role.

Research in Australia, the UK and the US reveals that successful PhD students regularly receive support from sources other than their supervisor, for example, friends, family, colleagues and members of university support services (Rudd, 1985; Salmon, 1992; Conrad, 1992; MacKay, 1996; Cullen, Pearson, Saha & Spear, 1994; Wright, 1992; Elton & Pope, 1992; Kluever, 1997). Much of this takes the form of emotional and financial support, for example, from family and friends. But academic support is often also needed and can be in the form of structured workshops on specific aspects of researching and writing a PhD or individual help with particular problems encountered during the research process, for example, from learning advisers.

Most Australian universities provide some form of learning support, but the majority of this is targeted to undergraduates or to students whose first language is other than English (Martens, 1993; McLean, Surtie, Elphinstone & Devlin, 1995). At the University of Queensland, the Learning Assistance Unit, Student Support Services, for many years has recognised the diverse needs of research students and offers a number of specifically targeted programs, including workshops on research proposal, literature review and thesis writing, weekly drop-in sessions, support groups, individual hour long confidential consultations and a web site, 'PhD: First thoughts to finished writing'. Earwaker (1992) asks whether support should be prevention or cure, whether

support services should take initiatives or respond to needs, or whether support is integral or ancillary to teaching and learning. At the University of Queensland we have taken the stance that support can take all these forms, depending on particular circumstances. We adopt a student-centred approach and focus on 'process rather than subject matter content' (Samuelowicz, 1991, p. 16). As recommended for the higher education sector by Ryan (1996) and O'Neil (1995), we embrace the principles of adult education - that is, we work with students in a non-judgemental way rather than direct them; we leave the power and control with the students, encourage growth in areas desired by the students and encourage and model self-reflection (Brookfield, 1986; Knowles, 1990; Mezirow, 1990). Of course, as Collins (1991) points out, students only learn on their own initiative, but we can play a vital role in encouraging a conceptualisation of the learning process as a deep and meaningful experience within a wider context. That is, we encourage students to adopt the 'deep' learning approach in which assumptions are questioned, relationships between knowledge recognised, application of knowledge is seen to be the reason for learning, and students interact with the content (Entwistle & Tait, 1990; Gibbs, 1992; Ramsden, 1992; O'Neil, 1995).

This paper introduces the various support programs offered to research students by the Learning Assistance Unit, the University of Queensland, discusses the rationale behind them and demonstrates how they can enhance the experience of being a research student. The evaluation of such programs is, of necessity, difficult. Evaluation tends to focus on the students' perceived satisfaction (e.g. Cargill, 1996; Hanley, 1996; Lietz, 1996) rather than their learning gains (e.g. Martin & Ramsden, 1998). Regularly conducted surveys of our workshops always demonstrate that over 80% of students find them helpful or very helpful. In the individual session as we discuss the research project and look at drafts, we can trace the development of skills from one session to the next. Therefore, we feel that what we offer is helpful, does address real problems encountered by research students, and can be an important source of additional support that can complement supervision.

THE PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY PHD STUDENTS

The majority of research into the PhD experience focuses on student perceptions and attempts to tie these experiences with duration and completion rates (e.g. Rudd, 1985; Hockey, 1994; Salmon, 1992; Battersby & Battersby, 1980; MacKay, 1996; Cullen et al., 1994; Wright & Lodwick, 1989). The PhD experience spans several years, involves a close relationship with at least one supervisor (who is probably facing his/her own problems with research projects, funding and teaching loads) and requires dedication, persistence, high level intellectual engagement, the ability to withstand frustration and the willingness to spend hours and hours of time each week on the task. Therefore, it is not surprising that students face problems and that sometimes these problems are serious.

The problems that students mention include those that could be considered to be personal - for example, health, financial, relationship, emotional and family problems - and those that are academic - including misunderstanding expectations, problems with conceptualising the thesis, difficulties with writing, experimentation and methodology that do not work, and problems with supervision. It is mainly with this latter category that learning advisers can play an important role in helping students. It is useful to consider some of these problems in more detail to understand the rationale behind the programs we offer for PhD students.

Understanding expectations and conceptualising the study

One common problem identified by students is an initial lack of understanding of what was expected in PhD research (Martens, 1993; Battersby & Battersby, 1980; Rudd, 1985; Wright, 1992; Hockey, 1994; Phillips, 1996). For example, many students at the University of New England felt that their supervisor did not make departmental requirements, or exactly what was involved in doing a PhD, explicit (MacKay, 1996). One student felt 'thrown in the deep end with no real idea [of] what is expected of a PhD thesis' (p. 131). Similarly, the students at 'a large research university in Melbourne' (p. v) interviewed by Parry and Hayden (1994) expected departmental expectations to be fully explained to them during induction programs and written guidelines to be readily available, but in fact Parry and Hayden found that few departments provided such written guidelines and even fewer provided formal orientation programs for research students. Even students who enrol in a PhD as a continuation of their undergraduate studies fail to fully understand what is expected in a research program (Golde, 1998; Hockey, 1994).

Therefore, this beginning period of the research study is extremely important and 'bad beginnings' have been linked to extended time to completion (Wright & Lodwick, 1989), significant attrition rates (Golde, 1998), and

many personal consequences such as a drop in confidence, significant levels of anxiety and stress, breakdowns in relationships, and social and intellectual isolation (Zuber-Skerritt, 1987; Denicolo & Pope, 1994).

Writing the literature review, research proposal and the thesis

Universities seem to assume that postgraduate students develop the writing skills needed to undertake a PhD as undergraduates (Zuber-Skerritt, 1987; Gottlieb, 1994). However, some academics report dissatisfaction with the writing skills of their PhD students (MacKay, 1996; Parry & Hayden, 1994). The specific problems identified include a poor understanding of the purpose of writing a dissertation, the lack of a unifying theme (e.g. Brown, 1994), poor structure, a lack of critical assessment and not relating the literature review to the topic (e.g. Bruce, 1994). Such problems with writing are exacerbated for students for whom English is a second language or who come to study in Australia from a different academic culture.

That their writing ability may not be adequate is also a concern of students (Gottlieb, 1994; Rudd, 1985; Salmon, 1992; Kluever, 1997). From our experience students, although confident in their ability to tackle assignments, have doubts about their ability to write a large piece of work, doubts about how they can possibly plan the structure of the thesis to ensure that they present a well-reasoned argument or flow of results, doubts about their ability to reference correctly and even doubts about their ability to write adequately at the sentence and paragraph level. Students worry about their level of scholarship and about their ability to produce something 'original'. In addition, students are concerned about what their supervisor will think about their writing and dread being judged harshly by their supervisor. For example, as Grant and Graham (1994) point out, 'the authority of the supervisor to pronounce on the clarity of the student's argument in the text becomes an authority to pronounce on the worth of the student' (p. 167).

One task for which many students feel ill-prepared is the writing of the literature review (Bruce, 1996; Wright, 1992). Wright and Lodwick (1989) in their longitudinal study at Reading University found that 'students were considerably ... reluctant to carry out a literature review' (p. 32) and that by the end of the first year of candidature, one third of the students had failed to complete any significant literature review. However, we see writing a literature review as an important process that can help a student narrow down the research topic and formulate research questions, conceptualise the research project in terms of structure, scope and limits, gain a 'feel' of where it fits into the wider context, and gain a needed confidence boost. Bruce (1994) believes that 'attention on the student's part to [the literature review] will ... impact not only on the quality of the thesis but on the quality of the graduating candidate' (p. 153).

Also, the writing of a literature review can be seen as a relatively small task (compared to the whole thesis) on which students can practise their writing skills and gain feedback at an early stage of their project and for which they can seek and receive help, not only from their supervisor but also from other sources. Students can test their skills, try out their ideas and thereby ease into the research. Working on a literature review can be seen as a way for the student to move through the 'developmental steps of learning', increasing 'their conceptual abilities and intellectual skills step by step from one level to the next through practice, experience, discussion and metacognition' (Zuber-Skerritt, 1987, p. 79).

Work and time management

One of the important shifts students must contend with when they move from undergraduate to postgraduate studies is the sudden lack of imposed structure. At the start, the three to four years of a PhD study can stretch ahead and seem like more than enough time to finish the work. Sometimes students may even wonder how they will ever fill it. On the other hand, sometimes time becomes a source of anxiety - students are always aware of the institutional pressure to finish on time.

Lack of efficient time management and work planning are well recognised as causes of prolonged PhD programs and student dissatisfaction (Moses, 1985; Rudd, 1985; Gottlieb, 1994; Wright & Lodwick, 1989). To exacerbate the problem of poor time management, PhD students often have a great need to be 'super organised' because most of them have many demands on their time from the need and wish to spend time with their family and friends to help maintain healthy and supportive relationships, to the need to work part-time to maintain financial viability. These problems are compounded for older students who return to study part-time while maintaining a full-time career (Evans, 1998).

Lack of opportunities for intellectual discussions

Students in many studies into the research experience express a wish to be intellectually challenged by, for example, participating in general discussions about their research with a range of people including their supervisor, but also fellow students, departmental staff and other interested parties (Rudd, 1985; Parry & Hayden, 1994; Wright & Lodwick, 1989; MacKay, 1996). Wright (1992), Elton and Pope (1992), and Boyle and Boice (1998) argue that the concept of collegiality should apply to research students and would help to satisfy this desire. In this way, students would be treated more as peers rather than as students - 'supervisors [would] assert that students work *with* and not *for* them' (Elton & Pope, 1992, p. 73, original italics).

However, since there is a difference in the level of importance placed on the research by the student and the supervisor (the research is likely to be the student's main focus but only one of many concerns for the supervisor) (Grant & Graham, 1994), since some supervisors feel that they must keep a certain academic distance from their students (Denicola & Pope, 1994), since sometimes there is a mismatch between the research interests of the student and supervisor (Whittle, 1994), and since supervisors have to maintain a supervisory role and act on behalf of the university, this concept of collegiality, though laudable, can only operate between the student and the supervisor to a limited extent. These same limitations also apply to the 'supervisor as mentor' model suggested by Shannon (1998).

Supervision

Not surprisingly, given the complex nature of the supervisory role, when asked about their PhD experience students nearly always mention problems with supervision (Rudd, 1985; Battersby & Battersby, 1980; Salmon, 1992; MacKay, 1996; Cullen et al., 1994; Parry & Hayden, 1994; Wright & Lodwick, 1989). Although it is possible that some students are wanting to blame supervisors for their own lack of success at PhD research, others have genuine complaints. A common thread running through all the research is the desire by students for more time with their supervisors. For example, 80% of the first year PhD students in Wright and Lodwick's (1989) study wanted more opportunities to learn from their supervisor. They rated getting critical feedback and academic guidance, and having their progress monitored as major roles of their supervisors. Unfortunately, the demands on academics to teach, do research, apply for funds and carry out administrative duties sometimes make it difficult for them to give students sufficient time. Whittle (1992; 1994) and Pearson and Ford (1997) argue that Australian academics lack experience in, and training for, the supervisory role, and to expect 'a successful supervision relationship to arise spontaneously' according to Grant and Graham (1994) 'is unrealistic' (p. 173).

No matter how many concerns students have with their supervision, it is extremely important for them to maintain a working relationship with their supervisor. It is almost inevitable that during a 3 to 4 year project there will be clashes, disagreements, periods when either the student or supervisor or both are under a lot of stress (sometimes from outside sources), and times when both can feel dissatisfied with the other. In most instances the supervisor will hold the 'power' position, and certainly from the student's perspective, have the might of the university behind him/her (Grant & Graham, 1994; Marshall & Reason, 1993).

Non-academic problems

Students sometimes feel in need of a 'morale booster', to feel someone is interested in them as well as their research, and to have an avenue to talk over a whole range of issues (Conrad & Zuber-Skerritt, 1996; Ryan, 1996; Salmon, 1992; Battersby & Battersby, 1980; Leder, 1998). Such general support has been shown to be an important factor in enabling completion (Lenz, 1997; Nerad & Sands Miller, 1997). While Marshall and Reason (1993) believe that supervisory involvement in the content of the research is 'always secondary to the underlying process of nurturing student's developing competence in both understanding and effective action' (p. 118) and therefore arguing that supervisors are the most appropriate people to fulfil this role of pastoral care, other research suggests that personal involvement with, and understanding of students, by supervisors is lacking (Denicolo & Pope, 1994).

HELP FOR PHD STUDENTS FROM SOURCES OTHER THAN SUPERVISORS

Although there is not a lot of research in this area, there is some evidence that programs offered by specialised units can help PhD students and improve completion times (e.g. Gottlieb, 1994; Whittle, 1994). At Berkeley, Nerad and Miller (1997) report significant increases in PhD completion rates following the introduction of interdisciplinary workshops in many areas of PhD studies including writing research proposals and literature

reviews. Similarly, Zuber-Skerritt (1989) found that students 'appreciated the clarification of procedures, tasks and methods; organisation and planning; staff concern and support; opportunity to discover mutual problems and to discuss solutions; opportunity to learn from previous dissertations, practical exercises, etc' (p. 83) offered by writing workshops. She concluded that 'the workshop approach seems to be an effective medium to help students overcome the problems in dissertation research and writing' (p. 86).

Some academics recognise the benefits that students can derive from having someone outside their department reading their work (Moses, 1989; MacKay, 1996). Gottlieb (1994) argues that a person reading the work for the first time without any prior knowledge is well placed to judge whether the main points are clearly stated, whether the flow appears logical and whether there are any gaps, and can therefore provide useful feedback.

THE PROGRAMS OFFERED BY THE LEARNING ASSISTANCE UNIT, UQ

As Learning Advisers we have long recognised the problems discussed above and have always considered supporting research students to be an integral part of our overall role. And since we aim to provide a range of services to meet the diverse needs of research students, we offer programs that can be considered to be of two types, proactive - those which address areas that we know, from experience and a study of the literature, can cause concern to students - and 'responsive' - those which respond to specific concerns expressed by students. In the first type we deal with issues we perceive as common to the majority of PhD students in group sessions with the aim of helping them to be ready to face the almost inevitable problems. Of course, the sessions remain flexible enough to incorporate issues raised by the students. We have also written a web site which students can access from their own work area whenever they want. In contrast, the work with students in the second type is solely driven by the student's concerns and usually occurs in individual sessions.

Proactive Work

- *Induction Programs*

The Academic Preparation Programs (APPs), run twice a year for all new international research students, have been designed to provide a comprehensive introduction to what it is going to be like to be a research student at the University of Queensland. Problems common to all research students are tackled. For example, students have the opportunity to discuss their expectations and ask lots of questions, some of which may seem trivial and sometimes unusual but which are nevertheless important and may be ones they would not want to ask their supervisors. This need for international students to have an early introduction to Australian academic expectations is recognised by many academics from a wide range of discipline areas (Samuelowicz, 1987). Since writing is always one of the major concerns of students, the APPs include several writing tasks - constructing an abstract of an existing article, writing a literature review and writing a research proposal. We use these activities to help shift students' approach to writing from seeing it as reporting on what has been done or written before (a list-like summary), to a critical review of the literature and the formulation of a research topic or research question. We want students to develop an appreciation of the role the literature review plays in a thesis and how writing one (from the beginning of the research) can actually help them progress through their research more effectively and efficiently.

APPs have been run for a number of years and evaluations at the end of the programs show that the students are extremely pleased that they attended, feel more prepared in general to face the tasks ahead and believe that the writing tasks were very useful. In addition, feedback from academics is also positive - they report that students who have attended our APPs are able to commence their research more quickly, require less time from the supervisor in the beginning period, appear to 'fit in' more easily, and are more willing to start writing. In follow-up sessions the students report continued benefit from attending the APPs.

- *Workshops*

We find that workshops are an effective way to help students overcome the common faults of theses such as the lack of a unifying theme, poor literature review, no integration of ideas and reporting rather than evaluating. They are also a good way to help students with time management and research planning. All our workshops are interactive and require the students to do something - they are not simply information giving sessions. One activity which forces students to explain their research, justify their research question and place their research into the wider context is one we call 'tell us about your topic/research'. During this activity, students work in small groups and have to talk about their topic to the others in the group. The other students are encouraged to ask questions, challenge assumptions and point out inconsistencies.

Through this activity, we hope that students will see the logical connection of all parts of their thesis, become aware of the need to keep the big picture in mind while working on specifics and develop a cohesive argument or theme which will run throughout the thesis.

Learning advisers are able to concentrate on the process rather than the content, which remains the domain of the academics. The students adopt the process and work with their own material within the workshop, thus making the process relevant to them. At the same time, they can receive immediate feedback. These workshops fit well into the ideas of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). That is, the students 'try-out', receive feedback, reflect on this, try again, and so on. Also, the workshops reflect some of Knowles' (1990) andragogical concepts by providing 'a climate in which the learners feel more respected, trusted, unthreatened, and cared about; by exposing them to the need to know before instructing them; by giving them some responsibility in choosing methods and resources; and by involving them in sharing responsibility for evaluating their learning' (p. 65).

It also seems of benefit to students that the workshops are in no way connected to their departments, that is, they are conducted by a centrally-placed, independent unit. In some ways the students can remain 'anonymous' and feel safe 'trying out ideas' and receiving feedback away from their department, school and supervisor, and fellow PhD students can 'act as friends' (Marshall & Reason, 1993, p. 122).

Once again, regular evaluations of these workshops reveal that students perceive them as useful. When asked what they found to be of the most lasting benefit, they write comments such as 'I now understand what a thesis is'; 'I didn't really understand or like my topic before but having to explain it has motivated me!'; and 'Explaining my topic has made me realise that I have to narrow it down more'.

- *Web site*¹

The idea behind the site was to make available comprehensive, self-help material presented in a such a way that students could access the information from many entry points. In other words, whatever problem, question or concern the student is facing, he or she can find appropriate and helpful information easily and in turn be directed to other related topics. We wanted to address students' real problems, so our frequently asked questions are real questions asked by real students. The web site contains many of the activities that we have developed for our workshops and students can work through them to gain the same benefits that the students at workshops get.

The web site has a feedback mechanism and we receive regular emails (at least two a week). Some typical comments include:

Your web site has been my saviour! I'm a post-doc in the UK and I'm working with a small group of PhD students who are desperately in need of sound, non-biased advice. Anyone who's slogged through the PhD process can, of course, give plenty of advice but it's great to find a web site with clear, logical and practical guidance that is applicable to students from all disciplines. I will be using some of your structures and suggestions in my discussions with them.

I think this is tremendous - it covers about every complaint I have had with being a PhD student and as a supervisor.

I just want to let U know, that what U did is just fantastic, I really appreciate it from the bottom of my heart. Thank U to all involved.

Responsive

- *Individual*

We like to call this way of helping students 'working together'. For us, this phrase captures the essence of working with students: there is no power gap between learning advisers and students, we have no power to assess, we are non-judgemental and we maintain confidentiality, all characteristics recognised as important by Andresen (1991). We create a safe, challenging and sympathetic environment in which to discuss the work in progress. We work alongside students as an 'intelligent other', responding to what they identify as important and in response to the text they bring. We enter a dialogue with students and work at different levels of involvement with the text as the text dictates, or the student requires. This could involve

discussing the overall conceptualisation of the research, formulating an argument, tracing the cohesiveness of the argument, scrutinising the evidence or even working at the level of paragraphs and sentences.

This work is completely student-centred, collaborative but also transformative. Students may not always be aware of alternative ways of thinking or doing, and as educators we 'cannot always accept [the students'] definition of needs as the operational criterion' (Brookfield, 1986, p. 124) for our help. The starting point, however, is always where the student is and through 'thoughtful conversation' (Collins, 1991, p. 23), critical questioning, an exploration of pre-existing assumptions and enthusiastic engagement with the subject matter, the student can be helped to develop increased critical self awareness, to negotiate meaning through reflection (Mezirow, 1990) and to move from being a beginner learner/researcher to an expert.

Our belief in the value of the individual sessions is based on the development we see of the students over time, their incorporation of new ideas and skills into their written work and their successful completion of research theses. Perhaps an even stronger indication of the value of the sessions is the number of research students who become regular users of our services. Many students see us regularly for short 'bursts' from time to time throughout their projects as a need is experienced.

- *Drop-in and Support Groups*

Drop-in sessions and support groups are other ways we offer help to research students and are particularly useful in providing a general forum for the discussion of research projects, testing out new ideas and finding out about the experiences of other PhD students. They also provide general non-academic support. Conrad (1994) believes that support groups can prove effective in eliminating the intellectual and social isolation that is an inevitable part of PhD research. Pearson and Ford (1997) and Salmon (1992) argue that the establishment of student networks can encourage general academic discussions and that these networks don't necessarily have to be confined to the one discipline. Such cross-disciplinary networks played a part in improving PhD completion rates at Berkeley (Nerad & Sands Miller, 1997).

The popularity of these sessions and the anecdotal feedback attest to their value.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we believe that we as learning advisers are in a position to help PhD students and thus contribute to their academic success. We do not see ourselves in competition with supervisors; to the contrary, we see ourselves as working in conjunction with supervisors. What makes our relationship with students different is that we are 'working together' with students and since we are not involved in the discipline-specific content of the research, we can concentrate on the process. We are 'intelligent others' and provide a safe and confidential environment in which students feel free to reveal what they perceive as their incompetence, lack of understanding, frustration with understanding concepts, difficulty in structuring their thesis or even not really knowing what's expected from them.

We also believe that there is no single best way of supporting students. Our experience indicates that having a range of approaches is necessary to meet the diverse needs of students. We are also convinced that there is no substitute for individual work with students; it is through such dialogue with students that specific problems are resolved.

ENDNOTE

¹ The address: <http://www.ems.uq.edu.au/phdweb/phhome.html>

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