Changing Identities

language and academic skills conference

29-30th November 2001

Edited by: Bronwyn James, Alisa Percy, Jan Skillen and Neil Trivett

University of Wollongong

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PREFACE

As we enter the 21st century, universities are experiencing a period of unprecedented transformation: globalisation, corporatisation, internationalisation, increased accountability, restructuring and new technologies are reshaping our institutions. These external forces, in combination with developments in our field and related disciplines, cannot fail to impact on our identities as LAS staff within our institutions, on the identities of our students and on the identities of our academic colleagues. The one constant is change and our own changing identities as we grapple with the new demands we encounter daily.

With LAS advising emerging as an identifiable discipline, it was most appropriate to have the changing identities of LAS advisers and LAS centres a as central theme of the conference. This theme allowed for discussions about who we are within our universities and what role our centres play within the university system as well as about how and in what directions there has been change. Some of the papers dealing with this theme give an overview of the changes in identity of LAS advisers or centres that have taken place over the lifetime of the discipline. Some characterise the changes in identity as moving from technical experts to strategic partners while others have characterised them as moving from institutional casualties to academic partners. Some provide strategies for dealing with change while others question both the agenda for change and the drivers of change. All of the papers contribute to a discussion about change that is a welcome one at this point in time when we are all are redefining and negotiating our identities within our institutions. Papers which deal substantially with this theme are those authored by Bretag, Clerehan, Craswell, Ellis, Jansen, Jones et al, George, Hicks, Melles, Morgan, McKenna and Thomas.

Another theme of the conference was the changing work practices of LAS advisers. Discussions addressing this theme focused onthe ongoing demand for change and innovation in our work practices in order to remain effective as universities.Change and innovation were seen as responses toincreasing student diversity and new teaching technologies. The majority of papers addressing student diversity deal specifically with the issue of supporting international NESB students at the program and institutional level, and provide insights and approaches that should enhance our knowledge and practice in this area. Papers dealing with new teaching technologies focus on how these can be utilised to enhance the learning process or on the 'lessons learned' in moving 'online'. One paper acknowledges the strain these ongoing changes in work practice place on LAS advisers and provides strategies for dealing with resulting stress in the workplace. Some of the papers that specifically address these themes include Barthel, Bretag, Cargill, Drury, Hussin, Parkes et al, O'Regan, Thomas & Bennett, Thompson, Wilson.

The final theme in the conference was Changing Student Identities. As with the other themes in the conference, authors covered a wide-ranging territory in their responses. A number of papers chronicled the individual experiences of both local, international, undergraduate and postgraduate students as they engaged with the university and its often multiple and conflicting writing, reading, thinking and valuing practices. These papers invariably suggested implications for practice for those involved in language, literacy, numeracy and learning development. Other papers focused on particular programs (either peer or language/literacy/learning practitioner mediated) which aim to address the well documented experiences of students and to ease students' transition into the cultures and disciplines of the university. Papers which substantially deal with the issues of changing student identities are the following: Baskin, Carmichael, Chanock, East, Giorgio & Chinnappan, James & McInnes, Martins, Moodie, Price, Symons, Ridsdale.

Two colloquia sessions opened up a space for discussion about issues of practice which confront all LAS staff at some time in their professional life. During the first colloquium, these issues were presented as questions to individual LAS staff from four different institutions (Chanock, La trobe; Hicks, University of SA; San Miguel, UTS; Skillen, UOW) . The questions can be summarised as follows: What quality assurance measures do you have in place; how do you deal with high demand for individual student appointments; how do you work with broader university demands to

fulfil a 'gatekeeping' role on English language standards; and to what extent and with what strategies do you work towards change in curricula development, teaching and assessment practices inside degree programmes? The four participants in the first colloquium answered one question each. Their responses demonstrated that decisions about practice are often strategic in that they are informed by broader considerations of institutional policy and practice, involve multi dimensional responses, involve collaborative partnerships with faculty and other university staff, and are underpinned by both language and learning theories and an understanding of the process of institutional change. Summaries of the responses can be found in the colloquia section of the proceedings.

The conference's central theme, the changing identity of LAS advisers, or learning developers, is also the theme of Associate Professor Carolyn Webb's plenary paper. Her paper charts the historical growth of LAS centres in Australia and plots the changing role of LAS advisers, from 'remediators' to 'transformers'. It plots these changing roles in relation to the changing themes in higher education in Australia: first multiculturalism then massificiation and, currently, flexibility. Her paper also makes suggestions about the need for research into our current situations and practices and, perhaps more importantly, asks questions about our future, raising questions such as "What might the LAS professional evolve into?". Carolyn's paper both summarises our historical experiences in the field and signals current possibilities. It also puts into words some hopes for the future: for LAS advisers to be known as "catalysts for systemic change, as facilitators of organisational learning, [and] as partners in the transformation of university teaching and learning".

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Review Panel

Reviewing is an important but largely unrecognised job. Since the review process is 'blind' the author(s) will not know who to thank for their time and the suggestions offered. The conference delegates and the people who read these proceedings will not cite the reviewers nor thank them when a paper is useful. Most reviewers are, however, intrinsically motivated and rewarded and understand that they are making an important contribution to our field. The organising committee sincerely thanks the following people for their valuabe input.

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COLLOQUIUM

Colloquium One: Dealing with the outside from the inside

Facilitators: Joanne Tiernan and Bronwyn James

In this colloquium, we asked participants to consider their practices and the philosophies driving those practices within their particular institutional context. In particular, we wanted to draw out the ways in which those "ideal" philosophies and practices impacted and/or are impacted on by outside influences eg. graduate attributes documents, restructuring, cuts in funding, internationalisation of the curricula, quality assurance measures etc.

In order to attempt to draw out philosophies and practices in changing times, we structured a colloquium as a hypothetical. Panel members were asked to respond to a number of hypothetical scenarios. Each of these scenarios were designed to draw out issues which form and challenge our identities as language and learning practitioners.

In responding to these scenarios, we asked panel members to think about the following broader issue questions:

- Can we set agendas?
- How do we respond to outside agendas?
- When do we respond to outside agendas?
- What characterises our responses: are we steadfast, mutable, pro-active, reactive, strategic, ethical?
- Why and when do we respond in these ways?

Scenario 1 (Caroline San Miguel, University of Technology Sydney)

In your work around campus, you see subject outlines with inappropriate assessment strategies, illogical sequencing of assessment tasks and no reference to the skills that students will require in the subject.

In this scenario I assume I have seen the subject outlines via students who are having problems with assessment tasks. My short term aim would be to support the students in completing the assessment tasks while at the same time establishing and building up a relationship between literacy academics and academic staff from within the faculty concerned. My longer term aim would be to collaborate with the faculty in developing clearer assessment tasks and building literacy support into subjects within the faculty.

Firstly I would organise a workshop for students completing the first assessment task, contacting the subject coordinator to:

- explain the role and purpose of the workshop,
- clarify the purpose and requirements of the assessment and draw on the coordinator's knowledge of potential problems students may face in meeting these requirements
- organise a convenient time for the workshop, preferably within the subject so it was available to all students and so the coordinator could attend

To build up the relationship with the coordinator, a follow up meeting from the workshop would be organised to:

- discuss the coordinator's, the students' and my evaluations of the workshop
- offer further workshops after the assessment had been marked and request some sample student responses to the first assessment task to use in those workshops (with students' permission)

This cycle could be repeated with any other assessment tasks in that subject. Further meetings with the coordinator would be arranged to:

- assess the value of the workshops by noting changes in the students' writing, collecting further student evaluations and asking for the coordinator's evaluation
- illustrate a variety of assessment tasks and ways of working collaboratively by showing samples of subject outlines where literacy is integrated
- discuss future possibilities of working within the subject

Integrating literacy into the disciplines requires collaborative relationships which draw on the disciplinary knowledge of faculty academics and our knowledge of academic literacies. Initiatives which begin at a grassroots level need to be proactively maintained and extended if they are to lead to successful collaborations. This maintenance work, however, often remains invisible. How can we make this work count both in terms of funding and in terms of workloads? What ways might there be of theorising this kind of work so we can better understand these processes and communicate it to each other and to the broader academic community?

Scenario 2 (Jan Skillen, University of Wollongong)

Your Unit or Centre has secured/been offered funding by the university to screen all incoming students in relation to their English language skills. The proviso is that students, once identified as not meeting an acceptable standard in English language, must attend and pass programs developed, taught and assessed by your Unit or Centre, before being allowed to progress in their degree program.

Learning Development at the University of Wollongong has a philosophy that sees students as deserving of systemic and developmental learning support during their entry into university and its disciplines and throughout their degree as the academic and disciplinary requirements they have to meet evolve from 1st year to postgraduate level. This philosophy is in recognition of the language and the learning leap that all students

have to make when entering the new context of tertiary study and the new disciplines they're moving into.

With this philosophy in mind, our aim is to assist ALL our students to develop the appropriate language and learning skills for the tertiary and disciplinary contexts of this university. To do this, we have three main strategies:

- contributing to the development of policy about language, literacy and learning at university, faculty and department level;
- embedding or integrating the teaching of language, literacy and learning skills into core content curricula at each year level in each of our degree programs;
- teaching skills outside curricula via individual consultations, paper and web-based resources, generic workshops; and
- working with other academic staff to ensure that they have a language to talk about language, literacy and learning.

Our response to the scenario above would align with our philosophy of embedding support within the curricula of core content subjects. We would have screening procedures for ALL incoming international students that would ideally be carried out within a core subject in each degree program. The aim of such procedures would be to provide a profile of the students' written English that would allow both them and us to take appropriate measures early enough in their degree programs for further development to occur.

The type of program we would see as most suitable would not involve courses for credit, but would instead involve the embedding of teaching about English into at least one core subject in each degree program, with the decision about the choice of subject/s made by both the learning developer and the department or faculty. It would consist of one tutorial a week in that core curriculum that would run parallel to the main lectures/tutorials and would use the readings, topics and assignments of that curriculum. The program would be developed collaboratively by the learning developer

and the relevant course coordinator but would be taught primarily by the learning developer. This embedding would allow students to develop discipline-specific as well as English skills and may help in concept development within the discipline as well, thus ensuring that students see the relevance of further development in English to their success in the curriculum. Assessment of the effectiveness of the strategy could be achieved by pre and post assessment of English skills on real assignments, set at the beginning and end of the course.

Scenario 3 (Margaret Hicks, University of South Australia)

Student demand for individual appointments is high. You do not have the staffing resources to meet these demands.

In reality everyone who has worked in the student learning support/development area has been faced or is facing this situation. In this area of work – demand on our services and especially services relating to individual appointments is always high. It doesn't matter how many individual appointments are offered – they are always filled. If a substantial proportion of learning adviser time is allocated to individual appointments and is increased due to demand the opportunities to provide other alternative services diminishes.

In 1999 – the role of study advisers at the University of South Australia was redefined and the number of positions was significantly reduced. Past practices in this area which had focused on individual appointments had to change. This was not only due to reduced staff resources but also to unmet student demand. At the University of South Australia we have developed a professional development model of student learning support. This model is characterized by:

- collaborating closely with teaching academics, professional development staff and learning advisers to change and integrate support into the curriculum
- focusing on the curriculum and assessment items in particular

- developing resources and offering services for **all** students
- aligning approaches with institutional priorities and directions
- acknowledging explicitly that learning support is developmental
- providing multiple ways that students can access support, services and resources

At the University of South Australia students are offered direct services through online workshops, learning guides (online), individual appointments, workshops, and drop-in times. Indirect services are offered through the collaborative work that learning advisers do with teaching staff. Working with the teaching staff member is pivotal. Rather than there being an emphasis on one type of delivery/service – it is about offering a combination of varied services which complement each other and emerge from the University's strategic directions and priorities.

Scenario 4 (Kate Chanock, La Trobe University)

Your university is being reviewed in the next quality assurance round. What mechanisms do you / would you want to have in place to demonstrate the quality of your service?

The philosophy of my unit is that LAS advisers act as guides to the distinctive academic subculture(s) in which our students sojourn, interpreting their purposes and showing how these shape the literacy practices that students will encounter. The aim is increased control over, rather than more thorough submission to, these cultural practices. The work of interpretation is done in individual tutorials, lectures, workshops, and handouts; the implications for each student's reading and writing are explored one-to-one. At the same time, it is our responsibility to try to engage tutors, too, in thinking about why they do what they do, and how to make this clearer to their students. Ideally, evaluation should focus on the effectiveness of our efforts to raise awareness on the part of both students and tutors, though this is not easy to demonstrate, still less to measure.

Because academic skills advising is different in many ways from teaching in the disciplines, it does not lend itself easily to institutional methods of evaluation designed to demonstrate the quality of teaching in degree programs. Nonetheless, if evaluation is to reflect credit on our programs and our institutions, we need to institute mechanisms that assess what we think is valuable in our work, in a form that is comprehensible and credible to outside evaluators. These will vary from program to program, but useful considerations for many may be:

- What is meaningful
- What is feasible
- What is credible
- What is fair

I think we should be steadfast in standing by what we perceive as our students' needs and what we have found to be the best ways of meeting these. At the same time, particularly if these methods are expensive and/or low-tech, we need to demonstrate a willingness to develop flexible alternatives. (Because I regard one-to-one teaching as essential, for example, I also address common problems through materials integrated into the disciplines, and demonstrate how each mode informs the other.) We need to be proactive in preparing (succinct) statements of how our programs support the work of the institution, and regular reports demonstrating that we carry out a constant cycle of planning, implementation, reflection, and revision. For credibility, this cycle should also call upon the mechanisms already authorized by the institution's quality assurance process. While these may not suit our purposes (e.g. course evaluation questionnaires do not fit one-to-one tutorials), adaptations can be negotiated that do suit our goals and values, but are recognizable to outside evaluators. We need to be clear about the reasons for what we do, AND able to articulate them in the language of quality assurance.

Our work is a powerful influence on students' success, but only one influence. We should develop mechanisms that affirm the kind of influence we think we have (e.g.

building confidence, demystifying expectations, developing strategies, helping to internalize a critical approach) but do not go too far (e.g. claiming improvement in marks or retention, which we can help but over which we can have no control).

Changing Identities

PLENARY ADDRESS

LANGUAGE AND ACADEMIC SKILLS ADVISERS: PROFESSIONAL ONTOGENESIS

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Keywords: Language and academic skills advisers, professional ontogenesis, communities of practice

It is a pleasure and an honour to be invited to address this conference, all the more so that the theme of the conference is “changing identities”, a theme which resounds profoundly with me in my own professional journey. A conference which challenges us to think about being insiders and being outsiders is also immensely challenging to me, because I feel both inside our profession because of my past, and potentially outside because of my imagined future. At the moment, however, I feel that I’m standing in the doorway between two rooms, and not wanting to close the door. Indeed I would like to keep this door open for ever, but more about that later.

For now, I simply ask for your tolerance if I slip occasionally between the two rooms. The one room beckons me through my solidarity with the field of practice that I cut my first teeth on, and that will always provide the conceptual and practical grounding

in my work - I've usually referred to this field as "learning development", but let's use the prevailing term of "language and academic skills" here or LAS for short. The other room exerts its constant pull on me towards the responsibilities of my role as a so-called "director of educational development". Let's not dwell here on the appropriateness of that label to describe what I do, and particularly let's leave aside the term "development" to stew over its own self-inflated claims of authority and virtue.

I therefore speak from both inside and outside, or rather poised between. This motif of inside and outside is a very significant one in understanding what a profession is all about. Who's in, who's out, who's on the edge, who's at the centre, who's knocking at the door to come in, who's torn between many rooms at once… It's a motif which is typically invoked by university executives in the almost annual rituals of restructuring as they decide where the tribes will live, where the territories will begin and end (drawing on Tony Becher's 1989 and now legendary metaphor). This inside/outside motif will bubble along throughout my presentation as I attempt to articulate my own view of the professional ontogenesis of the LAS profession.

What is the LAS profession? Who are the LAS advisers? How many lads are there? You may be interested to know that 85% of the delegates at this conference are females. Just how representative is this of the whole profession? What else do we know or not know about LAS professionals themselves?

Prior to this conference, there seem to have been few published reports or papers on LAS professionals themselves. This is particularly surprising given the wealth of published literature generated by LAS advisers elaborating the role of language and literacy in learning, describing the discourses of particular disciplines, and explaining pedagogical practices which foreground language and literacy in university learning.

This conference is a real milestone because it foregrounds the concept of professional identity, and has attracted numerous contributions related directly to the role of the professionals themselves. Prior to this, only a handful of papers seem to have been published about LAS professionals and the evolution of their profession. Reflected in these few papers but, even more so, reflected through my own lived experience within this field, has been a prevailing insider-outsider discourse, and a

sense in which LAS professionals feel they are often isolated from the mainstream of academic life, inhabitants of the peripheral fringes of their universities.

For me, a picture has emerged of a group of professionals who share a common set of goals and interests, who share a common language about their work, who have relatively close agreement about what topics and issues are of greatest relevance at particular times, who come together regularly at professional gatherings such as this one, who have a sense of belongingness – who share the feeling of being insiders.

But at the same time, and in their solidarity with each other, they also share a sense of being outsiders. Alison Lee encapsulated how this feeling of marginalisation was manifest in the mid-1990s:

> "They often have short term contracts. Tenure is rare and career paths are very limited. There are permanent problems of resources. Opportunities for research are limited due to the institutional funding imperative for these practitioners to provide a service to students and faculties. The structure of the university restricts the activities of the units which are usually outside, and not integral to, the day to day functioning and structures of the mainstream business of the university. Access to ways of forming productive collegiate relations with senior colleagues in various fields is limited." (Lee, 1997: 72)

At the beginning of the '90s, a study by Samuleovicz (1990) of the group she termed "learning counsellors" revealed, through the reported experiences and perceptions of the practitioners themselves, an earlier picture of disquiet. Foremost among the concerns of the staff she surveyed was their lack of professional and career development opportunities, and this they attributed to their marginalised existence within their university.

Let me summarise some of the signs that I think are relevant to understanding the status of LAS and the LAS professional in universities, at least in Australia, but I

have a feeling this list could be expanded to include New Zealand and South Africa at least:

- no commonly accepted name for the professional role
- roles poorly understood by others (as “the remedial tutor”, “the English lecturer”, “that person who helps students”, etc.)
- no agreed standard for staff awards and levels
- rarely a clearly identified career structure
- few groups with anything approaching effective critical mass
- a disproportionately high level of staff casualisation
- few jobs advertised at more senior levels
- generic institutional promotion criteria insensitive to LAS work
- few staff successful in being promoted to higher level positions
- no professional association
- no professional journal or newsletter (although the discussion list Unilearn has been an unparalleled success)
- in some contexts, explicit exclusions from rights and entitlements conferred automatically upon others undertaking academic work

There are some LAS units which are not well captured any longer by these descriptors. But in as much as any of these assertions might be seen as valid generalisations for the LAS profession as a whole, is it any wonder that there has been a pervasive belief amongst LAS professionals that their work continues to reside on the margins of university work, unrecognised and unrewarded?

This theme of separateness from mainstream academic work in universities is one which is reiterated in studies on the status of “writing centers” in the USA. Grimm, in 1996, published a paper called “Rearticulating the work of the writing centre” which

was a polemical analysis of the "subordinate service positions" of such centres. She described these centres as being "neither theoretically nor structurally integrated within the intellectual work of the university". She claimed that "they are marked by social notions of what women provide – refuge, nurturance, emotional support, personal guidance…" (Grimm, 1996: 527). The role of writing centres in US universities shares many similar characteristics with that of LAS units in Australian universities, although I'm not sure that her depiction is entirely applicable to our situation.

I'd like to come back now to the doorway between my two rooms, the LAS profession and the academic development one. There is a growing sense of the proximity between LAS work and that work which is often called "academic development", otherwise known as "educational development", "educational consultancy", and so on. Lee Andresen in 1996 actually depicted academic development as a superordinate term encompassing a plethora of professional roles including LAS. This was his list:

> "academic staff developers, teaching/learning consultants, instructional designers, educational technologists, educational evaluators, academic management/leadership developers and consultants, student learning researchers, and student support personnel (learning skills advisors, literacy and numeracy tutors, equity tutors and the like)." (Andresen, 1996: 40)

I'm sure there would be markedly different views on just how appropriate his taxonomy is here, and markedly different views on whether academic developers would be considered the most proximate to LAS. In some universities, these two groups are actually co-located within the one organisational unit (a pattern which is a little more common in the United Kingdom), whereas in some other universities, the two groups operate in worlds apart, hostile or oblivious to each other.

But what is really interesting, however, is the parallels between the two groups in terms of their experiences of marginality. Strikingly similar accounts of feeling marginalised and isolated were reported more than a decade ago amongst academic

developers. Ingrid Moses, in 1987, compared the status of what she termed educational development across four countries including Australia. She included amongst the symptoms of this marginality their lack of a career path, and their difficulties of being promoted on the basis of criteria insensitive to their work and roles. She summed up the mood of the day:

> "The morale of many educational developers seems low – some of the reasons are the precarious position of education development and educational developers, the low status of teaching which is reflected onto their work, the constant need to be relevant, needed, to demonstrate effectiveness where effectiveness may be hard to prove; the constant need to convince, convert, establish and maintain credibility via-a-vis a sceptical university environment where status is based on research performance." (Moses, 1987: 476)

Ten years on from then, this mood continued to tinge the self-examination of academic developers. David Baume in the UK saw the academic development field as continuing to be buffetted by the winds of change, with some units "surviv(ing) precariously on high narrow ledges, grabbing crumbs and doing good where they may, susceptible to death by attack, starvation or apathy" (Baume, 1996: 4). But, in the same journal issue as Baume's piece, Phil Candy was arguing that there were signs of a clear shift in status for educational development "from the margins to the mainstream" (Candy, 1996: 8).

The journal was the International Journal of Academic Development, published by the Taylor and Francis Group, this was its first issue, and its establishment marked a watershed in the academic development field. From the beginning the journal foregrounded an interest in the professional status and roles of academic developers. It provided a venue for debate and knowledge-sharing across national borders and the dissemination of empirical investigations into the profession. No doubt this journal has played a key role in the consolidation of the academic development profession and its elevation in institutional status, although other

contextual factors such as government-initiated quality assurance demands have probably also been influential.

Let's look at another cognate field – that of instructional design. In this field there has been a similar ongoing interest in the roles of the practitioners themselves, although without as marked a sentiment of exclusion. The origins of instructional design map on closely to the establishment of university distance education centres which were charged with the task of producing packaged learning materials for off-campus students (Allen, 1996: 7). Perhaps because of this beginning, the roles of these practitioners have tended to develop less haphazardly, even if there are continuing concerns about the codification of work and work processes as Inglis (1996) and Young (2000) have attested.

What is common amongst these two cognate fields of practice has been the felt need to organise as a profession, and to clarify roles and responsibilities in order to justify the relevance and value of the contributions that these expert practitioners can make to improving university teaching and learning. These groups have actively inspected their own identity and practice, either to secure their place in the landscape of university work, or to reinvent themselves for securing future places. It seems to me that, by contrast, LAS practitioners have been less inwardly focussed on addressing their own identity and status, and less outwardly strategic about it compared with these other fields of practice.

So let's turn to this idea of organising. There have been a few calls at different times to formalise the evident solidarity of LAS practitioners into an organised professional status. In 1990, Samuelovicz, for example, urged "learning and language skills counsellors" to consider forming a professional association, and to establish a forum for information and knowledge-sharing. Since then, the insecure and unrewarded status of LAS positions in universities has been a perennial discussion theme. Towards the end of the last decade, one of these LAS conferences enabled a more concerted effort to be made to draw together multiple perspectives about the nature of the LAS practitioner role.

The outcomes of this forum were consolidated into a generic position statement for "academic language and learning skills advisers/lecturers in Australian Universities",

prepared by Erst Carmichael and others in 1999. This paper argued that the work itself was essentially academic work and needed to be recognised as such. That such a statement was able to be developed provides evidence of the shared identity and goals of LAS practitioners. That such a statement was believed to be needed provides even more vivid evidence of the pervasive insecurity they experience in the status of their positions within Australian universities.

There had been an earlier call by Mark Garner, Kate Chanock, and Rosemary Clerehan in 1995 to clarify the nature of this field of practice. Their edited collection, "Academic Skills Advising: Towards a Discipline" was the first publication of the Victorian Language and Learning Network, a loose affiliation of LAS practitioners in the universities in Victoria. Whilst this particular collection was focussed for the most part on theoretical and practical accounts of LAS teaching, the introduction to the collection captures the sense of a new field of practice in search of its professional identity:

> "…the development of LAS [language and academic skills] teaching has been the richer for the diversity of backgrounds, perspectives and areas of expertise that people have brought to it. Nonetheless, each new member of the field is likely to be asking exactly what it is we do and why…" (Garner, Chanock, and Clerehan, 1995: 5).

What characteristics are normally associated with a field of practice coming to be known as such? It seems there are many different ways that individuals approach unpacking their notion of shared identity, as captured in a study about academic developers' views of themselves:

> "Some people chose to approach the question of self-definition by the desire to identify a body of knowledge which defines what we know, a 'canon' for developers. Others preferred to talk about the way we do our work as opposed to accepting one canon which defines what we know. This approach emphasised the theories we subscribe to, the way

> we analyse the discrepancies within our work, and the lessons we learn. Still others talked about looking in from the outside, bridging private critiques of the solitary developer with public measures of our practice and research." (Mintz, 1997: 24)

I have found Etienne Wenger's conceptualisation of the idea of "communities of practice" to be very helpful for this purpose. Wenger sees a community of practice as being made up of people engaged in "practices …(which are) the property of a kind of community created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise" (Wenger, 1998: 45).

Wenger's carefully articulated concept of communities of practice is a generic one and, as such, does not engage in depth with the issues of epistemology which are so fundamental to contexts of work in an educational setting. Nonetheless, the concept has strong explanatory potential for understanding and studying more systematically a particular group engaged in doing its work, within a common historical and social context which gives structure and meaning to what they do (Wenger, 1998: 47).

For Wenger, our identity within a community of practice entails the negotiation of our identity within that community, the coming to know ourselves through our recognition of what is familiar and what is not familiar, a knowledge of where we have been and where we are going, our reconciliation of our co-existing multi-memberships, and our ways of resolving our identity in the interplay between our local and our more global communities (Wenger, 1998: 149).

Wenger's conceptualisation of a community of practice is salient in the context of LAS work. In particular, the identification of the boundaries around LAS practice may provide a useful way of examining the nature of LAS work, and articulating what distinguishes it from other work. Equally as importantly, the examination of LAS practice within a "broader constellation of practices and broader institutions" (Wenger, 1998: 168) is likely to offer a useful perspective for understanding the status of LAS work in its various contextual settings.

Indeed, it is possible that the experiences of marginality reported by LAS practitioners may be characterised most persuasively by reference to their co-existing identities of participation and non-participation in their own community of practice, in those with close and sometimes contested boundaries, and in the institutional arrangements which mediate their relations of participation. This is a series of themes articulated by Lee (1996: 7) who attributed responsibility for the low self-concept of LAS practitioners to their inclination to "define themselves by contrast to others" (Wenger, 1998: 168), the others in this case being academic staff in universities as a whole group:

> "Many academic literacy development practitioners come from a background in teaching and do not see themselves as 'real' academics. Indeed, many define themselves in a binary 'us/them' relationship to 'academics', a relationship with a clear hierarchy of privilege and marginality. Many could be said to have significantly internalised such a relation." (Lee, 1996: 7)

I have re-interpreted the kinds of characteristics that Wenger suggested one would need to look for as indicators of whether a community of practice has formed. I have reworked Wenger's essentially process characteristics and represented them in Figure 1 as desirable goals (with apologies to Michael Halliday (1985) whose metafunctions I have very loosely appropriated for this purpose). To these I have added other processes and goals emanating from practitioner perspectives, and characteristics which reflect the institutional situation which mediates participation and non-participation in LAS practice.

The first of these clusters captures what the field itself is about, as would be manifest through the practitioners' perspectives of the substance, history, scope, issues and so on within the field. The second refers to the people relationships within the field: not just amongst the practitioners themselves but also between them and others. The third cluster refers to the way the field of practice is organised.

Integrating dimensions of a field of practice	Examples of characteristic processes and goals of a field of practice
What the field of practice is about	· an understanding of its history and evolution · a shared knowledge base · a common view about the definition and scope of the field of practice · a common view about what are the relevant issues and problems of its practice
How people interact in the field of practice	· sustained mutual relationships – harmonious or conflictual · substantial overlap in people's views on who belongs and who does not belong · a common status conferred on it by the institution it serves · a common commitment of service to its "clients"
How the field of practice is organised	· channels to facilitate knowledge sharing across local and global boundaries · an agreed code of ethics and standards of practice · a formal organisation and structure · procedures for licensing and accreditation of members

Figure 1: Characteristics to distinguish the LAS field of practice

What's really important at this point is to declare that I am not leading towards making recommendations about a planned interventionist approach. I am not going to suggest a design intended to alter the trajectories of the LAS field of practice. This could only be foolish to attempt, even if one wanted to. A field of practice is constantly evolving in an organic way towards the destinies its practitioners jointly construct, whether knowingly or unknowingly. Wenger provides a cautionary note about the futility of mandating the shape and directions of practice:

> "Communities of practice are about content – about learning as a living experience of negotiating meaning – not about form. In this sense, they cannot be legislated into existence or defined by decree. …. One can attempt to institutionalise a community of practice, but the community of practice itself will slip through the cracks and remain distinct from its institutionalisation." (Wenger, 1998: 229).

However, what I will say is the LAS profession is ripe for the studying – there is so much that is assumed and felt, but so little that has been subjected to rigorous scholarly enquiry. Here are some of the studies that might be done.

At a first level, a census could be carried out to find out about the demographics of the profession. Some examples of the kinds of demographics that could be gathered are listed in Figure 2. Such a census would no doubt provide the kind of data that is periodically sought, sometimes frantically, through the Unilearn discussion list, as yet another unit needs to justify its place or existence yet again in its university's landscape. One could imagine some insightful examinations of the field of practice emerging from an interpretation of census data, perhaps along the lines of the small study undertaken by Hicks (1997) of the career paths of academic development directors.

But possibly of greater significance to the LAS field of practice, a snapshot of the profession at a particular point in time could provide a very useful benchmark against which the profession's growth and development could be plotted over the next decades. As a record of the professional contexts of LAS practitioners, however they may define themselves and in all their diversity, this could contribute enormously to the strengthening and consolidating of the field of practice. Indeed, the undertaking of such a project as a collaborative initiative could provide, in itself, a mechanism for helping to formalise the status of the group as a professional body, and especially if commissioned by a body such as the Australian Universities Teaching Committee.

Categories	Example item topics
Position status	· Position award, level, tenure · Position title
Backgrounds and qualifications	· Educational qualifications · Other professional attainments · Previous positions
Organisational context	· Unit, group, or team name and organisational location · Unit, group, or team mass (critical mass) and constitution · Cognate groups – parallel, related, stratified

	· Unit hierarchy and reporting lines · Degree of inclusion in academic and university mainstreams · Participation in governance and strategic direction-setting
Professional relationships and participation	· Associations and affiliations · Professional meetings attended · Communication channels · Sources of information and ideas for professional maintenance · Types of contributions made to professional discourses
Career progression	· Conditions governing progression and promotion · Conditions governing appraisal and review · Career structures and succession chains · Access to mentors and role models
Work activity	· Types of work activity · Distribution of activity (priorities, periodicity…) · Degree of autonomy

Figure 2: Demography

At a deeper level, the surface has barely been scratched of the LAS profession's epistemologies and practices. I don't mean this in a derogatory sense as there are actually countless insightful explorations from the LAS field. What I mean is that there is so much more to be discovered. Here are just a few of the areas in which I believe much more study could usefully be undertaken into the epistemologies and practices of LAS professionals:

- enduring theories and concepts to explain LAS knowledge
- relationships to close and distant other knowledge domains
- the distinctive nature of LAS pedagogical knowledge
- the relationships between language and learning (as for example, Taylor, 1995)
- the notion of transdisciplinarity in LAS work

- the notion of “co-production” of knowledge in LAS collaborations within the disciplines (after Lee, 1997)
- LAS professionals’ conceptualisations of teaching and learning
- the relationships between LAS professionals’ conceptions of and approaches to their work
- legitimate means of evaluating LAS work

In a socio-historical sense, there are probably countless different interpretations of the professional ontogenesis of the LAS field. Here in Figure 3 is my own roughly conveyed sketch of the profession’s evolution over the last few decades, beginning in the early 1970s when small units (or often individuals) were set up in a few universities to provide “study skills” or English language support for students from non-English speaking backgrounds. This was exactly the way that my own career began in this field in the mid-‘70s, as a response to the steadily increasing flow of NESB students entering the university with lower levels of English language proficiency than was considered sufficient for them to have an equal chance of success.

I’ve referred to the role that was cast for me, and others like me at that time, as “the remediators”. I’ve depicted the prevailing theme of that era under the rubric of “multiculturalism”. In my own experience over the years, I have seen my role change as I have developed my understanding and beliefs, and responded to the context around me, through that of mediator, to integrator, to transformer. Certainly the theme of integrating has generated a plethora of writings during the last decade, with the focus on embedding the development of language and literacy into the curricula of the degree programs and knowledge domains. Over the last few years, and especially among a number of what I would consider leading edge groups, the roles themselves seem to have become more those of “transformers”, with the goals of curriculum transformation driving the work, and change agency imbuing the experience.

Prevailing theme	Response by LAS professions	LAS professionals as:
Multiculturalism	· supporting the minority in an elitist system	The Remediators
Massification Globalisation	· ameliorating disadvantage for "non-traditional students" · internationalisation and inclusiveness in curriculum	The Mediators
Generic skills Quality	· integration of skills with content · outcomes oriented monitoring and assessing	The Integrators
Flexibility Interdisciplinarity	· learning as reading and writing · language as transdisciplinary	The Transformers

Figure 3: Professional ontogenesis – one possible sketch

But the aspect I find most tantalising is imagining the futures. What might the LAS professional evolve into? What might be the conditions now and in the future which could alter the trajectory? What might be the responses which will strengthen and sustain LAS professionals into the future?

In the ever-changing climate of university work, as boundaries between groups shift and merge and sometimes melt, the possibilities of meta-professional convergence between LAS professionals and other groups are exciting. We would need to discuss who the most closely cognate groups are. Would they be academic developers, instructional and educational designers, information literacy skills developers, research developers, postgraduate supervising skills developers, professional and organisational developers, and so on? We would need to explore how LAS roles intersect with these groups. Just as significantly, we need to understand how LAS roles intersect with those of the academics who teach the disciplines, and thereby elaborate (for them and others) how role convergences can benefit the co-production of new understandings.

As well as exploring work roles into the future, there are numerous aspects of LAS practices that have been only superficially opened to critical debate until now. For example, the issue of confidentiality for students has hardly been broached, but really demands to be critically scrutinised within the context of a university's educational goals and curricula. For as long as access by students to LAS units is considered to demand confidentiality levels akin to those of counselling services, it seems unlikely to me that the work of LAS professionals will be well understood and appreciated for its considerable contribution to student learning. Similarly, the practice of working with students on their assignments prior to submission for assessment needs to be contested as an ethical dilemma of fairness and equity.

Amongst the papers at this conference is one by Gavin Melles which enters into the very critical examination that I believe is needed on the question of ownership and stewardship of knowledge for the LAS profession. He argues that what LAS professionals teach is "not uniquely located in LAS" units, but is really at the heart of what all university teaching is about. If one agrees with Melles' view that the teaching of literacies is dispersed "across institutions with no privileged convergence on LAS" units, then it behoves us to articulate all the more clearly what is the distinctive contribution that LAS professionals can and do make? The LAS scholarship continues to be short on this kind of investigation, and short on scrutinising the congruence (or lack of congruence) between LAS practices and underlying theories about LAS knowledge. One might question, for example, the rationale underlying separate tertiary literacy credit courses in terms of whether the literacy taught is a means of learning (that is, learning something else through literacy), or whether literacy has become itself the object of learning (that is, learning about literacy). From there, one would need to unpack related matters, such as whether literacy capability can or should be assessed separately from disciplinary knowledge. Likewise, some solid fundamental work needs to be undertaken to develop valid indicators of the effectiveness of LAS contributions to student learning, in order to justify that more or deeper learning has taken place.

There are many new areas of work that LAS professionals are beginning to engage in which are opening up the horizons of the field and creating greater awareness of the distinctive contributions they can make. One of these is the role they are

increasingly playing of facilitating a deeper understanding amongst discipline-based academics about their own literacies. Until now, this has tended to have been identified as a serendipitous spin-off of the collaborative LAS teaching they have done with academics, and particularly in the contexts of teaching graduate students about research writing. However, in a world in which learning is increasingly happening without face-to-face contact, the role of literacy and the written text has assumed an even greater prominence than before, and the discipline-based academic has become more dependent on their own literacy skills to facilitate student learning. Thus, the opportunities are abundant for working with discipline-based academics in syndicated writing partnerships to create course materials, with the LAS professional guiding their writing partner towards more explicit understanding about discourse and their own writing process.

How will LAS come to be known in the future? Hopefully not any longer as handmaidens, nor as "intellectual ambulances in the slipstream of the academic disciplines" as Bernard McKenna observed in presenting his paper yesterday at this conference. Perhaps we should be confidently preparing ourselves for the more prominent role that Professor Richard Johnstone outlined in yesterday's keynote address when he spoke of the value of such centralised units in opening things up, introducing cultural change, tackling the boundaries of the larger more stable discipline-based groups in universities. Surely these are the ways we would like to be known: as catalysts for systemic change, as facilitators of organisational learning, as partners in the transformation of university teaching and learning.

For myself, I stand at the door between my two rooms. These rooms could be seen as the self-perpetuating "silos" that Richard Johnstone spoke of yesterday, the resilient edifices erected around fields of knowledge, intended to keep some things in and some things out. Rather than choosing between them, I contest the value of a "silo mentality" for the future of the many fields of professional practice which support a university's educational goals. Instead, I believe we should be engaging in more vigorous partnerships across these converging areas and working towards the co-construction of new knowledge. Certainly, let's be strategic in becoming more visible, and laying claim to those areas of knowledge where we truly are expert. But let's do that from a more consciously and rigorously well-defined understanding of

ourselves and the professional roles we play in transforming university teaching and learning.

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Changing Identities

FROM MYSTERY TO MASTERY

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The identity that universities assign to their students is a mystifying one; it moves continually from novice to expert, from out-group to in-group and back, sometimes by shifts so subtle that students have trouble recognizing them, sometimes by sickening lurches from which they have difficulty recovering. For example, students are expected to write as experts, but are marked as novices. They are expected to "invent the university" (Bartholemae 1985) when they could be oriented to its culture. They are asked for creativity but penalized for departing from convention. This paper looks at the various ways in which university teaching positions the learner, and the alienating effects of inconsistency in this regard. It goes on to suggest ways in which LAS advisers might help to clarify the students' role as novice members of a discipline, and introduce some discussion of this into mainstream teaching practices.

Keywords: maturity, individuation, originality, role, convention

Introduction

The aspect of identity I want to focus on is one that most of our students have had drummed into them for a year before they start university, and will hear about, again, well into their first year. This is the idea that university study is a passage from childhood into adulthood. From both their teachers at Year 12, and their tutors in First Year, they hear the same refrain: “In Year 12, the teacher coddles you, spoonfeeds you, leads you by the hand. It’s not like that at uni; there, you take responsibility for yourself” (cf. Clerehan, Moore & Vance 2001). No longer will teachers monitor when, where, or whether the work gets done. Nor will they offer scaffolding to help their students think. Within this trope, there is very little room for manoeuvre. The original state, in which they had achieved a hard-won confidence, is constructed as somehow shameful, and to wish to remain in it is not an option. Likewise, failure to pass out of it can be experienced as a failure to grow up.

It may be that personal organisation is a function of maturity. It is largely a mystification, however, to identify the transition from novice to expert with the process of maturation, or to identify maturity with a movement from dependence to independence of mind. What is seen as individuation is at the same time socialisation, and what is represented as independence is conformity to a conventional academic role. That paradox is what I want to explore in this paper. I’ll look first at the ways in which maturity is bundled together with individuation, independence, and expertise in the university context, and at the damage this can do, when students misunderstand what it means to do “original” work at university. Then, I’ll discuss the reasons why I think this “bundling” is mistaken. Students’ difficulties stem, in large part, not from immaturity but from unfamiliarity with the academic subcultures in which they find themselves; and their response – to wish for guidelines – is that of any adult on unfamiliar ground. Finally, I look at some of the things that LAS tutors may be able to do to dispel this mystification, by helping students to think about the role(s) in which they write.

Standing Apart from the Crowd

Central to the image of the adult in this trope is that an adult walks alone. “At uni”, the Year 12 teachers tell their students, “you’ll be on your own.” (At our large academic orientation each year, I ask, “How many of you were told this?” and the room becomes a sea of hands.) When they commence their course, moreover, this impression is reinforced by the emphasis on originality, reiterated in the “statement of authorship” that every student must staple to every assignment to certify that “the attached document is my original work”.

This statement is part of the institution’s prohibition on plagiarism, and only the most visible part. If we read further in the advice on plagiarism on La Trobe’s Sociology and Anthropology website, for example, we find that it is largely about handling intertextuality, and includes advice on how students should take notes from their sources that will enable them to avoid plagiarism. The central emphasis on originality, however, is often misunderstood by students as requiring that each writer stand apart from others, and this interpretation fits well with the idea that maturation is individuation. While this idea comes from Western psychology, the claims of that science to universality make it seem natural, and right. Consistent with this paradigm of maturation is the idea that adults do not plagiarise, because they have something of their own to say.

Indeed, the wording of many assignments in the Humanities appears to call for a personal approach to the topic: “In your view/ in your opinion/ what do you think/ do you agree?” Often, students receive a list of marking criteria that includes “originality”. As one Anthropology assignment put it, “To do your essay well, you need to give it your own character. Try not to quote or paraphrase; instead, find your own angle on the subject”. The students are, in effect, being positioned as experts, and some may welcome thus being “validated as having something to say” (Sansevere 1999, p. 259). Some who consult me are uneasy, however, and they are not wrong. They may be experts on their own opinion, but they are novices in the context within which it is being sought. The lecturer in this Anthropology subject is sincere in his invitation, but it is risky for students who think that they must ***substitute*** their “own angle” for the ones they encounter in the reading. As Bartholomae

remarks in “Inventing the university”, the “right to speak is seldom conferred on us – on any of us, teachers or students – by virtue of [the] fact that we have invented or discovered an original idea. Leading students to believe that they are responsible for something new or original, unless they understand what those words mean with regard to writing, is a dangerous and counterproductive practice” (1985, p. 143).

An unintended consequence of asking students to write as experts is that it can create an impression that there are no conventional expectations to be met; that any approach could be successful, as long as it conveys what one sincerely thinks; that there are “no right answers”, as tutors frequently insist, implying quite misleadingly that there are no wrong answers either. It sometimes seems that tutors underestimate the disciplinary constraints within which they themselves are working. Certainly, they see independence – intellectual as well as personal – as a salient difference between university and school. Tutors complain that their students have been ‘spoonfed’ at VCE (the Victorian Certificate of Education, taken over Years 11 and 12), where each assignment came with a list of criteria specifying what had to be in it, so that students expect a formula for writing essays. This is poor preparation, it is felt, for university, where we do not want them to write to a formula; we want original, independent, critical thought.

Standing Out *in* the Crowd

Students who interpret this expectation of originality as a demand for “your view, not other people’s” find, however, when their work is returned, that it was really a demand for “your view ON other people’s”. Academics see originality as a kind of engagement with other people’s work, not in isolation from it. This needs to be said explicitly, however, for it is not obvious. Students who consult me are often worried that they’ve “used too many references – with all those footnotes, it looks like I didn’t have any ideas of my own”. Others who did not consult me find out the hard way, but do not know how to interpret the comments on their work. “Why did he ask me for my opinion, if he didn’t want it?” asked one; and another exploded, “How can my opinion be wrong?” (cf. Preus 1999, pp. 78-80).

It is not that they have been told to ignore the reading, of course; the problem is more that they have not made sense of the idea of writing originally about other people's ideas. Students who showed me the essay instruction to "find your own angle on the subject" were puzzled as the instructions continued:

> Unlike the previous essay, this one does not require you to be reflexive…You simply have to describe and analyse an ethnographic situation. That ethnographic situation is recounted in the following paper, which should be the basis of the ethnographic part of your essay.

What exactly could be meant by originality in this context? Looking it up in the marking criteria, they found this definition: "Are the ideas in the essay truly your own, even if you originally gained them through listening to or reading what someone else said or wrote?" Similarly puzzling is the advice given in a subject at Monash University, that "It is not sufficient merely to repeat the opinions of other writers in a particular topic area….Where opinions of other writers are relied upon to support a student's argument, they should be acknowledged by way of a footnote" (Searcy & Price 2001, p. 299). This seems to be saying, don't do it, but when you do it, give a footnote! The key, here, is the word "merely", but students are not yet in a position to understand why it is crucial. It is not ***sufficient*** to repeat the views of others, but it is necessary to do so – and then to comment on them somehow.

To make sense of this, we must take a closer look at the trope of the academic writer as a sort of Lone Ranger (and in case this legend is one that has not survived my generation, the Lone Ranger was a cowboy who appeared from nowhere when outlaws threatened, sorted them out, and then rode away into the sunset leaving the battlers to ask each other, in tones of awe, "Who WAS that masked man?" (Largent 2001). There are two things we need to recognise about the Lone Ranger. In the first place, he was never alone: he had his faithful Indian companion, Tonto, by his side, listening and responding to his every utterance. In the second place, he was a ranger: he was not a maverick but a representative and defender of the social order. It was not his difference ***from*** conventional society that made him a hero, but his difference ***within*** it.

So it is with academic discourse. What is truly original is unlikely to be of much interest, because it is not what we were already talking about. What appeals to us as original is likely to be a slightly different way of looking at whatever we ***were*** talking about. This is a salient characteristic of the successful academic discourse that Bartholomae discusses in “Inventing the university”. The more successful students, in his view, “claim their authority… by placing themselves both within and against a discourse, or within and against competing discourses, and working self-consciously to claim an interpretive project of their own, one that grants them their privilege to speak” (1985, p. 158).

Criticism as Conformity

But are academics necessarily thinking for themselves when they adopt a critical approach, if this approach is, itself, the convention to which our system requires them to conform? Bartholomae tells a story of his own teacher who “once told us that whenever we were stuck for something to say, we should use the following as a ‘machine’ for producing a paper: ‘While most readers of _____ have said _____, a close and careful reading shows that _____’” (1985, p. 153).

“Writing against the grain” (Kramer-Dahl 1995, p. 21) is not, or not necessarily, the approach of an independent thinker taking up his or her “own” individual stance; it is the patterned behaviour generated by the convention that we should always be critical. Viewed in this light, it is not a self that is speaking, in the usual (pre-postmodern, and persistent) sense of the term (my ‘real’ self), but a writer performing a role. And here, perhaps, we should remember that the Lone Ranger wears a mask. If he has a “real self”, it is not on display; what we see is the role of the Ranger, doing what a Ranger’s gotta do.

Writing in Role

It is this idea of role, in fact, that Christine Jessup employed to rally a group of students who were outraged by their tutors’ rejection of their essays, which they took as a rejection of themselves (Jessup 2001). They had written from experience or

"common sense", and had been rebuked for neglecting to anchor their statements in references to the work of the disciplinary community. Their resentment is echoed in the literature (cf. Ivanic 1998, pp. 220-221), and, for many of us, in one-to-one tutorials with older students who bring expertise that tutors do not accept as authoritative. For students who come to us from the professions, in particular, and write as practitioners, this is a common and alienating experience. They are abruptly displaced from the in-group they thought they would belong to, into an out-group of students who are not-yet-one-of-us (e.g., Chan 1997).

Although we might not see the tutors' feedback to Jessup's students quite as they did – and Jessup undertook to interpret the comments in ways that would enable her students to revise successfully – we ***can*** see in them a lurch from having constructed the writer, in advance, as an expert, to reconstructing him/her, in the event, as a novice. The language suggests a disappointed expectation, and it certainly is not the way we address a colleague:

- That really does render this sentence incomprehensible!
- You simply can not make this kind of categorical claim! You must learn to be more tentative.
- Who says so?
- This is a very strange statement?
- …you have made no effort to develop these points into a coherent argument (Jessup 2001, p. 202).

This last rebuke -- "you have made no effort"—is particularly indicative of the lecturer's position of power over the novice. Lecturers cannot know what effort was expended, but they are allowed to attribute the student's failure to causes of this kind. As Jessup says, "Ultimately [feedback] defines the nature of the relationship between tertiary teachers and their students" (2001, p. 200).

Jessup's response to this was to get the students to focus on their role as writers, rather than on their relationship to the lecturer. What are the obligations of writers to readers? What did these writers want the reader to know, and how could they

construct their text in such a way as to organise and facilitate the reader's reception of it? How could they share (and acknowledge) the sources of their knowledge? The re-written essays were a good deal better received, and Jessup believes -- because time constraints precluded the students from doing more research, and because she offered little advice on changing the original texts themselves -- that "the main improvement came from students developing a better understanding of their role as writers" (2001, p. 202).

There are conventional expectations surrounding the performance of any role, and students are not wrong to want to know what these are. This is not a failure to grow up and take responsibility for themselves; it is a way of taking responsibility. Nonetheless, it is dispiriting to be confronted with advice as formulaic as Bartholomae's "machine". It is understandable that tutors are reluctant to offer guidance that could be used formulaically. Moreover, formulae, in themselves, are not likely to be much help. It has been found that writers who fixate on rules are liable to become blocked rather than enabled (Rose 1980; Daly 1985); and if they do manage to produce essays, these are disappointing.

It is not that criteria are a bad thing, however; the problems arise only when the rationale for the criteria is "because I say so". Regularities of form, structure, voice, evidence, etc, are generated by the purposes of the discipline, and it is here that we must focus if we are to help students take on the role of student writers. For example, the reason why Bartholomae's machine can work to generate essays in literature is that the purpose of critical commentary is to show another reader of a particular literary text more than has yet been seen in it. If the writer has nothing of this kind to show, the "machine" is not going to help.

When we want to teach students what their texts should be like, then, we have to go beyond the common features of the artifact to ask about their purpose, and this purpose is both intellectual and social: to embody an argument of a particular kind, in response to a question generated by a discipline community. There is no formula for this, as it depends on the purpose of the question and the nature of the material; but similar forms will be generated by the particular kinds of questions a discipline asks, the kinds of materials it goes to for evidence, and the kinds of uses it makes of these materials. If students can answer questions in their – as yet fictitious -- role as a

member of that community, their answers will not all be the same, but they will be conventional.

Individuation as Socialisation

It is once people feel confident in the conventions, moreover, that they can do original things within them. For all their complaints about students who will not think for themselves, lecturers who find themselves on unfamiliar ground behave in much the same way. In a professional development seminar I attended recently, participants were asked to think about a subject they had taught more than once, and to tell the group how their teaching of it changed after the first time. “The first time,” said a Psychology tutor, “I just used the textbook, because I wasn’t an expert in the subject yet.” This is echoed by staff who participated in a teaching experiment with Cartwright and Noone (2001). Reflecting on their adjustment to the methods they were being asked to try, a social science lecturer said:

> At first, you follow each of the steps, then as you get more confident you make adjustments until the recipe is really your own…. I don’t have the confidence yet to deviate in any way. It’s providing me with a sense of security to know that I have the steps that I can follow (p. 51).

An environmental science lecturer concurred:

> I get worried if I don’t do quite what you say, because I feel I’m not doing it right. Generally, I feel I’m groping my way with the strategies, and so I have a tendency to stick to the steps formulated, no matter what. Though, I do imagine that as I get more familiar with the structures, and with incorporating them into my tutorials, I’ll learn to move away from the steps a bit (p. 51).

This sounds like the stereotype of the student who does not think for himself, who expects to be told what to do – and who is, for this reason, marked out as not yet

belonging to the intellectual culture of critical, independent thinkers to which these lecturers securely belong! When one is on unfamiliar ground, understanding precedes criticism, whether one is a student or a lecturer. The difference is that lecturers are less often on unfamiliar ground.

When they are, it becomes clear that individuation, in this context, is a function of socialisation, not of maturation. If we do not see it that way, it is because we are heavily invested in the idea of individuation. But if we regard it as the culmination of a natural process of maturation, the unfortunate result is to construct anyone who does not demonstrate it as somehow childlike. This process of "othering"-- that is, defining and privileging our own identity by contrast with what it supposedly is not – is masked, to some degree, when high school students are the designated "other" against which the academic community defines itself. It is quite plausible to think that they are immature. It becomes more obvious, however, if we broaden our perspective to consider how similar has been the "othering" of mature intellectual cultures that are not the same as ours.

Originality and 'Othering"

Members of western academic communities often congratulate themselves on their practice of challenging received wisdom. It is this, they say, that distinguishes our academic culture from the "reproductive" intellectual culture of the East, which produces (and sends us) students who cannot "think for themselves" (for a critical survey of this idea, see Chen 2001; also Fox 1994, pp. xiv-xv; Ramburuth 2000; Yew & Farrell 2001. Pennycook (1998) traces it as far back as 1865, with disturbing quotations from European commentators on education in China). "Alongside the tradition of emphasising the creativity of the West", as Pennycook says, "there has been a tradition of deriding other cultures for their supposedly stagnant or imitative cultural practices" (1998, p. 281).

In this regard, our discourse community is like any other described by Benedict Anderson as "imagined communities" (1983). "Communities are distinguished", he says, "not by their falsity/ genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (p. 15). And, as Pratt observes, "This style of imagining…is strongly utopian,

embodying values…which the societies often profess but systematically fail to realise" (1998, p. 180). Just as there is plenty of evidence that overseas students are critical (Yew & Farrell 2001; Fox 1994, p. xv) – and anybody who lives with Australian adolescents knows that they are critical as well! – there is evidence, too, that Western academics can be formulaic and authoritarian (Zamel 1998a, p. 193, Pennycook 1998). Indeed, it is overseas students who have made this complaint to Zamel (1998b, pp. 255-257). Nonetheless, the Western academic community persists in imagining itself as a community of critical thinkers.

If critical thinking is mandated, however, what is critical about it? Interestingly enough, some of the most critical thinking that takes place in universities occurs when students, from both local and international backgrounds, criticise the critical thrust of subjects they are studying. They do not often do it in their essays, because they expect to lose marks if they do; but they do it in one-to-one sessions when they discuss their work with me. They do not talk like rigid thinkers resisting attempts to open their minds, but like thoughtful people annoyed at attempts to channel their learning in particular directions that they see as faddish. If they express this view it may only confirm their tutors in the idea that the students are resistant to critical perspectives and cling childishly to conventional wisdom. But when we think that our teaching is boldly challenging received ideas, we might ask ourselves why, if this is so radical, our institution is paying us to do it. It is because challenging convention is the conventional activity of Western scholarship, and each academic generation that dismantles the previous set of ideas follows this up by establishing its own.

To say that the critical impulse functions as a mechanism of generational replacement within the profession is not to say that it is of no intellectual worth. Critical enquiry is one good way of pursuing knowledge, and I am happy to show students where it can lead. But I think it must be seen as a method of enquiry, rather than as a marker of identity with the power to include and exclude people from the academic community.

Where LAS Advisers Come In

What, then, can LAS advisers do to address this mystification? I think that, like Jessup, we can help students to think in terms of roles, with which they can choose to identify or not (or partly so and partly not), even as they carry them out. Useful questions then are

- Who are you writing as?
- To whom does a person in this role write?
- Why does a person in this role address the problem you're addressing?
- How does s/he communicate this work, and why?

For example, I had an interesting time earlier this year with an Honours class in Archaeology, analysing the texts they were reading in terms of accommodations to the imagined community of readers rather than in terms of any generic notions of good writing. We compared texts written by archaeologists for an academic journal (Bird, Frankel & Van Waarden 1998), a client group (Bird & Frankel 1998), and a popular audience (Keyser 2000), and considered how various features in each one established membership of a common community. For example, in the journal article, the references performed the same function as the use of "we" in the popular magazine: to group writer and readers together in the project at hand. For students just entering the professional community, this was a more compelling reason for referencing than the prohibition on plagiarism. As we picked each text to pieces, they could see how the structure, the voice, the evidence, and the language of each one followed from the adoption of a role and the assumption of a particular audience.

Comparing the research report in the academic journal with the booklet written by the same authors for the Aboriginal custodians of the sites they were investigating, we found systematic differences in each of these areas. In the context of the discipline community, the authors were addressing the problem of checking the accuracy of previously established dates for the sites – a problem of method – as

well as the implications of their findings for the work of other archaeologists in this field (the much earlier dates they obtained challenged prevailing assumptions about the chronological depth of human settlement and cultural continuity in the region). They used (with slight adaptations) the conventional structure of a research report, the objective voice, and the highly technical language of the discipline to communicate with this audience, focussing on the presentation of evidence in a tabular form and represented by abbreviations that are standard within the discipline but incomprehensible outside of it. When addressing the Aboriginal stakeholders in the project, by contrast, the authors described the artistic styles that were found at the sites, explained the lifeways that could be inferred from the artefacts they found, and highlighted the significance of the dates in showing the great time span of Aboriginal occupation of the area. They wrote in "plain English", with a minimum of technical language, and they included a kit of slides that could be used to share this knowledge with others in the indigenous community, as well as to instruct them on how to manage the sites to preserve them from damage.

While this text was comparatively simply written, there were interesting contrasts again when we looked at the other text written for a non-specialist audience. This one, dealing with new hominid discoveries in Southern Africa, and published in ***National Geographic***, was a personal, dramatic narrative of discovery, designed to take armchair travellers, in their imaginations, to the site of the discovery, and even into the long-vanished experience of the creature whose jawbone it described as "not just a pretty face" (Keyser 2000, p. 76). The many linguistic and visual devices by which this was done are beyond the scope of this paper; but in the Honours class, we were able to see how they created a tone and a story that contrasted markedly with the unadorned sharing of scientific information in the booklet for the client group.

Many LAS advisers focus on the sorts of questions I have outlined, and more ideas can be found in the literature. Ann Johns, for example, has tried training her students "in the principles of ethnography" and asking them to keep journals on their activities in the courses they were studying in the disciplines. The goal was for students to explore the roles that they and the professor play in this particular academic context" (1990, pp. 214-16). Ivanic, similarly, recommends that students

> conduct their own ethnographies of the academic discourse communities they are newly members of …[to discover] what the possibilities for self-hood are in these specific social contexts, and what positions they …are expected to occupy in their academic writing (1998, p. 342).

They should examine the instructions they are given, the feedback they get, and the ways that "social relations are conducted in their department" (Ivanic 1998, p. 342). It does not follow, for Ivanic, that students will be happy to embrace the "possibilities for selfhood" they discover; but they will have a clearer view of what the choices, and their consequences, are.

Elsewhere, Blanton advocates that instead of getting students to use academic texts as models, we should figure out "what academic readers and writers do" and get them to do that – and she offers a list of these "literate behaviors" (1998, p. 226) Unlike Blanton, I think that analysing texts is one good way of exploring such behaviors, but I think her emphasis on the role behavior of "interact[ing] with texts" in particular ways is useful for us.

As well as focusing on role in our adjunct activities, we may be able to introduce such a focus into the mainstream curriculum too. Tutors often start the year with just such a discussion, in order to clarify what they and their students expect to do in lectures, in tutorials, and with regard to assignments. Here, however, the focus is on their role as students in a subject; this needs to be connected with the idea that the subject itself is an activity within a discipline, and that its literate practices have the discipline community as their reference group. This idea is central to the materials I have introduced into first-year subjects in a range of disciplines across my Faculty (described in some detail in Chanock 1998 & 2000). The materials include a brief reading for students, for each of the first few weeks. These introduce the idea of a discourse and then focus on particular aspects of the discourse in which they are being trained: primary evidence, secondary argument, intertextuality, and critical debate. For the tutors, there are suggestions on how to discuss and practise these ideas in the context of the week's work for that particular subject. The questions asked in each subject are discussed in terms of the kinds of enquiry that go on in the discipline as a whole. The sequence of work with primary and secondary sources,

the focus on arguments and evidence, the use of sources and referencing practices, and the efforts to engage students in debate, are all explained in terms of the knowledge-making activities of the discipline community. When students are having this staged discussion, over the first few weeks, in each discipline they study, they are able to see what the disciplines have in common; but because the discussion is contextualised, each time, in the week's work for that particular subject, they also get a sense of how they differ between one disciplinary subculture and the next.

Role-Playing and Engagement

Once students can see critical enquiry of a particular kind as a cultural preference, not a measure of personal maturity and worth, they can try it out without damage to their own identity. However, in advocating this emphasis on writing in a role, I am conscious of the possibility that writing in a role creates a distance between the writer and the project s/he is working on, and thus diminishes her engagement with it, and perhaps her responsibility towards it (Sansevere 1999, p. 258; Ivanic 1998, p. 307). Students do sometimes complain of alienation even when they are writing successfully, if they are not writing "as themselves", in their "real voice". "Why did I write that stuff?" wonders Peterson. "Where the hell was ***I*** when all of those silly words were issuing forth?" (1999, p. 262). Another laments that her "persona became that of academic worker bee" (Schambelan 1999, p. 196). Still another, reflecting on the distance between her original voice, that of a rural Southerner in the United States, and her academic voice, writes

> Learn the formula, listen to whatever the teacher wants, and do it …. That has worked for me a lot, but this semester especially, I've come back to asking myself where am I in all this mumbo jumbo? And I realized that I have learned to make some of it fit me, that I talk through it, and not the other way around, most of the time. I do believe there is a difference. But….What price did I really pay? (Pryor 1999, p. 226).

Her answer is that it was worth the price, and some other writers who have experienced similar anxieties and conflicts in adding to their repertoire of voices

concur with this (e.g.Mellix 1998; Rodriguez 1982). Fan Shen, reflecting on her success in learning to write well in English as well as in Chinese, says

> I feel that I am writing through, with, and because of a new identity. I welcome the change, for it has added a new dimension to me and to my view of the world…. Any time I write in Chinese, I resume my old identity….in order to write authentic Chinese…. But when I write in English, I imagine myself slipping into a new 'skin', and I let the 'I' behave much more aggressively and knock the topic right on the head (1998, p. 132).

Others, however, dispute that it is possible to have a repertoire of identities. There is evidence that learning to write in a different way profoundly changes who you are, a risk that is particularly acute for overseas students and some others from culturally diverse backgrounds (Fox 1994). Some students resist such changes for this reason, and others who have undergone the transformation give painful testimony of the loss they feel. Blanton believes that "powerlessness results from being cut off from one's self and one's own ideas and life experience" (1998, p. 231). If membership of a particular discourse community is not a role that can be added to one's repertoire – if it requires transformation of a disempowering kind – we must question our own role in mediating this transformation.

Fan Shen, however, suggests that it is mediation that can make the difference. "Being conscious of these different identities has helped me to reconcile different systems of values and logic, and has played a pivotal role in my learning to compose in English" (1998, p. 132). What seems crucial here is "being conscious", and for that reason, Fan Shen tells us that "the process of learning English composition would have been easier if I had realized this earlier and consciously sought to compare the two different identities required by the two writing systems from two different cultures" (1998, p. 132). This is why I think it is safer to approach writing in any particular context as the performance of a role.

I do not think, moreover, that acting in a role necessarily diminishes engagement

with the task at hand. People can be aware that doctor, mother, lawyer, counselor, etc, are roles, without feeling that it does not matter how they perform in these roles, or disengaging themselves from what they are doing. But the concept of role allows people a choice of how closely to engage, and enables people to see successes and setbacks in terms of their skill in carrying out a role, rather than as a measure of their own fundamental adequacy.

Conclusion

I have argued that mastery of a role is not a matter of maturing as an individual, but a matter of understanding the social expectations embodied in that role. For university students, the problem of accommodating these expectations is not helped by presenting it as a matter of maturity. A more effective approach is one that assumes all students are, to some extent, on unfamiliar ground and undertakes to map it with them so they can proceed with confidence.

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CHANGING IDENTITIES: LAS ADVISERS

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Language and Academic Skills (LAS) advising in Australia has, in the last ten years, emerged as an identifiable profession within the tertiary education sector. That emergence has been the result of intense research and reflection, not only in terms of advisers' roles and status, but also in terms of understanding the students with whom we work and their LAS needs. The resultant changes have challenged and extended our fundamental conceptions of the roles and status of LAS advisers, their practice and profession. However, such changes have been largely undocumented, and, arguably, little attention has been given to developing a comprehensive framework for LAS pedagogy. In tracing the emergence of the LAS profession and evaluating the changing identity of LAS advisers in terms of their roles and status, we attempt to reconceptualise the LAS profession with a view to emphasising its multidisciplinary nature. We also take the preliminary step of outlining, in this discussion paper, a framework for LAS pedagogy.

Keywords: LAS profession, identity, pedagogy

Introduction

Language and Academic Skills (LAS) advising had its humble beginnings in the context of 'remedial' English teaching and ad hoc 'fix it up' approaches. We were seen as the 'fixers', those who with magic strokes of the pen could render a student's essay readable, acceptable and thus passable. It was generally assumed by the academic community that we worked only with those who had problems, and, in particular, those who had problems with English. We were on the periphery of the 'real' academic teaching that went on – too often marginalised and casualised. In this paper we chart the journey towards a 21st century view of the LAS profession that leaves us a recognisable, much stronger entity within the tertiary education sector. In the process we attempt to reconceptualise LAS practice with a view to emphasising its multidisciplinary nature. We also take the preliminary step of outlining a pedagogical framework for the LAS profession based on that laid out in ***Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures***.

Dislodging the 'remedial' tag

Prior to 1990 there were few well-established academic skills and learning centres in Australia with a national profile. Centres pre-1993 could be characterised by the extremes of a continuum: on the one hand, there were a handful of extremely high profile Centres, such as the Study Skills Centre at The Australian National University (ANU), which was driven by the sheer determination, vision and professionalism of individual staff; and on the other, there were very low profile centres, perhaps staffed by one person, most often on a part-time or casualised basis, who worked with a small number of students. Rarely would these latter centres provide professional, university-recognised and systematic assistance to students. Characterising many of the units that did exist was a counselling approach: one third of the LAS units that existed pre-1985 were located with counselling services (Webb and Bonanno, 1984). What can also be said of the centres was that despite the nature of the profile of some centres, both ends of the spectrum were very much overlooked in terms of the enterprise of the university and certainly not considered part of the core business of the university.

It was characteristic of LAS practice in the late 1970s and 1980s that while there were nationally prominent and published academic skills advisers – e.g. Brigid Ballard and John Clanchy at ANU, John Grierson at Western Sydney, Gordon Taylor at Monash, Hanne Bock at La Trobe and Carolyn Webb at Sydney – there was no strong sense of a distinctive profession of LAS advising, or national consensus about the role of LAS advisers and the nature of their work. This is understandable given the relative isolation of those working as LAS advisers. A quick review of the published proceedings of the Annual Australasian Study Skills Conferences during the 1980s shows that presenters were a diverse group. Some came from academic staff development centres, language centres, health & counselling centres; others from academic schools or departments such as psychology, education, English studies, and one from a School of French; some appear to have been 'educators' with administrative roles; very few appear to have been dedicated LAS advisers. Yet all came together under the banner of 'study skills', some exercising a long-term, shaping influence on the emerging LAS profession and lending it credibility through their own high professionalism.

In 1978, well before a separate LAS identity had emerged, and advisers were often known as counsellors, ANU staff – Brigid Ballard and John Clanchy of the Study Skills Centre and Geoff Mortimore of the University Counselling Centre – took up the issue of professional status before Justice Mary Gaudron of the then Commonwealth Arbitration and Conciliation Commission. Gaudron (1979) defined a Counsellor working in the study skills or counselling areas as one who

> is engaged in work of an educational nature that involves the development and application of knowledge, skill and experience in assisting students to handle their university studies more effectively.

In Gaudron's ruling, a Principal Counsellor was

> …a highly experienced competent individual... [who] is expected to have a significant policy input in respect of the counselling area [or student service] concerned, would have a

> high level of creative initiative, supervisory and administrative competence, would be responsible for the guidance of colleagues in that area for the efficient operation of that area and would liaise with appropriate University officers and committees….(Gaudron, 1979).

Thus, under Gaudron's ruling, LAS advisers and Counselling staff at the ANU became recognized as Professional Staff within the General Staff category, and, as such, advisers gained access to some measure of professional development leave, conference leave and travel. For LAS advisers within the General Staff classification, Gaudron's ruling recognized that, unlike administrative staff, advisers were not transferable or interchangeable with other administrative staff.

However, despite this ruling, LAS advisers have always been in an anomalous position, and the nature of LAS positions and their classification as General Staff or Academic Staff has always been contentious. More often than not the duty statements and selection criteria suited to the appointment of General and Academic Staff do not adequately address LAS advisers' work. Working under the General Staff classification, LAS advisers teach, and may or may not be required to run courses for credit, or assess students. They also undertake professional research, write papers and books and attend conferences, none of which is recognized by General Staff descriptors. Under the Academic Staff classification, LAS advisers often do not have regular course teaching and assessment, but they do teach and research. For both categories, promotion is not easy. LAS Advisers who are classified as Academic Staff are often expected to apply for promotion on terms – primarily research and publications – that ignore a significant and important component of their work: teaching. Lecturer Level C positions do exist – at the Universities of Western Sydney, South Australia, Adelaide, Wollongong, Flinders University, and the University of Technology Sydney, to name a few (Morris, 1999), but in the main they are highly contested. Serious thought has to be given to the promotion/selection panels involved, and their ability to respond creatively and flexibly to promotion requests wherein LAS advisers are square pegs in round holes, and panel members are often limited by their inadequate understanding of the nature

of LAS advising. Pre-1990, it would have been the exception rather than the rule had job advertisements for LAS advisers not read:

> The appointee will be required to teach classes in study skills and seminar presentation, as well as English as a second language; remedial one-to-one coaching may also be required (Division of Economics, ANU, 1992).

As Casazza and Silverman (1996, p.31) observe: "The term ***remedial*** has implied a more limited approach toward the student and has primarily described programs that focus on correcting specific skill deficits". Dislodging the 'remedial' tag has been a long process.

Extending the boundaries of LAS advising

In terms of beginning to conceptualise what LAS advisers did, the publication of ***Literacy by Degrees*** in 1988 brought together leading Australian LAS practitioners, Ballard, Clanchy, Taylor, Vic Beasley, Peggy Nightingale and Hanne Bock, who challenged the notion that the "writing ability of students in our universities is a mechanical problem 'remediable' by the disciplined application of mechanical answers" (Taylor ***et al***., 1988, p.i). In re-considering what it is that LAS advisers do, much of which is text-based, it is worthwhile picking up on their view in 1988 that "[w]hile the tasks of academic writing do demand skills of one kind or another, academic writing is not fundamentally a question of applying skills. Rather it demands the creation of meaning and the expression of understanding" (Taylor ***et al***., 1996, p.i). This publication provided a strong challenge to the prevailing notion that LAS advising was fundamentally 'remedial', a menial adjunct to the 'real work' performed by academics.

LAS advising pre-1990 was mainly characterized by an association with 'study skills'– loosely viewed as the skills of note-taking, time-management and essay writing; and although this does not sit easily with the LAS profession nowadays, it was the basis for the development of more fully fledged academic and learning skills advising. The texts of this period – e.g. Anderson, Durston and Poole (1970),

Wallace (1980), and Packham, McEvedy and Smith (1985) – were the precursors to a more probing and comprehensive view of LAS advising. By the 1990s it had become increasingly clear that the work LAS advisers did was definitely not remedial, and that it was more than study skills.

The notion that the work LAS advisers did was in any way academic, however, often did not fit with the means by which, and terms under which, LAS advisers have been employed; or with some academics who have tended to regard the work we do as peripheral to the 'core' business of the university. In 1994 Webb and Bonanno, in a seminal LAS paper, examined the role of LAS staff and noted that the lack of a recognised LAS identity had implications for status and stability. They called for LAS staff to be more explicit in defining their goals and strategies; identifying measures of effectiveness; establishing position descriptions and standards of professional practice; and ensuring more effective collaboration with subject staff. They began the process of, and called for, greater research into the role of LAS advising. This in essence established the LAS agenda for the 1990s.

Webb and Bonanno's (1994) paper led to a renewed emphasis on conceptualizing what LAS advisers do – their professional practice. In terms of the nature of the work, Webb and Bonanno claimed that it lay in the development of skills, thus highlighting the 'developmental' aspect of LAS advising, so thoroughly articulated in ***Learning Assistance and Developmental Education*** (1996). At the same time, their paper tended to preserve the distinction between content and skills, with academics teaching content and LAS advisers teaching skills, a distinction we do not find useful as expanded on below.

In 1995 Chanock took another important step in trying to separate, but not necessarily totally dissociate, LAS advising from counselling. Up until then, the prevailing culture that LAS advisers were somehow still 'counsellors' had detracted in large part from recognition of the academic nature of our work.

From thence were a number of key developments in the emergence of the LAS profession. The first was the recognition, in which Kate Chanock was instrumental, that there was no professional body with which academic skills advisers could identify. HERDSA catered for academic staff advisers/professional developers, not

the come-lately LAS advisers. Thus, the HERDSA Special Interest Group was established at the LAS Conference in 1994 wherein LAS advisers could meet during the year on a state basis and nationally at the annual HERDSA conference. As we see it, the inauguration of the Language and Academic Skills (LAS) Conferences – first held at La Trobe in 1994 – was an enormous breakthrough for an emergent profession characterized by marginalisation, isolation and casualisation in relation to the 'mainstream' – be that General Staff or Academic Staff, and LAS advisers who were characterised as suffering from an inherent lack of professional confidence, status and recognition. For the first time LAS advisers had a dedicated professional forum not shared with counselling or HERDSA.

Subsequent LAS conferences at La Trobe (1996, 2000), and the publication of the proceedings, have led to a plethora of research and publications addressing the kinds of students with whom we work (e.g. first years, graduates, honours, international, ANESB, distinguished scholars, students with disabilities); their complex LAS needs (e.g. disciplinary language, the writer's voice, developing arguments, mastering genres, critical inquiry, manipulating voice, interpersonal relations), the issues they confront (e.g. understanding lecturers and supervisors' comments, computer-based technology, equity and access); and the practice of LAS advising itself (e.g. individual consultations, bridging, orientations and inductions, group work, collaborative endeavours with academics and other professionals, dialogic learning, integrating academic skills into the curriculum), all of which have begun to shape and articulate LAS advising as a profession. The national ***LAS Newsletter*** was also inaugurated in 1994, although this has since been replaced by the services of the UNILEARN Network, for which we have John Grierson's vision and endless patience to be grateful for. These developments have worked to engender a much greater sense of unity in diversity for LAS advisers.

Two other key events took place in the mid-1990s. One was the Bendigo Working Conference for LAS advising in 1995 which led to calls for the status of LAS advisers to be recognized, and the other was the publication of ***Academic Skills Advising: towards a discipline*** (1995). These events did a great deal to develop a more explicit recognition of our roles as LAS advisers' and the nature of our work. From Bendigo emerged the position statement ***The Position of Academic Language and Learning***

Skills Advisers/Lecturers in Australian Universities 1995-1999 by Carmichael, Hicks, McGowan and van der Wahl, which outlined the perspectives of advisers from nineteen Australian institutions. It was clearly articulated therein that the work of LAS advisers was developmental rather than remedial, and that the role of LAS advisers was integral to improving the quality of teaching and learning in tertiary institutions.

Reconceptualising the LAS profession

Generic descriptors used in LAS position advertisements over the years provide some insight into how LAS advisers conceive of the work we do. As already noted, a position advertised in 1992 was described as being to "provide remedial one-to-one coaching" (Division of Economics, ANU, 1992). The selected position statements below, in chronological order 1996-2001, illustrate substantive changes in the nature of the professional expectations of LAS advisers:

> The appointee will join a small team of professional staff who assist students with their academic work and will take particular responsibility for helping students develop the skills for effective writing and study. Applicants should have a strong interest in students' learning and academic development and be prepared at certain times of the year to work out of hours in the evenings or at weekends. Qualifications for the position include a postgraduate degree supplemented by teaching at tertiary level. (The Australian National University, 1996)

> The Academic Skills adviser provides advice by offering learning opportunities for students to develop their language, learning and literacy for specific academic contexts on campus. The applicant must have highly developed interpersonal and administrative skills with at least two years' experience in an academic environment identifying tertiary student learning needs with a focus on text-type analysis. A postgraduate

qualification in applied linguistics, education theory or a related area is also essential

(The Australian Catholic University, 1999)

Applicants need to demonstrate skills in analyzing and assessing the discipline specific tertiary literacy needs of students, and in developing resources such as print materials, workshop formats or interactive resources which aim to develop literacy skills. Evidence of teamwork skills and successful collaboration with faculty academic staff in the area of learning development should also be provided. …The position is academic and accordingly staff will be expected to participate in research and evaluation of the University's Learning Development programs.

(University of Wollongong, 2000).

Applicants must have a postgraduate degree with a research component, tertiary teaching experience and preferably a qualification in teaching English as a second language. Applicants' experience must include experience in assisting students from diverse backgrounds, including students from a second language background, with the development of reasoning, research and writing skills.

(The Australian National University, 2001).

The appointee will be expected to develop and run discipline-specific and generic literacy and study skills programs in collaboration with Academic Support Program staff and other academics. The appointee will also be expected to see

> students on a one-to-one basis and to carry out activities to develop scholarly, research and/or professional expertise relevant to the profession.
>
> (The University of Canberra, 2001).

In 1994, Webb and Bonanno characterised the recruitment of LAS staff as requiring evidence of teaching skills and an understanding of student needs, and qualifications as including a higher degree in a relevant discipline – e.g. education, literature, linguistics, psychology anthropology, sociology and philosophy (p.127). This issue of the diverse academic backgrounds of LAS advisers generated lively debate at the Bendigo Working Conference for LAS advising in 1995. Some of us took the position that such diversity was 'a good thing' without articulating very clearly why this might be so; others argued that if we were to achieve full academic recognition, it was necessary to designate appropriate disciplines (e.g. educational psychology and linguistics) from which to draw LAS appointees.

In the case of our own Centre, the cross-fertilisation of ideas and various expertise allowed by diversity has proved essential in providing a quality service to ANU students. Appointees have been from mathematics, philosophy, history, linguistics, literature and the biological sciences; some have had specialist expertise and/or qualifications in English as a second language, information technology, international education and writing. It might even be argued that in drawing together highly trained people from diverse academic backgrounds to work together on 'learning development' that the LAS profession was somewhat ahead of its time (perhaps of necessity) in profiling the value of multidisciplinary collaboration. There is now a growing tendency for academics from different disciplines, and remarkably diverse disciplines at that, to get together to work on a major project that requires various bodies of knowledge and expertise not residing in any one discipline. Similarly, the 'student learning project' as it manifests itself in different universities and different settings (centralised, faculty, school or discipline), will determine the bodies of knowledge and expertise required of LAS appointees. In short, in this new world, it is the needs of the project that determine, or should determine, what knowledge,

competencies and skills are required from what disciplinary backgrounds when appointing LAS staff.

Webb and Bonanno also stressed that research, although not necessarily required by the selection criteria, was essential in that “without focused, systematic and sustained exploration of knowledge within the field…the nature of the work [LAS] staff do is unlikely to be viewed as truly academic” (1994, p.127). Few would disagree that research is essential to expansion of our knowledge base and improved teaching methods, just as it is in any academic work. Like our academic backgrounds, our research is multidisciplinary in ranging across teaching and learning literature; language and communication literature; textual, genre and rhetoric studies; cross-cultural studies; and studies on special interest groups such as those with a learning disability, or NESBs and Indigenous students; and more not mentioned. We are not suggesting that each and every LAS adviser conducts in-depth research in every area, which would be impossible, but rather that there is a vast, multidisciplinary research base that is academically coherent in terms of student learning, and on which we as an LAS collective draw.

That LAS advisers, like academics, are conversant with the relevant literature, including the theoretical literature, is evident from published conference proceedings and our refereed publications. Like some academics, many LAS advisers also conduct more qualitative research, with their research subjects being particular groups of students**.** There is then the immense practical knowledge acquired from individual consultations with students that informs both our writing, and our group practice as documented, for example, in the Proceedings of the Conference held at La Trobe University, November 18-19 1996. In an Anthropological setting, the insights and understanding derived from our on-going fieldwork with students (i.e. individual consultations) would be accorded high ethnographic value, which is not always the case for our profession. (There have been many reports over the years of administrative ‘threats’ to replace ‘individual consultations’ with large-group teaching (or drop-ins) because it is more cost effective and/or ensures larger numbers are ‘serviced’ (the quantity versus quality position), including pleas from LAS advisers posted on Unilearn for suggestions on how to counter such threats). At the same time, we are required to develop our knowledge of disciplinary practices, to stay in

touch with the latest developments in tertiary education (no mean feat given that this is a fast moving sector), and with administrative and academic developments within our universities that impact on the students with whom we work.

As implied above, both the alignment of variables and prominence given to specific variables in the student learning project shift according to the different institutional and locational settings in which we find ourselves, and our specific conditions of employment. Nevertheless, all LAS advisers require a substantial body of knowledge about ***their*** students' learning needs to function effectively, which perhaps explains why we are often called on for policy input. At the Academic Skills and Learning Centre, ANU, for example, researching particular cohorts and their LAS needs, either in a broad general sense (First years, Graduate research students), or more specifically (e.g. Honours students, International graduate coursework students), allows us to develop a profile of their LAS needs such that we can then contribute to policy. This has meant that we have, for example, been part of the University Working Party on Honours, the Management Group for the First Year Experience, the Research Supervision Training Project Reference Group, and have contributed advice to the Admissions Committee, all of which allows for an informed contribution to university-wide policy such that the diversity of students' LAS needs can be more effectively identified and addressed.

Towards an LAS pedagogy

In considering a possible LAS pedagogy, we again bounce off Webb and Bonanno, who have provided so much stimulation in terms of our topic: "Without a relevant theoretical framework or set of frameworks to inform one's pedagogy, [LAS] expertise may comprise mere common sense, a very useful commodity, but not amenable by itself to academic and scholarly enquiry and extension" (1994, p.128). This insightful observation engages a question particularly pertinent at this time in the development of the profession: What type/s of theoretical framework might inform LAS pedagogy, given the complex nature of the practice?

In addressing this question, the pedagogy laid out in the Introduction to ***Multiliteracies: Literacy Learning and the Design of Social Futures*** (Cope &

Kalantzis, (Eds.), 2000) is a useful place to begin. It may be that this pedagogy is not the only appropriate framing of LAS pedagogy, or that careful application of this framework to LAS practice (which is beyond the scope of this paper) would expose gaps and deficiencies. All we are attempting here is a preliminary application of the basics of the pedagogy as laid out in the Introduction: 1.

The multiliteracies pedagogy turns on the notion of "Design", identifying "six major areas in which functional grammars, the metalanguages that describe and explain patterns of meaning, are required – Linguistic Design, Visual Design, Audio Design, Gestural Design, Spatial Design and Multimodal Design", with the last-mentioned representing "the patterns of interconnection among the other modes" **(**Cope & Kalantzis (Eds.), 2000**,** p.25). This is a pedagogy that operates outside the content/skills division in focusing on "Designs of meaning", which we consider a powerful part of its attraction.

While content/skills has not acquired the loaded connotations of say, white/black, male/female or young/old, there is nevertheless polarization, with 'content' retaining more positive connotations in being what discipline Academics teach (e.g. linguistics, sociology or physics), and 'skills' accruing more negative connotations in being what LAS advisers teach – content teaching is the 'real work' of the university; skills teaching is the 'lesser work', a 'supplementary' add on. Of further relevance, given the embedded link between content and 'knowledge', is that the content/skills split does not respect that LAS advisers (whether academic or general staff) may have specialist knowledge that discipline teachers do not have, knowledge that is essential for student success. Knowledge is always 'knowledge ***of*** (something)', and LAS advisers may have specialist knowledge of a type that, for example, allows them to identify precisely what is wrong with a text, why it has gone wrong, and how problems might be addressed so that the student acquires both improved understanding of discourses generally and greater textual control in context. To put this another way, specialist knowledge of textual design meanings is not necessarily a knowledge attribute of discipline teachers, and understandably so we would suggest.

As well, the content/skills division seems to reside in the same muddied waters in which old debates, now sunk, once circulated—e.g. the style/content or

language/content debates. How, for example, are we to demarcate content and skills in academic discourses, written, oral or visual? Can it be said that meaning resides in content but not in skill(s)? If that were the case, why would a skillfully crafted piece of description evidencing sound knowledge of the relevant literature prove unacceptable to a lecturer expecting academic argument? Or why might a student's Report be rejected as having 'an inappropriate style for [discipline named]', as one supervisor commented. Do these examples not suggest that there are indeed "design meanings", and that academic discourses, like all discourses, are simply "configurations of knowledge" (Cope & Kalantzis (Eds.), 2000**,** p.21)?

Particularly attractive also is that this pedagogy moves away from a language-centred view of literacy to the more inclusive multiliteracies, which "engages with the multiplicity of communications channels and media" and "with the increasing salience of cultural and linguistic diversity" (Cope & Kalantzis (Eds.), 2000**,** p. 5). In the first instance, with the growing use of IT in teaching and research, more students seek assistance with multidesign productions (but not necessarily multimodal as Audio design is often absent), as for example, PowerPoint presentations. Just recently too, a stimulating discussion was generated in a Poster design seminar about meanings generated in the interstices of the Spatial, Linguistic and Visual design elements of the posters being examined. Particularly impressive were the striking meaning effects of one poster that had skillfully used sweeping, curved lines (and colour) to carve up the total space. The overall communicative effect was a logical patterning that allowed both immediate access to core sets of meanings associated with the project being reported on – e.g. the health implications of the study, and the ability to 'free-read' the poster in any direction without feeling lost.

Little needs to be said in this forum about the increasing saliency of cultural and linguistic diversity, and the attendant challenges of such diversity; much has already been documented in LAS publications on this subject, which is not to say that more does not need to be done. One recent example of continuing effort in this regard is the research and reflection on the LAS needs of Australian students from non-English speaking backgrounds (ANESB). It became clear in late 1998 that some ANU academic staff were confusing international students with ANESB students, and were at a loss to know how best to address their complex and diverse needs.

The Academic Skills and Learning Centre conducted a pilot research project to chart the distribution of ANESB students on campus and, via a survey and focus groups, identify what they considered to be their most pressing LAS needs (Bartlett and Ballard, 1998). How best to address those needs was the subject of a small working conference in 2000, which brought together LAS advisers for two days in Canberra. The resulting papers are insightful, thought-provoking and challenging (Bartlett, Chanock, Cargill, Gollin, Chase, Percy, Wilson in press). Such research can only strengthen policy responses within the advisers' universities.

Other basics of the multiliteracies pedagogy, as figured below, are now considered:

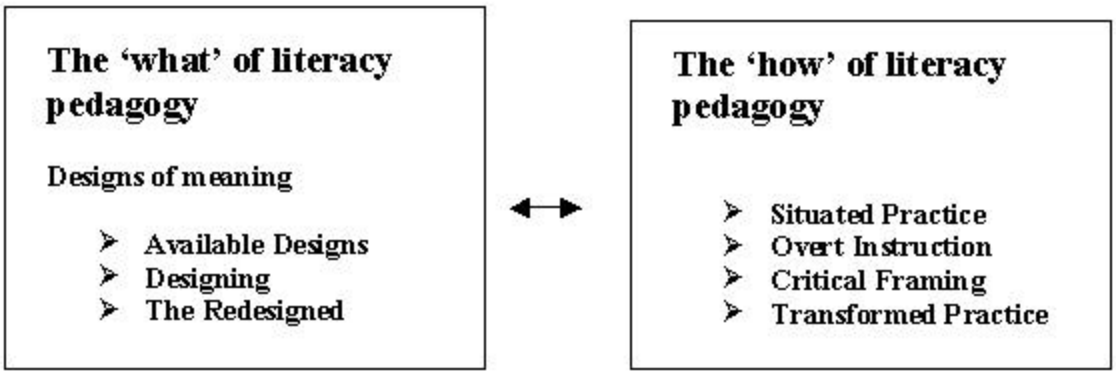

Figure 1: The 'what' and 'how' of literacy pedagogy

There are several appealing aspects about how the 'what' is conceptualised in ***Multiliteracies.*** First, as implied above, the focus on 'Designs of meaning' is appropriately inclusive of a very broad range of LAS activities (if not all) in that it engages the "idea that learning and productivity are the results of the designs (the structures) of complex systems of people environments, technology, beliefs, and texts" (Cope & Kalantzis (Eds.), 2000**,** p. 20). The notion of "designs" appeals in terms of its freshness – its freedom from the type of emotional baggage evident with content/skills, but the appropriateness of the substitute term "structures" is somewhat questionable. There is also the recognition that all semiotic activities associated with 'Available Designs' 'Designing' and 'The Redesigned' are firmly linked to the generation of meaning. This is important as there is often insufficient recognition by the academic community at large that meaning does not reside in disembodied knowledge(s) (particular discipline content(s)) that exist independently of how we

speak and write these knowledge(s**);** knowledge(s) which, in turn, order the ways in which learning and research proceed in different disciplinary settings.

Finally, in the multiliteracies pedagogy there is full acknowledgement of the complex array of conventions inhering in the "resources" of meaning-making – the grammars of "various semiotic systems (e.g. languages, film, photograph, or gesture); and the orders of discourse", which are "socially produced…intermeshing and dynamically interacting" (Cope & Kalantzis (Eds.), 2000**,** p.20). There is further recognition that the "process of shaping emergent meaning involves re-presentation and recontextualisation", that it is "never simply a repetition of Available Designs" (Cope & Kalantzis (Eds.), 2000**,** p.22); and that the "outcome of Designing is a new meaning, something through which meaning-makers remake themselves" (Cope & Kalantzis (Eds.), 2000**,** p23). Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis, the editors of ***Multiliteracies,*** are great practitioners of what they advocate. Given the strong semiotic orientation of the ideas behind 'the what', these ideas are not really new. But their redesign of old ideas takes on new meaning in a way that helps us to see a-new.

Similar care is given by the editors to the scaffolding that constitutes the 'how' of learning. 'Situated Practice' recognises that mastery in practice involves sociocultural and contextual pattern recognition that occurs only with "immersion in a community of learners engaged in authentic versions of such practice" (Cope & Kalantzis (Eds.), 2000**,** p.31). Such immersion, however, "does not necessarily lead to conscious control and awareness of what one knows and does" (Cope & Kalantzis (Eds.), 2000**,** p.32), and this can be a problem. In one such case, a student with a PhD in the experimental sciences, now doing a Master degree in a different science area with a strong interdisciplinary focus and practice, was referred because of 'serious writing problems'. The student perceived his writing as 'very concise' when in fact it was exceptionally dense, did not embody audience needs, provided insufficient detail to support ideas and evidenced very poor paragraph control. While the student suspected that the writing in his PhD must have been 'very bad', this is not likely. He said that 'none' of his examiners had criticised his writing and they surely would have had they received writing of the type just described. But discussions in consultation did reveal that the student had little 'conscious' control of his PhD discourse, had not

progressed beyond situated practice (like so many who learn by osmosis), and so lacked the capacity to re-present and recontextualise available designs in a new writing culture. With some overt instruction, it was possible to introduce explicit metalanguages describing and interpreting different discourse practices in different discourse communities and contexts**.** With this student (and similar other postgraduates) the high degree of breakdown in discourse control was matched only by the remarkable speed with which he progressed to a more conscious, critical and reflective understanding of the sociocultural and contextual embededness of discourses. In just two visits his writing was radically 'transformed' from a collection of impenetrable meanings to the reverse, which is not to suggest that transformation occurred in the full sense in which the notion of transformed practice is used in ***Multiliteracies,*** as discussed below***.***

It is true that both Situated Practice and Overt Instruction can be "notorious as socialising agents that can render learners quite uncritical and unconscious of the cultural locatedness of meanings and practices" (Cope & Kalantzis (Eds.), 2000**,** p.32), and that critical framing of "value-centred relations of particular systems of knowledge and social practice" (Cope & Kalantzis (Eds.), 2000**,** p.34) is important. Yet there are institutional and time constraints on just how far LAS advisers can take such critical framing, with which student learners, and under what learning conditions (see also Benesch, p.60). Student loads (both individual and group) can be very heavy, at times forcing advisers to prioritise learning needs for immediate outcomes rather than longer-term learning goals; and students can be under great pressure with some showing little interest other than to achieve enough 'mastery' in practice to pass their courses, to get that all-important degree. As well, the very nature of a practice in which we, at least, see students on average 1-4 consultations per year can constrain ***full*** development of our students' learning potential, though the situation may be different for some of you. Still, prioritising learning needs for more immediate outcomes does not mean that the appropriate underlying principles of the multiliteracies pedagogy cannot be activated in these contexts (see the example of the PhD graduate working in another discipline above). Perhaps what matters most is the type and quality of learning that does take place, rather than the frequency with which students are seen.

Critical Framing appears to underpin the notion of “Transformed Practice”, where, as the authors argue, “theory becomes reflective practice” (p.35), though this notion seems not to be as fully articulated as it might be. It is indeed desirable to ensure learners “gain the necessary personal and theoretical distance from what they have learned; constructively critique it; account for its cultural location; creatively extend and apply it; and eventually innovate on their own, within old communities and in new ones” (p.34). We have been working towards this very end in Centre workshops, such as ‘Effective writing in professional and academic contexts’. But the question still remains: Is this an achievable outcome for ***all*** learners with whom we work as LAS advisers? In posing this question, however, we do not mean to suggest that LAS advisers cannot be fully active in fostering learning outcomes of the type detailed in ***Multiliteracies*** in various forums addressing student learning.

Conclusion

In building on the fine efforts of our predecessors, we, together, have progressed far in shaping a recognisable identity for the LAS profession. In this paper, we have tried to push the boundaries of this identity a little further towards academic ‘respectability’ by initiating what we hope will be a long-running conversation about LAS pedagogy(ies). None of this means though that on-going effort is not required to counter the residual effects of ingrained attitudes. Some still think we are about ‘fixing up’ English and grammar; some still see our role as basic ‘study skills’; some still refer to us as ‘support’ services. And some ad-hoc LAS appointments are still being made on the basis of expediency rather than with genuine concern that the specific learning needs of student cohorts will be met. This recalls an old attitude that anyone with a modicum of intelligence can do this job, which is an attitude that downgrades the profession at large. Not only do students lose out here, we also lose if we are unable to engender widespread understanding that this is a job that requires specialist knowledge and skills, great flexibility, hard work and strong commitment to students’ learning development. It is somewhat ironic that by the very nature of our work we are likely to be reasonably familiar with the research directions of many academic disciplines, when very few outside our profession would be familiar with our research and publications. Perhaps one of the challenges we now

confront is how to ensure more systematic dissemination of our knowledge, which is necessary if we are to acquire full professional recognition throughout our universities, and with it a fuller LAS identity.

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TEACHING GENRES IN THE DISCIPLINES: CAN STUDENTS LEARN THE LABORATORY REPORT GENRE ON-SCREEN

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Successful written communication in the disciplines is highly valued in tertiary assessment processes and is a preparation for professional life. Yet, the challenge remains to find an effective way of teaching this skill within varying discipline and institutional contexts. As institutions try to meet the needs of a changing student population, online forms of "learning" have been welcomed. However, can this mode provide students with new insights into how to write the genres of their disciplines and facilitate their understanding of the purpose and context of different text structures? Online courseware that aims to teach writing skills needs to be informed by both applied linguistics and learning theories. Within applied linguistics, genre based approaches to teaching the language of the disciplines are now widely accepted. This approach can provide learners with generalised, systematic guidelines about how to create meaningful and purposeful texts, although each student will create their

own individual text. Genre theory has also been used to describe and develop approaches to teaching writing which emphasize a communicative, purposeful and socially based theory of learning. This paper will illustrate the application of genre theory in the design of an on-screen program which aims to teach students how to write a laboratory report in three different disciplines, namely, biology, biochemistry and chemical engineering. This program provides guidelines, models, interactive exercises and feedback and takes into account the genre variations between these disciplines. Outcomes of a pilot evaluation of part of the program will be discussed.

Keywords: genre theory, laboratory report writing, on-line learning, higher education, systemic functional linguistics (SFL)

Introduction

The new technologies promise dramatic possibilities to change the modes of teaching and learning within universities. Courses or parts of courses are now offered online and some universities are moving towards completely 'virtual' forms of teaching in some contexts. For most teachers, moving their courses to an online form of delivery, will force a re-thinking and re-conceptualisation of their approaches to teaching which in turn will raise questions about their roles within the institution and their relationships with students. Students in turn are encountering a new medium for learning whose flexibility challenges their identity as traditional learners, forcing them to learn 'on their own' and become their own teachers. For academic literacy specialists, the new technologies raise key questions about how students learn using these technologies and how to teach academic communication skills in this new medium. The focus of this paper is how and what to teach about writing the laboratory report genre on-screen. The on-screen courseware developed for this genre (How to write a laboratory report at university, WALRUS) is based on previous

paper-based teaching materials and approaches which have been used successfully to improve students' writing skills in this area (Taylor and Drury, 1996). These paper-based materials and approaches, like many writing courses, have been underpinned by genre theory as developed within discourse analysis studies (after Swales, Dudley Evans, Bhatia and others) and within systemic functional linguistics (SFL) (after Martin, Rothery, Veel and others). Moving to teaching genres in an on-screen environment has implications for the underlying theory. This paper will explore how genre theory can also provide a useful theoretical framework for teaching the laboratory report on-screen. Firstly, the background to the writing a laboratory report program will be briefly summarised. Then the main principles of genre theory in both the above traditions will be reviewed as a basis for critically examining how and to what extent the on-screen program for writing a laboratory report has incorporated these key principles. In this way, attention will be focussed on how a new on-screen context for learning a genre can constrain and/or extend the language theories on which it is based. Finally, evidence of learning outcomes will be discussed in the light of a pilot evaluation of part of the program, namely the part for writing a laboratory report in the biological sciences.

Background

The on-screen writing a laboratory report program began as a part of a collaborative project between the Learning Centre and the Department of Biological Sciences, Sydney University, to integrate writing skills into the first year biology curriculum (Taylor and Drury, 1996). This project, begun in 1994, has undergone many changes and adaptations as the biology curriculum for first year itself has changed and as resources have been reduced. However, a strong commitment to the teaching of writing skills within the discipline remains as does a developmental approach to teaching these skills. The initial paper-based materials for supporting the teaching of laboratory report writing skills (Drury, 1997) were embedded in laboratory-based activities which provided a relevant and realistic context for explaining the purpose of the genre, its content, structure and language. In creating the materials, genre-based approaches to describing the laboratory report within the discourse analysis tradition (Dudley-Evans, 1985, Bhatia and Tay, 1987) and the

SFL tradition (Veel, 1992) were used as well as research into scientific language and other science genres in both traditions. As part of the pedagogic context, learning activities focussed on students identifying their own criteria for a successful report, using these criteria to assess examples of report writing and comparing these with teacher expectations. Further, students were encouraged to reflect on and develop their approaches to writing by writing parts of a practice report and receiving feedback from peers and the teacher, before writing a report for assessment. Most of this rich learning cycle remains in the curriculum (see Taylor and Drury, forthcoming) and the major change is that students are no longer required to write a full report but only the results and discussion sections.

At the same time as these developments in the Biological Sciences were taking place, the Learning Centre had begun to engage in other collaborative projects aimed at improving students report writing skills within the context of their curriculum, namely with the Departments of Electrical Engineering and Chemical Engineering and later with the Department of Biochemistry (Murison, 1996). Therefore, when the WALRUS program was conceived in 1997, it was planned to be a resource on writing reports at university which could be extended in terms of the needs and purposes of each discipline, taking into account not only genre variation among disciplines but also variation as students move from first to third year of an undergraduate program. This is an ambitious, long term goal for the WALRUS project and as yet only the first stage is in operation, namely the part of the program for writing a laboratory report in the biological sciences which was created using the Authorware programming language (Drury and O'Carroll, 1999) The move to an online form of technology which would work across platforms and browsers has delayed the implementation of the other parts of the program designed for writing reports in chemical engineering and biochemistry. However it is hoped that these will be operational in 2002. These developments are taking place at the same time as collaboration continues with subject area specialists on how to integrate the on-screen programs into their curricula.

Key Principles of Genre Theory and their Application to Teaching Genre On-screen

Context

Genre theory situates any text instance within the context in which it has been created so that an examination of the language choices in the text reflects its context and purpose. Earlier approaches to genre analysis within the discourse analysis tradition focussed on the text itself and its linguistic characteristics and tended to neglect the wider social context. However, later approaches emphasize the importance of a thicker description (Bhatia, 1993) which includes information on the discourse community who use the genre, their common goals and discursive practices (Swales, 1990). An SFL approach to genre analysis has consistently emphasised the importance of the social context or cultural context of a genre, although as a linguistic theory it has tended to provide richer insights into the linguistic characteristics of genres. The SFL model distinguishes between two kinds of context that influence genres and in turn are influenced by genres, a more general context, the context of culture and a more specific context, the context of situation. The context of culture is described in terms of the meaning potentials and hence genres available to social subjects interacting within discourse communities which are open to change over time. Genres serve the purposes of those engaged in the discourse communities and can be adapted and changed to serve new purposes which in turn can bring about change in the social context itself. The context of situation is described in terms of the register variables of field (participants and their activities), tenor (relationships among the participants) and mode (channel and medium/a of communication). Genres are made up of particular combinations of field, tenor and mode variables according to the social purposes they are fulfilling.

Context and the Writing a Laboratory Report Program

Programs that teach genre on-screen need to address the issue of what kind of context they will provide for the genre and how they will do this. Selection of a relevant context (what context and how much) needs to be tied to the overall aim of the genre teaching program, the target student audience, the course they are

studying and the task they are aiming to carry out. As yet, the writing a laboratory report program does not provide an adequate description of the social context of the genre on-screen although the program does situate each genre in its discipline context by using authentic examples - both expert and novice - from each discipline as the basis for explanation and exercises. In addition, these text selections have been informed and commented on by subject area specialists. The program design also tries to make a link between what students actually did in the laboratory and how they reflect on their results and write them up in the genre form of a laboratory report. A sub-section of the program (Content) addresses in detail the issue of what content or field knowledge to put in which section of the laboratory report, while another sub-section (Application) moves students towards applying what they have learnt in the program to writing their own report based on their own experiment. The on-going project will eventually provide a range of report genres from different disciplinary cultures which students can explore and compare and contrast. The resource itself, in line with genre theory, can also clarify variations in disciplinary context and purpose revealed by specialist informants and link these to different report genre conventions. For example, laboratory reports in some applied science disciplines such as chemical engineering need to address the teacher as both expert and client, rather than solely as expert, and this dual role of the teacher changes the tenor relationship between student and teacher and this has implications for the form of the genre. Thus, in the long term, this extended report writing program would go some way to providing an academic context for the report genre.

Another aspect of the academic context which needs to be addressed in an on-screen genre writing program is an understanding of the processes and practices of writing the genre. How and why are students engaging in this writing task and what are staff expectations. Students and teachers as specialist informants can provide this information. For example the Monash Transition to Tertiary Writing Project (Moore and Clerehan, 2000) is a multimedia resource which makes use of audio data from interviews with students and lecturers. Students talk about their approaches to writing assignments in particular discipline contexts and lecturers provide information about their expectations of writing in the same discipline. This is an appropriate resource for the target audience, namely students entering the university context for the first time.

The pedagogic context in which an on-screen genre writing program is used plays a critical role in providing a relevant context for students to actually engage in the on-screen learning program. If the program is closely integrated into the discipline, then the context for writing can be provided by associated teaching and learning activities both on and off screen that take into account learners' needs and the writing task they are preparing to carry out. However, the form and extent of integration depends to a large extent on subject area specialists. There are successful models of on-screen writing resources being integrated into subject area curricula in various ways (see Ellis, 2000 and Merten et al, 1999) The present on-screen resource takes into account student needs by providing an on-screen diagnostic questionnaire which helps students' to identify the parts of the biology laboratory report they have most difficulty with and hence which parts of the program they need to access. The on-screen design for chemical engineering and biochemistry reports takes this diagnostic approach a step further by providing a diagnostic exercise on entry to each part of the report so that students can test themselves before moving further into a particular part. The pedagogic context of the biology report writing resource will be further extended in 2002 to provide a data base composed of student text examples which will be used for exercises to address common problems students experience in content, structure and language when writing the report genre. Students as individuals or in groups will choose or be guided by the subject area specialist to access different parts of this data base according to their developing needs as they prepare for the task of writing their own laboratory report. In this way, a richer, student centred context will be provided for the program both on and off screen.

Purpose

The definitions of genre in both approaches emphasize the goal-oriented or purposeful nature of genre as a social process. According to Martin (1997, p.13) 'genre represents the system of staged goal oriented social processes through which social subjects in a given culture live their lives'. Bhatia (1993 p.13) defines genre after Swales as 'a recognizable communicative event characterized by a set of communicative purpose(s) identified and mutually understood by members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs'. Martin (1992)

further argues that purpose influences the selections made in the register variables of field, tenor and mode and in this way genres develop their individual structure and language characteristics. Genres, unlike registers, are complete texts that move through stages from beginning, middle to end to achieve their social goal

Purpose and the Writing a Laboratory Report Program

The overall purpose of the laboratory report genre is to display awareness and understanding of known, established content in order to be successful in the teaching/learning context (Bhatia, 1993, p.96). For both students and teachers in the early undergraduate years in the sciences, getting the content right often takes precedence over writing appropriately. This concern has been taken up in the design of the writing a laboratory report program at both macro and micro levels. At the macro level teachers expect students to know what content goes in which part of the report (ie.abstract, introduction etc.) and why. Therefore one section of the program called Overall Structure identifies the typical parts of the biology laboratory report and students are asked to drag and drop statements of their purpose or function to match the appropriate part (see Figure 1).

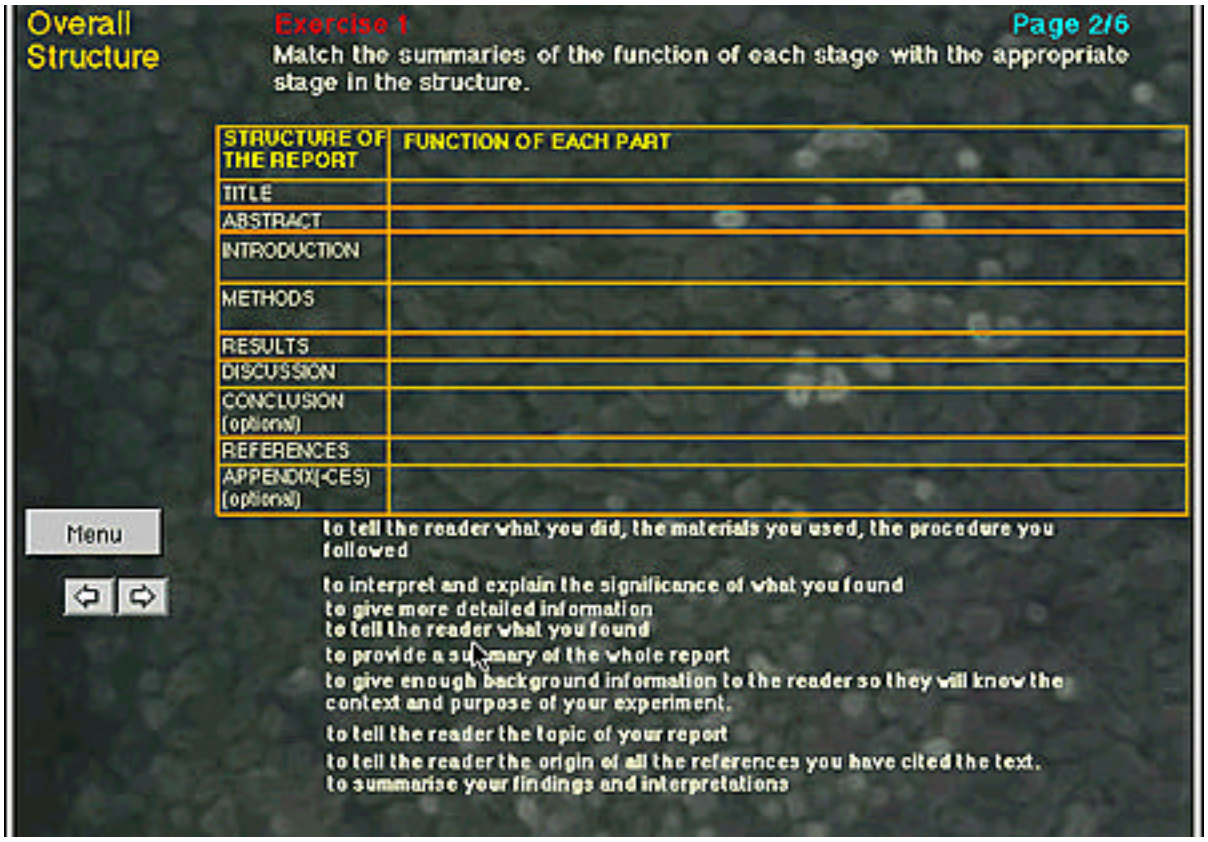

Figure 1: Exercise to help students identify the purpose of each section of the laboratory report

A further exercise then asks students to place authentic text extracts from different parts of the report in the appropriate parts of the laboratory report according to the purpose they exemplify. At the micro level, where each section of the report is explained and exemplified in detail, students can choose from 4 sub-sections, the first of which is Content. In this sub-section questions are used to highlight what kinds of content are appropriate for this part of the report (see Figure 2). In other words, the micro-level purposes or functions of each stage in the report are explained and illustrated followed by exercises and feedback for students to test their own understanding.

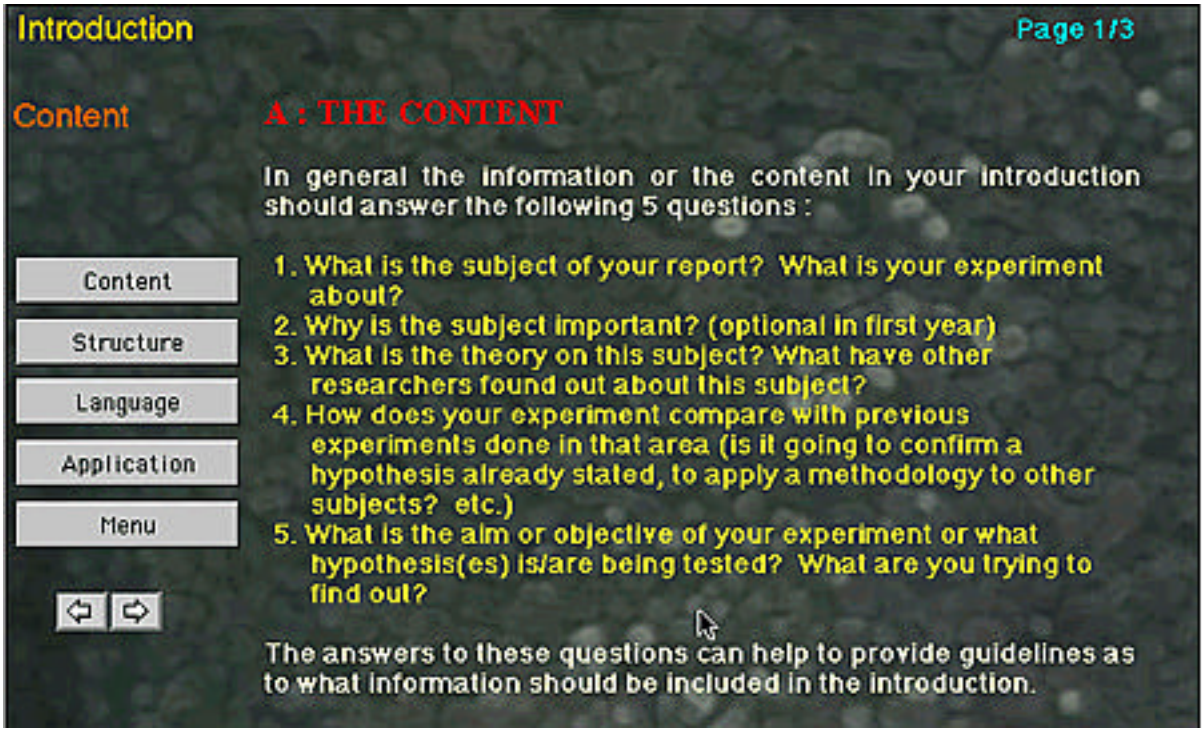

Figure 2: Questions to elicit what content is typically appropriate for the introduction stage of a laboratory report in the biological sciences

It is true that these types of explanations and exercises could also be presented in a paper-based form. However, the screen offers students a more immediate way of making connections within the genre to aid their own understanding. For example, students can use the hyperlinks in the left hand sub-menu in Figure 2 to find out how these content questions are structured or to see what language choices are possible. In this way, the on-screen program has the potential to make the connections between purpose, content, structure and language clearer so that a better understanding of their interrelationships can be achieved.

Schematic Structure

The descriptions and explanations of the schematic structure, stages or moves through which genres develop to fulfil their communicative purposes have been invaluable in the teaching of genres to new or apprentice members of discourse communities. The typical stages of an established genre unfold in certain, generally predictable sequences to achieve the genre's purpose. Each stage is characterised by discourse and lexicogrammatical choices. Research continues into what stages are considered typical of a genre, variations in the sequencing of stages of particular

genres and whether stages are optional or obligatory and whether they are recursive. Approaches to teaching genres have been criticised for modelling schematic structure in a formulaic or prescriptive way and presenting the analysis of a genre's stages as unproblematic. In addition, a static, linear image of models of genre has tended to elide their dynamic potential. However, despite these criticisms, the detailed linguistic descriptions of the staging structures of genres have helped to make explicit the way language is used to achieve success in the written genres of a number of discipline areas.

Schematic Structure and the Writing a Laboratory Report Program

The navigation system of the laboratory report writing program is designed to allow students to learn about the schematic structure of the report and the language choices that realise this structure. Although students have a choice as to which menu items they access, the menu design itself tells them about the macro and micro level structure of a report. The macro menu was created using headings which reflect the different parts of the report, typically, abstract, title, introduction, methods etc. Each macro menu item in turn has its own sub-menu, generally consisting of 3 parts which are related to learning about the schematic structure of the genre, namely, content, structure and language (see Figure 3). In general, this two level hierarchy and the repetition of the sub-menu items within each part create a simple but effective navigation framework. Where there are genre variations in the schematic structure as in the short report for biochemistry which has two different macro stages, namely, Study Design and Legend, these are identified in a further sub level in the hierarchical structure within the Methods part of the report (see Figure 3). This short report genre, in fact, has no Methods section since it is largely replaced by the 2 new sub parts. However, the more traditional and familiar report design has been retained so as to guide students from the more familiar structure they have met in first year courses to this new structure required for their report in the second year course in Biochemistry. In this way, different purposes of the two kinds of reports and hence their structures are made clear.

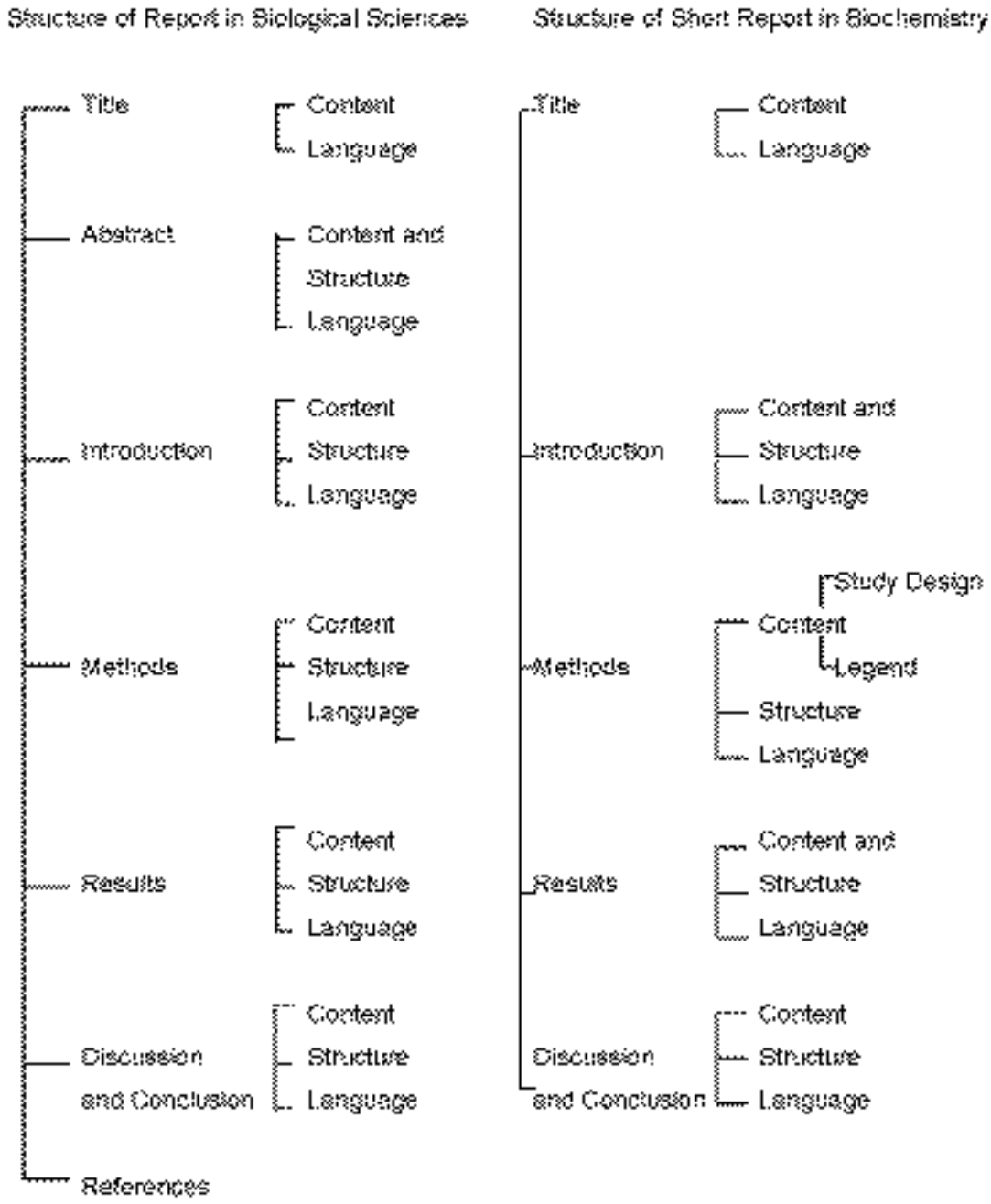

Figure 3 : Navigation design for the Laboratory Report Writing Program in Biological Sciences and Biochemistry

Within the Structure sub-menus, as the name suggests, the typical staging structure of a particular part of the laboratory report is introduced (see Figure 4). Rolling the cursor over the stages can immediately exemplify each stage, re-inforcing the links between content, structure and language. However for more detailed information on language choices in this section of the report, the student needs to access the

Language sub-menu where key language features for this section, such as choice of sentence themes, information exchange, the language of certainty and usuality and tense choices are illustrated and explained.

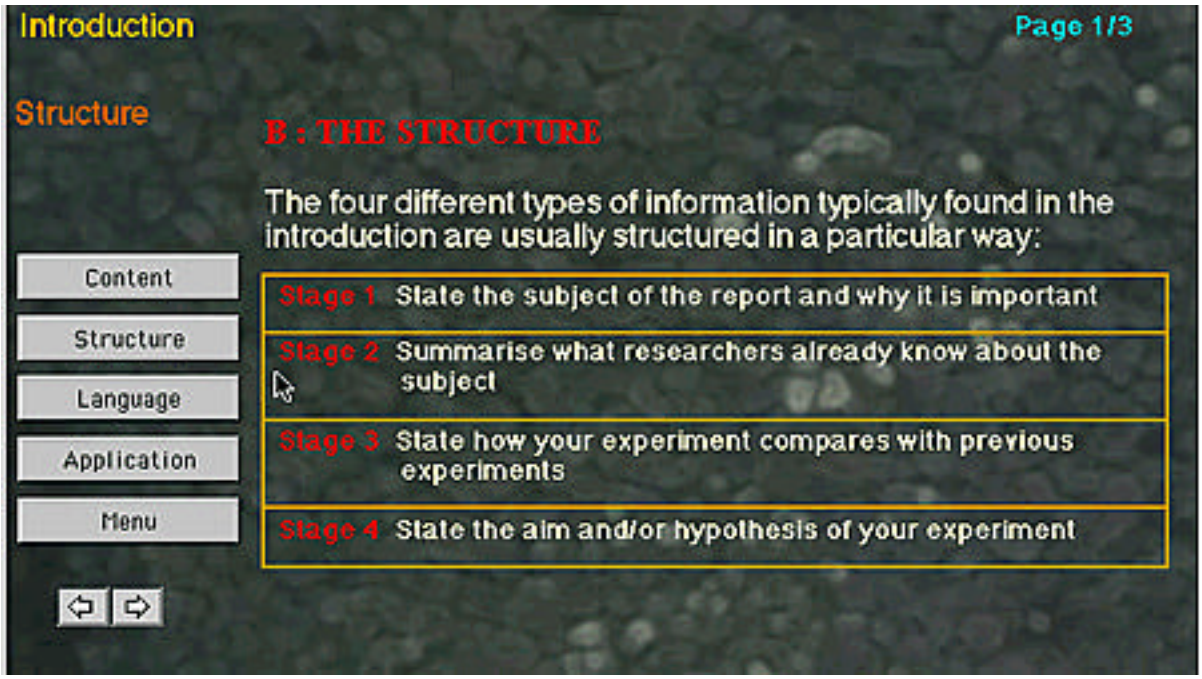

Figure 4: The on-screen display of the staging structure of the introduction to the laboratory report in the biological sciences

Relationships within and among Genres

In SFL, research into genres in educational contexts, began with short texts produced in the primary school years. As research moved on to examine longer texts of the later years of schooling and also workplace texts, Martin (1994) proposed using SFL clause theory to account for the development of these longer texts or macro genres based on the combination of the shorter genres or elemental genres. This is an attractive theory, especially in an educational context, where elemental genres, once mastered, can become the building blocks for macro genres. However, the theory has proved difficult to apply to some longer texts, such as the university essay in the social sciences and humanities, although aspects are still relevant such as the concept of a macro theme which at the most general level introduces the essay and predicts its development in the hyper themes or introductory sentences of each paragraph. Genre descriptions which have grown out of discourse studies, although they tackled larger texts, such as the research

article, began by focussing on parts of these texts such as the introduction (Swales, 1981) and slowly building up towards a picture of the whole genre (Hopkins and Dudley-Evans,1988 Swales, 1990). Therefore, to some extent, both theories in treating longer genres as being made up of smaller genres recognise each element as having its own purpose and structure which contributes to the overall purpose and structure of the longer or macro genre.

As genre studies have grown, it has become clear that the schematic structure, discourse and language criteria for identifying a particular text instance as belonging to a particular type of genre are not always applicable as genre instances may vary from their conventional or prototypical forms. Therefore, it is helpful to see genres both in terms of their typical, conventional forms and in terms of a continuum between and among genres within a discourse community. This way of modelling genres is useful in educational planning and curriculum situations where teachers want to move students from the more basic genres of learning and applying the introductory knowledge of a discipline to the more complex genres and subject matter of later studies (Rose, 1997, Veel, 1997). Generic variability is also associated with expert users of a genre who want to achieve a particular, more personal, purpose within a given discourse community (Bhatia, 1993 p.12). Genre mixing also seems to be a phenomenum noted in new cross-disciplinary studies whose purposes may blend those of individual disciplines (Veel, 1998).

Relationships within and among Genres and the Writing a Laboratory Report Program

The concept of macro genres composed of elemental genres can be applied to the description of the laboratory report program where each part of the report has its own purpose, reflected in its content, structure and language. Once again the menu and sub-menu items re-inforce this view of the genre (see Figure 3). However, although this view of the report can help students to successfully understand the purpose, content, structure and language appropriate for each stage of the report, the danger is that it may over represent the report as made up of separate unrelated segments. The report is a whole text and needs to be seen as such - something which is difficult to do in an on-screen environment. Screen scrolling of the whole

report does not help to conceptualise it as a whole, as text disappears off screen, making connections difficult among and between parts. Printing out the complete macro genre to provide a paper-based copy is at the moment the only way to give a learner an overview of the whole text. The menu item Overall Structure does attempt to provide some linkage between the different parts of the report. In particular, it highlights the role of the aim, as macro theme in the report and on rolling the cursor over the participants in the macro theme, the linked participants in the results and discussion sections are highlighted (see Figure 5).

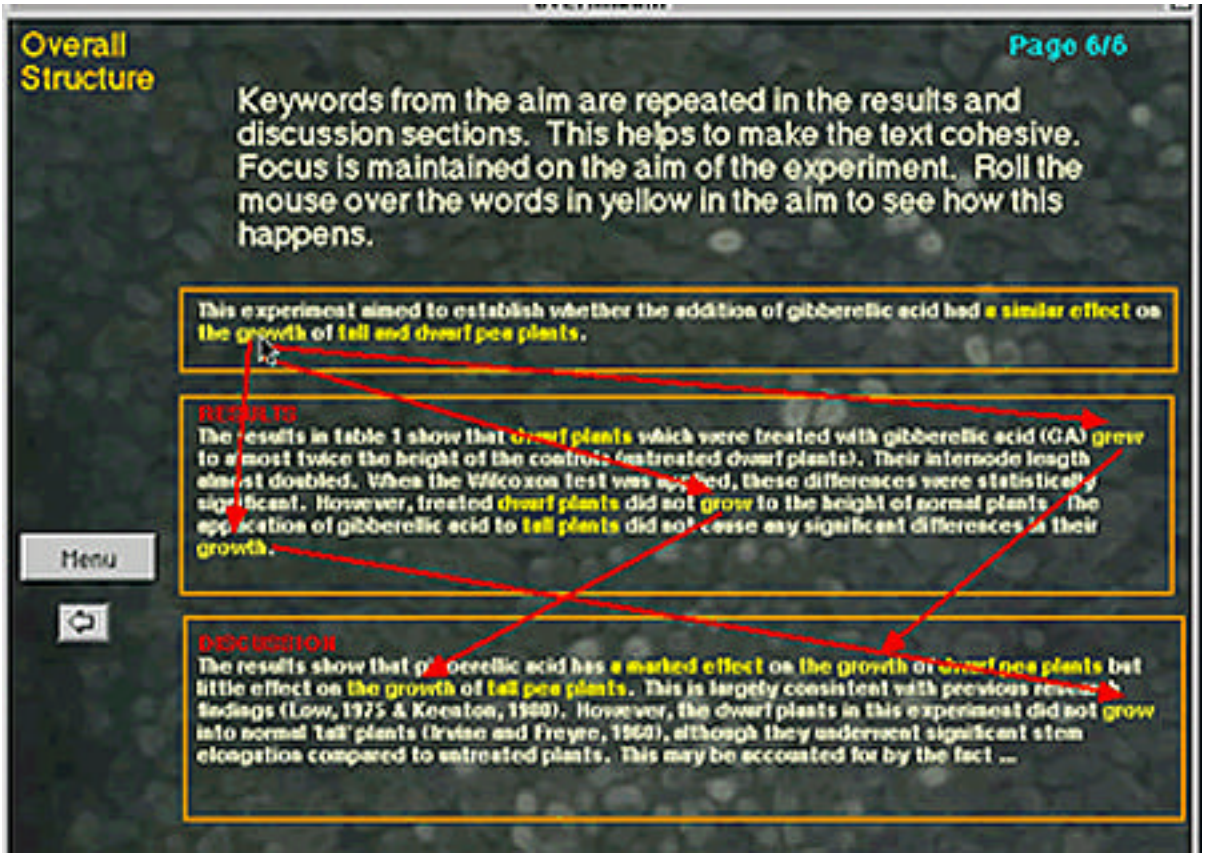

Figure 5: The on-screen display showing how participants in the aim in the introduction are linked to those in the results and discussion stages of the laboratory report in the biological sciences

However, the space constraint of the on-screen environement can also be exploited to show the dynamic, unfolding aspect of a genre. For example, when students reach the on-screen limit of a part of a genre, they can be asked to reflect and make predictions on how the text will develop. Then they can use hyperlinks to see a range of possible choices of text development, make a choice and receive feedback

on what they have chosen. However, this design feature has not been used in the present resource.

As the report writing program expands to include more laboratory report writing genres from different disciplines, the variations in genres will become apparent. There is already generic variation to be seen between the 3 discipline areas analysed. The laboratory report in chemical engineering contains aspects which have similarities with a business report whereas the short report in biochemistry models itself on brief communications in such journals as Nature.

Genre Theory and Learning Theories

Genre theory and analysis in both the discourse analysis and SFL traditions have addressed the educational context of teaching and learning genres and have developed materials and approaches to teaching genres in formal educational settings. Materials have focussed on exemplyfying the product, the genre itself, choosing from a range of different kinds of examples - both expert and novice, successful and unsuccessful, draft and final version - where genre characteristics of context, field, tenor and mode, schematic structure, discourse and lexicogrammatical features are made explicit.

A genre-centred pedagogical approach in the discourse analysis tradition is task driven 'likely to focus student attention on rhetorical action and on the organizational and linguistic means of its accomplishment' (Swales, 1990, p82). Communicatively based classroom activities engage students in examining examples of the target genre to learn about aspects of context, purpose, schematic structure, discourse and language choices before they write guided practice texts and finally their own text. Feedback and guidance is provided by the teacher, although peers are also involved in the feedback process (see Weissberg and Buker for examples of genre-centred materials and teaching approaches).

In a smiliar way, genre-based literacy pedagogy in SFL (Martin, 1999) engages students in an interactive teaching and learning cycle where they acquire knowledge and understanding of the target genre and how to apply this in producing their own individual text for 'publication'. The teaching learning cycle is divided into 3 phases,

the modelling or deconstruction phase, joint construction and individual construction. The cycle can be entered at any point according to students' needs and can be accessed at different levels in that teachers can move back and forth between phases as appropriate, focusing on different aspects of the genre. The modelling phase allows for all aspects of the genre to be made explicit from social context to lexicogrammatical features, joint construction makes the process of genre writing clear by engaging students, with the teacher as guide, in creating an example of the genre and finally, individual construction moves students on to writing a draft of their own text for peer and teacher conferencing before the final version is written. After this stage, students and teacher can engage in a more creative or critical analysis of the target genre, questioning its structure and purpose, re-writing it as a different genre etc. (see Martin, 1999 or Cope and Kalantzis, 1993 for more information on the genre-based teaching and learning cycle and Christie et al, 1990 and 1992 for examples of the application of the model in teaching science genres in the school situation).

Genre Theory and Learning Theories and the Writing a Laboratory Report Program

Genre-based pedagogy in both traditions provides a rich teaching and learning context which would be difficult to create in a on-screen environment. It is true that the on-screen environment can offer a wider range of different kinds of examples of a genre than would be possible in a typical classroom situation and the technology can be effectively used to highlight and explain generic features. Students can choose to access whatever texts are relevant for them at a particular stage in their learning, test their own understanding of the genre conventions by using interactive exercises which target typical problem areas and then receive immediate feedback on the choices they have made in the exercises. This describes the resources of the present program for writing a report in biology.

What is missing in this program and in general in an on-screen environment is the engagement and interaction with their peers and the teacher which students can experience in the face-to-face classroom situation. Such interaction is an essential aid for the teacher to monitor on-going student understanding and react by giving further clarification, explanation etc. when necessary. To some extent, this kind of

interaction can be created on-screen by offering students bulletin board, chat room and discussion list facilities, where they can post questions, draft texts etc and receive answers and feedback from the teacher and their peers and additional guidance from the teacher. Teachers can also monitor student progress using these facilities (Ellis, 2000). Such facilities however offer a different context and form of interaction where communication is carried out entirely through a written mode. How or if this affects learning is unclear, although the delay involved in communicating in writing on-screen should allow for more reflection on what is being communicated and this in turn has implications for learning.

Classroom based exercises, as well as allowing for peer collaboration, are also more varied and creative than present on-screen exercises which are basically limited to variations on multiple choice, drag and drop, toggling and formulaic text entry. More challenging exercises based on extended writing would have to be emailed or posted on a bulletin board for individual feedback from the teacher and peers.

The extent to which the full range of interactive resources available in an on-line environment such as, bulletin board, chat room, discussion list and email facilities. will be made available with the future laboratory report writing program will depend to a large extent on subject area staff, how they see their role and that of the academic literacy specialist and how they see the program being integrated into their curriculum. Off-screen activities can also make the on-screen program a richer learning resource but this again is dependent on how subject area specialists will use the program.

Can Students Learn the Laboratory Report Genre On-screen

Much of the evidence for the success of genre-based pedagogical approaches in the tertiary level classroom tends to be of an informal and qualitative nature. In general, studies report on how genre theory is used to research writing in the disciplines and/or how it underpins the design and implementation of writing programs. Some studies in the discourse analysis tradition have shown evidence of improved writing outcomes using genre-based pedagogy (Reppen, 1995; Mustafa, 1995 and Henry and Roseberry, 1998). Although, there is evidence for the success of genre-based

pedagogy in the SFL tradition in the primary school (Walsh et al., 1990), no such detailed evaluation has been carried out in the tertiary level context. Evidence for improved student learning in the on-screen environment is inconclusive with most studies reporting no significant differences in learning outcomes compared with traditional teaching/learning approaches (Alexander and McKenzie, 1998). Many studies which make claims for improved student learning using on-screen programs have also been criticised in terms of their research design (Dillon and Gabbard, 1998). In this context, it is not surprising that there is as yet, not enough valid evidence to support claims of improved student learning for on-screen programs using genre-based approaches to teach writing at tertiary level. It is clear that research into this area is urgent, given that many tertiary level academic literacy programs are moving into an on-screen environment. However, the fact remains that finding an appropriate research design is problematic and the present pilot survey of the on-screen report writing program for biology is a step towards the development of an appropriate research tool to assess learning outcomes from this kind of program.

This pilot survey (n=40) was carried out shortly after the program had been made available to students and just after students had submitted their first assessed laboratory report assignment in first-year biology. The survey questionnaire sought both quantitative and qualitative data, primarily on the design of the program in such areas as screen layout, navigation design, instructions for doing the program and on the design of explanations, exercises and feedback. Although the main aim of the survey was to gain information on the overall program design so that changes could be made, the survey also tried to establish students' pathways through the program and students' perceptions of their learning.

The majority of students (consistently more than 80%) rated the program highly in terms of the 'user friendliness' of the screen layout and navigation design, the effectiveness of the program instructions and the usefulness of interactivity in aiding the explanations.

Similar ratings were given for the exercises in terms of the clarity of instructions, ease of doing the exercises and their usefulness. Almost 90% of students rated the feedback as excellent or very good, although a third of the sample wanted more

feedback. These ratings were supported by responses from two expert users (biology lecturers). About half of the students moved systematically through the program, from screen to screen in a 'page turning' approach, while the other half moved quickly from screen to screen, scanning the information before choosing a particular explanation and exercise to work through in more detail. The most visited parts of the program were the results and discussion sections and then the overall structure and references. This is not surprising since first year students were using the program while writing their laboratory report assignment which requires them to write only the results and discussion sections.

The marks received for the reports written by the sample group were compared to those of a control group who did not do the on-screen program but had access to paper based guidelines and models on how to write the laboratory report, although these materials did not contain practice exercises. Students' reports were also assessed in terms of their academic literacy using the MASUS instrument (Bonnano and Jones, 1997) and literacy ratings were compared with biology marks. There were no significant differences in performance between the two groups either in terms of their literacy assessment or their biology mark. As mentioned above, this outcome is consistent with most research which has attempted to compare student learning outcomes using computer-based learning materials to those using traditional materials.

Although most students (66%) reported that the program had made them more aware of their problem areas and more knowlegeable about writing laboratory reports, only a third reported that it had increased their confidence in writing reports This suggests that they may not have been able to transfer and apply what they had learnt to the context of their own writing. Students' main complaint, apart from teething problems with the technology, was that more examples and models were needed, something which the new data base extension will provide. Given the small sample size and the research design of this survey and also the kinds of data it sought, it is impossible to draw any conclusions about student learning associated with using this on-screen program. However, since most students recorded strong positive experiences and attitudes towards the program, it is likely that learning has taken place and for some students, depending on their learning style, prior

knowledge and ability, this may well have contributed to their better understanding of laboratory report writing and a better performance outcome.

Conclusion

Essentially, on-screen and classroom environments offer two distinctive learning contexts and allow for different learning experiences and different approaches to learning. In today's resource starved universities, the rich learning environment of the classroom is being eroded as students have to increasingly compete for teacher attention to their individual needs. In this context, an on-screen learning situation can offer advantages in meeting the varied and individual writing needs of a large and diverse group of students. For example, a core on-screen resource can model and deconstruct genres and provide exercises for students to check their understanding. If and when students encounter difficulties with the exercises or feedback provided, they can post their questions to a discussion list to be answered by teachers and peers. Many students will have similar questions and problems and can see the answers provided for their peers on the list. This approach would then allow teachers time, either in a face-to-face context or on-screen, to give more detailed, individual feedback to students in the individual construction phase, when they are actually trying to draft their own report. In this way, it may be possible to maintain the richness of a face-to-face learning experience, albeit occuring less often than in a traditional curriculum, at the same time as providing an on-screen learning environment and offer students both experiences. This is what many surveys of students using on-screen learning resources have requested - the best of both worlds.

However, many questions remain as to what and how students learn on-screen and whether this new learning context improves and deepens learning and finally whether learning is transferrable to new contexts. An important part of the on-going development of the report writing program is to collect more evaluation data, not only on aspects of program design and content, but also on what and how students are learning using this resource and how they are using this knowledge in their own writing. Although we can argue that most of the principles of genre analysis and pedagogy are maintained in an on-screen environment, until we know more about

how students learn in this environment, we cannot claim that genre analysis and pedagogy have been successfully transplanted to this new learning context.

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NUMERACY IN THE WORKPLACE: THE CASE OF NURSING AND IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE ASSISTANCE

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Nursing is a relatively recent arrival in the university sector and as such, represents the increasing diversification of knowledge as traditionally vocational disciplines become academic. The problem of standards in a field like nursing is compounded by several factors including literacy and numeracy. There seems to be a consequent misalignment between the demands of the workplace and levels of preparedness. The issues of literacy are particularly critical in the healthcare environment in which life and death issues abound. The most widely documented consequence of a lack of

nursing competence is in drug administration errors. While nurse educators carry the major responsibility for training nurses, academic advisors play a significant role. Students, overwhelmed by the linguistic and mathematical demands of their subjects, become anxious about the real possibility of failure. Academic advisors need to be more multi-skilled than ever in meeting the demands placed on them to support these students. They have to identify the knowledge gaps, bridge theory and practice and support both linguistic and mathematical problem solving. This study investigates the nature of the knowledge gaps these nursing students present with when attempting to solve drug calculation problems. The results indicate an inability to conceptualize the problem both mathematically and linguistically. Some recommendations are made for the continuing language development of these students such that they might graduate, well equipped to meet the demands of the future health-care work-place.

Keywords: language use, numeracy, academic advisors, nursing, mathematics, problem solving

Introduction and background to the study

“Changing identities” as a conference theme aptly applies to domains of knowledge undergoing not only ideological shifts but shifts on a number of levels, especially those traditionally seen as practical, vocational and essentially non-academic such as nursing. In the push for a ‘knowledge economy’ standards have to be raised in these traditionally non-academic fields. The changing identity of nursing schools into the academic mainstream requires that they provide researchers as well as practitioners. They have the responsibility of ensuring their nurse graduates have

levels of numeracy and literacy which equip them not only for an increasingly sophisticated, technological and demanding work environment but also for statistically complex research. The changing identity of the society being served by the nursing profession has to be articulated as does the changing identity of the nursing and student nursing body, in addition to the changing nature of learning itself. In response to these changing identities, academic advisers have to be a step ahead in their repertoire of skill and this requires increasing diversification of their operational knowledge.

Nursing educators and university support services today are particularly challenged by the diverse learning needs of nursing students, given changing demographics, the advent of the age of electronic communication (Teikmanis & Armstrong, 2001) and signs of “disengagement” (McInnis, 2001). While McInnis is referring to young undergraduates, what he says may apply to nursing students who are female, ESL, older and have the competing demands of paid work and family responsibilities. Unlike their young counterparts, they may not be computer-literate or computer-confident nor be able to easily access material on-line. There is ample American research which documents the multi-faceted challenges confronting nursing schools today and the little local research there is, suggests similar trends. Enrollments in bachelor's-degree nursing programs have declined consistently over the past 5 years, dropping 4.6% in 1999 alone, according to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (Jannetti, 2000). As our communities become more culturally diverse, so do our classrooms and the need for representation of minorities in schools of nursing has yet to change sufficiently to meet society's needs given the increased health care needs of minority populations.(Griffiths & Tagliareni, 1999).

The increase in the number of English as a second language students coupled with increasing nursing shortages, an ageing population, an ageing nursing population, declining nursing enrolments among young students with older nursing students returning to study (Zimmermann, 2000; Jannetti, 2000), has resulted in a high risk of attrition among nursing students generally (Callister, Khalaf & Keller, 2000), and ESL students in particular (Jalili-Grenier & Chase, 1997). The problem of standards in a field like nursing is attested to by documented literacy deficits (Benjamin, 1997; Hess, 1998); language deficits among English as a second language immigrant and

international nursing students (Jalili-Grenier & Chase, 1997; Malu & Figlear, 1998; Arthur, 1999; Marrone, 1999; Parks & Macguire, 1999; Gaffney, 2000), and numeracy deficits (Keill & Johnson, 1993; Ferner, 1995; Hutton, 1997; Fuqua & Stevens, 1998; O'Shea, 1999; Thomas, 2000).

Given the complex profile of learning needs, there would appear to be a misalignment between students' levels of literacy and numeracy and the increasingly sophisticated demands of the nursing workplace, the escalating demand for graduate-prepared nurses and the prediction that employment for nurses will outstrip all other occupations (Jannetti, 2000). The most widely documented consequence of a lack of nursing competence is in drug administration errors. Nursing mistakes can injure thousands, even kill (Hess, 1998; Berens, 2000).

While nurse educators have the ultimate responsibility to assist nursing students overcome gaps in literacy and numeracy for competence in the workplace, academic advisers become involved when students and lecturers turn to them to assist them achieve their educational goals. Nursing students may pose a particular challenge for the adviser who must diagnose the numeracy gap and then provide mathematical problem explanations. This is part of the changing identity of those advisers who have a language-rich background but who are called on to assist students across a range of discourses. Students in general, come from increasingly complex and diverse knowledge areas which place greater demands on the domain knowledge of the advisers. For nursing students seeking assistance with mathematical problem solving, while the mathematics underlying the solution could be elementary, the context and language in which the problems are embedded make the task of understanding the problem and explaining the solution far more difficult. Both phases of the solution process necessarily draw on the mathematical and language competencies of students and advisors alike.

The particular focus of this study is to explore the extent to which nursing students have the mathematical and language skills that are necessary to solve problems in the workplace. Because the most widely documented problem is the need for competency in mathematics for the prevention of drug administration errors, particularly drug calculation errors in the work-place, (Keill & Johnson, 1993; Ferner,

1995; Hutton, 1997; Hess, 1998; Fuqua & Stevens, 1998; O'Shea, 1999; Berens, 2000; Thomas, 2000), this study revolves around the solving of drug calculation problems. The aim of the study is to explore how advisers might help these students by understanding the nature of the difficulty they are experiencing in tackling workplace problems. Sample problems were analysed and the language issues that impede problem solving for both native and ESL students consulting with the advisor were drawn out.

Literature review

Drug administration is an integral part of the nurse's role and responsibility and with changes in legal liability, nurses are directly accountable for correct administration of medication (Ethics lecture, ACU, 2001). Many nurses report being anxious when faced with drug calculations, and while patients expect to receive the correct medication at each drug round, several studies suggest that this does not always occur (O'Shea, 1999; Ferner, 1995; Keill & Johnson, 1993; Raju, Kecskes, Thornton, Perry, & Feldman, 1989; Fuqua & Stevens, 1998). They report calculation problems, problems in the preparing, checking and administering of medications, in monitoring their effectiveness and in teaching patients how to take their drugs. A study of 40 hospitals revealed medication errors as the second most reported incident in hospitals today, attributable to a lack of nurses' mathematical skill (Gillies, 1994). Thomas (2000) reports more errors in calculations occurring particularly in high technology areas and in neonatal nursing where the mathematics involved are a little more complex (Thomas, 2000). This is by no means a new issue for nurse educators. Research carried out on second year nursing students in Australia found that a large number of students had limited understanding of basic arithmetic, and '…made errors large in magnitude, which implies potentially dangerous drug doses…[not solvable] by the use of calculators' (Gillham & Chu, 1995). Most drug calculations involve the skills of multiplication and division and while much has been written on drug calculation error, research has generally not focused on examining methods of dealing with poor calculation skills and how to test for those skills. Commenting on the situation in Australia, Cartwright (1996) called for 'creative' approaches in dealing with the problem of 'serious numeracy skills deficits' which

account for errors in drug administration with an older study reporting very little published information aimed at facilitating mathematics calculations for drug and solution calculations (Weinstein, 1990).

While nursing does not require tertiary level mathematics, nurses do need to demonstrate a range of mathematical understandings and their applications (Hutton, 1997). For example, applying mathematics to practical nursing sometimes means giving answers that are nearly accurate while other calculations may require a higher degree of accuracy. Calculations involving tablets usually give simple and small answers (except some doses of major tranquilizers) while those associated with fluid doses can be more complex. Most drugs work in wide therapeutic ranges so manufacturers usually produce 'standard doses' which do not vary for adult calculations, but child doses are more difficult to compute as they are often related to body weight or surface area, and greater care and accuracy are needed. Nurses also need to make calculations of the electrolyte contents of infusions and other drugs which are expressed in percentages and ratios describing the dilution strength. They need to be able to carry out intravenous regulation and input and make output or fluid balance calculations (Hutton, 1997).

The conceptualizations in handling the administration of common and vital drugs can be problematic to nurses as they involve both linguistic analyses and mathematical computations (Miller, 1993). An example of the type of reasoning required of nurses is given in calculations involving adrenaline which has two standard strengths: 1ml ampoules of 1 in 1,000 (1:1,000) and 10ml ampoules (1:10,000). The first number represents weight in grams and the second represents volume in millilitres. 1:1,000 represents 1 gram adrenaline in every 1,000ml solution (1g/1,000ml). There are 1,000mg in 1g, so 1,000mg/1,000ml = 1/1 or 1mg per 1ml, therefore a 1ml ampoule, contains 1mg of the drug. Some drugs are expressed as percentages (grams per 100ml) so 0.9% saline has 0.9g of sodium chloride in every 100ml or 9g/litre (0.9 x 10 per litre = 9g/litre).

Weaknesses in reasoning the solutions to problems may come about because of a lack of being able to handle basic mathematical principles represented by the above calculations. Other weaknesses occur in representing calculations as equations; knowing that anything done to the numerator of a fraction must also be done to the

denominator; translating both sides of equations into the same unit of measurement; checking answers if in doubt by working backwards; and being aware that equations can be modified, provided both sides are balanced before isolating the unknown (Woodrow, 1998). Some calculations may involve the integration of division and multiplication with addition and subtraction. Graphs and charts easily convey complex information and nurses are expected to be able to read such representations of information about patients (eg. one measure on the vertical axis may be temperature, and another on its horizontal axis may be time). As well as showing the last recorded temperature, an observation chart could show trends which may help with diagnosis and help save time looking through written notes. Nurses are expected to be able to read various other graphs, charts and tables for example charts showing average and normal ranges for height and weight (Woodrow, 1998).

The definition and categories of medication errors vary throughout the literature but the American Society of Hospital Pharmacists (ASHP, 1982; p. 321 cited in O'Shea, 1999) identified nine categories of medication error: omission, unauthorized drug error, wrong dose error, wrong route error, wrong rate error, wrong dosage form error, wrong time error, wrong preparation of a dose and incorrect administration technique. In a study conducted by Blais and Bath (1992) three areas of medication calculation deficiencies among nurses were identified. These were mathematical, conceptual and measurement inabilities with the most frequent type of mistake being conceptual errors (difficulty in setting up the problem), followed by mathematical errors and then measurement errors. Segatore, Edge and Miller (1993) identified 91% of all errors as conceptual errors. Other researchers (Cohen, 1994; Calliari, 1995; Gladstone 1995) also attribute most medication errors to language-based factors and not merely the result of wrong calculations. It may indeed not be possible to separate mathematics and language if all conceptualizations including mathematical ones involve language (Anderson, 2000). Hence errors may not simply be due to a lack of numeracy but to a ***complex interplay of mathematical and linguistic factors***. Researchers (Blais & Bath, 1992; Segatore, Edge & Miller, 1993) have suggested that we need to examine those linguistic factors that play a key role in helping the problem solver understand the structure of a given problem.

It is a common practice for nursing schools to use a mathematics test to ascertain mathematical competency for nursing even if its effectiveness is questionable. Such tests may measure basic mathematical knowledge with little attention to the contexts in which such knowledge could be used thus not reflecting the reality of the workplace. Tests largely bear no relationship to real-life nursing calculations and according to the literature, have no real benefit in terms of learning (Rutherford, 1996). One reason is that the language associated with real-life problems is very much richer than that reflected in basic skills tests. In any case, nurses come to know the common dosage of particular drugs or the usual amount of feed for a baby of a particular size on the job. Recognising erroneous amounts becomes common sense. If an answer does not look reasonable, nurses are expected to check calculations. In fact, research on what these tests can predict is inconsistent. Some research suggests that poor performance in a written mathematics test does not necessarily predict a lack of later competence in the nursing mathematics required in the workplace. A study by Hutton (1998b) found that nursing students were particularly poor at applying mathematical concepts to problems written in words but this poor test performance was not reflected in clinical practice. On the other hand, research also shows that nurses who fail a written medication test are more likely than those who pass the test to make medication errors in practice (Calliari, 1995).

Purpose of the study

This study set out to examine the medication calculation skills of nursing students attending the academic skills support unit. The initial task was to find out if these students had poor calculation skills. The next task was to find out if these poor skills were due to low competence in mathematics or poor language proficiency or both and finally, to consider the reasons for the identified lack of skills. The results of the study would guide the researcher into preparing viable academic support programmes to assist such students and to advise the nursing faculty of strategies to deal with students experiencing difficulties.

The study was undertaken in response to the increase in the number of visits to the academic support unit at an Australian university by nursing students who were either failing the mathematics test or were failing the communications component of

the practical placement in hospitals. Conversations with nursing lecturers (Australian Catholic University, 2001), suggested that some students failed the practical placement because of a 'dangerous' lack of understanding of medication instructions and not because of an inability to do the mathematics. These lecturers also suggested that those students who did have problems with the mathematics failed tests for several reasons including an over-reliance on calculators, an inability to do basic mental arithmetic, and an inability to do conversions and ratios. They recounted anecdotal evidence of students who were unable to convert milligrams to micrograms; who calculated 1:4 as a quarter and not a fifth; who rang a doctor for advice at 3am because a patient required 500mg of an antibiotic but there were no 500mg tablets left, only 250mg tablets; and of another student involved in a diet survey who said she consumed '40 ton' of sugar a year, with no idea why the answer was incorrect. Needless to say, such accounts are cause for concern and indicate the need for effective support which targets the root cause of the problem.

Method

Participants

The participants consisted of four female native speakers (NS) and four non-native speaker (NNS) nursing students at various stages of completing a nursing degree. They were randomly selected to take part in what was intended to be a pilot study for a more extensive investigation. They happened to be representative of the female , resident and international, school leaver and mature age students who comprise the nursing student body at the university. The students had either completed or were about to sit a mathematics competency test covering basic multiplication, division, knowledge of fractions, conversion of decimals and percentages to fractions, conversion of ratios to percentages, and conversion of grams to milligrams and micro grams. The mathematical knowledge base for the competency test was equivalent to Stage 4 of the New South Wales mathematics curriculum (Years 8 and 9 of high school), covered in the first year with formal drug calculations covered in the second and third years.

Materials and procedure

Two tasks (Figure 1) which are representative of the real-life problems that could be encountered by nursing students were randomly selected from a range of practice problems found in Woodrow (1998) and given to students coming to the academic adviser in the normal course of their seeking assistance in the second half of the year. The participants were asked to think aloud as they attempted to solve the problems. If they could not solve the problems, they were asked to talk about the reasons why they could not make a start or complete the tasks.

Problem 1

Neat frusemide (Lasix) is prescribed at 4mg/min for one hour. Frusemide ampoules contain 10mg/ml. The total volume for one hour will be:

a) 15ml
b) 40ml
c) 24ml
d) 60ml
e) 6ml

Problem 2

A drug infusion runs at 30ml/hr throughout 24 hours. Oral inputs are recorded as: 180, 150, 180, 90, 75, 180, 100. The overall fluid input for the whole day is:

a) 965ml
b) 995ml
c) 1855ml
d) 1275ml
e) 1675ml

Figure 1

Results

Problem 1

Only two of the eight students could produce the correct solution to Problem 1. Several students made no attempt at all to solve the problem.

Two of the NNS said the answer was 40ml.

NNS1 made the following observation:

> ***I saw 10mg/ml and 4mg/min and simply multiplied.***

NNS2 proceeded to divide 4 by 10. She then decided to change her mind and divided 40 by 10. In neither of these instances could she provide a reason.

These students obtained the answer by multiplying 4 and 10 without realising that these figures related to the mass and not volume.

NS1 commented that

> This problem was hard - we had to convert mg into mls and we had to times 60.
> I saw it as one problem and I couldn't break the problem down and may not be able to do it again even with the explanation

Problem 2

Only two of the participants could solve Problem 2. There were two incorrect responses of 1275ml. NNS2, as in Problem 1, produced a series of computations without explanation. This student multiplied 150 and 180 by 30, but could not make further progress. Here, again, the students appeared to be performing meaningless computations without any links to the solution goal. One of the NS students commented that she could not understand and that she just guessed an answer. The other two NSs did not even hazard a guess.

Discussion

The results indicate that the participants had not understood the relationships between the various elements of the problem. There was evidence of meaningless computations being performed with little concern as to the goal of the solution. The solution of Problem 1 requires that students had to work out the volume of ampoules that would contain the mass of Frusemide prescribed for one hour (240mg). It was given that 1ml of ampoule contains 10mg of the drug. Hence, the required volume of ampoule for 240mg would be 24ml. The solution is dependent on chains of proportional reasoning which students could not verbalise. The problem had to be broken down to two stages before the relevant parts could be linked. NS1 could not 'see' this part of the solution.

The key to understanding to Problem 2 was to make a clear distinction between the two modes by which the drug was being administered to the patient. That is, students needed to make sense of three notions that appear in the problem statement: 'infusions', 'oral input', 'overall fluid input'. The overall fluid input referred to the total volume. Hence the solution involves summing up the individual oral inputs (955ml), adding this to the volume given via infusion over a 24 hour period (30 x 24 = 720ml). This reasoning should produce 1675ml as the overall fluid given to the patient.

The difficulties experienced by the participants here could be attributed to several factors. Firstly, students could not articulate or even raise questions about some of the terms that appeared in the problem. Secondly, there is little evidence that students understood the context of the problem. Thirdly, there was a tendency to attempt some form of calculation with little attempt at analysing and understanding what was being asked in the problem. This pattern of results suggests firstly that nursing students who participated in the study have gaps in their knowledge of basic mathematics and secondly but equally significantly, that NS and NNS alike experienced considerable difficulty in reading and understanding elements in the problems. Malu and Figlear (1998) corroborate these latter findings in saying that word problems cause confusion for NS and NNS students alike as both groups share a lack of understanding of the words themselves and their contexts. What seems

possible is that there is both a general lack of numeracy and mathematics skills (Gillies, 1994), and an inability to interpret the language of mathematics and problems with literacy in general (Rutherford, 1996).

Mature age students feel they have been ‘out of the system’ too long and are not confident about mathematics calculations while school leavers entering nursing often did not ‘do’ much mathematics in school or were not good at mathematics (Hutton, 1998a). Given that these students are all female reporting problems with mathematics, there is the added problem of mathematics being perceived as a subject girls are not good at and as a subject nurses did not need (Marr & Helme, 1990). School leavers report not being able to do calculations without calculators which are not permitted in tests because they are deemed to be ’…deleterious to students’ ability to estimate or approximate values of calculations’ with disastrous consequences as in the case of a newborn given a dose of .09mg ICL instead of .009mg because of a calculator error (Rutherford, 1996, p.15). Errors are ascribed to nurses not being able to conceptualize the problem or conceptualizing the problem incorrectly and this applies to both NS and NNS, the latter having the added complications of a poor grasp of the socio-cultural contexts of language use (Malu & Figlear, 1998).

Malu and Figlear (1998) report that a review of the literature revealed ‘scant’ research on the nursing education of ESL nursing students. Their study revealed four problems that impede success for these students- language development, differing expectations of nursing education, a fear of failure and an unfamiliarity with a participatory learning model. Factual information is copied or memorized at the expense of understanding concepts and abstractions because these require more time and are harder to grasp; basic interpersonal language skills for use in daily routines are adequate but cognitive academic language proficiency needed for University is not adequate. This may account for the fact that students who come to the academic adviser for assistance and are at risk academically, may also be successfully engaged in paid employment as practicing nurses. Malu and Figlear (1998) cite examples of students who appear fluent and cope in their workplace but fail the communications component of the practical placement which forms part of their academic studies. The students reported that they suddenly forgot all their

language when put under pressure of assessment in unfamiliar work environments and different social contexts. They said they often could not verbalise understanding of concepts or abstractions because they simply do not have the language to do so or they have failed to understand them in the first place.

Implications for academic skills advisors

The results of this study provide tentative support for the argument that academic skills advisors need to devise programmes and strategies to improve the linguistic competence of their nursing students with a view to building conceptual understanding of workplace problems including mathematical problem-solving. In doing so, an advisor's focus is on disentangling the various components of the concept(s) that are in question. Future research needs to provide more fine-grained analysis of mathematical representations and their linguistic contexts and of how links among the concepts and across representations are formed with a larger sample of participants. In spite of being bound to the mathematics test as used in this university, academic advisers working with nursing students, need to be aware that competency in nursing mathematics is a clinically-based skill in which practice in context is essential (Donovan 1990). Competency in nursing requires not only arithmetic but also a common sense knowledge of what is a reasonable answer for a particular patient (Coben & Thumpston 1996; Hutton 1997). Theories of learning support the need for experience and repeated exposure and nursing mathematics is no exception (Benner, 1984; Eraut, 1985; Schon, 1987). Learning opportunities in the clinical areas should be encouraged. Student nurses, especially those who have found classroom mathematics difficult, should have maximum opportunities in clinical areas to practise work-related mathematics and gain confidence and competence in its use through application.

Improving the academic success of these students is a collaborative process. Nurse educators and academic advisers working with nursing students, need to help their students explore and build language that will help in remediation of their mathematical knowledge (Flynn & Moore, 1990; Hek, 1994). While nurse educators carry the major responsibility for training nurses, academic advisors play a significant role in assessing and supporting communication skills, and devising appropriate

support programs to influence the rates of success and attrition. The literature strongly suggests that support programs can greatly increase the retention of ESL students (Callister, Khalaf & Keller, 2000). Malu and Figlear (1998) propose remedial action by way of continued language development for all nursing students at risk especially because of the problems of nursing language viz. – words used interchangeably eg. 'nursing measure, intervention, order, approach'; words with dual meanings eg. 'tablet'.; words that do not always translate literally eg. 'pouring'; words that may look similar but have very different meanings eg. 'internal, interval'. While native speakers have no trouble extracting the meaning 'tablet' from the context, both groups can be confused with words like 'nursing measure', 'intervention' and 'approach'. Support programmes could provide examples of problem words and categories of these words; students could keep lists and update them; they could be encouraged to keep a vocabulary notebook or vocabulary cards that can be used to build concept maps which categorise words and connect interrelated concepts and abstractions that they find troublesome. NNS need to be given more time in exams and allowed to use bilingual dictionaries. They need to be encouraged into immersion groups for study and discussion and be involved in native speaker settings outside study.

Academic advisers may also work in other ways. They can inform lecturers on appropriate cultural orientations to enhance mutual understanding; advise on training styles that address literacy deficits and language diversity; trial and recommend software programs that enhance learning such as lecture presentation software (Gaffney, 2000) and NCLEX-RN Review software (Ross, Nice, May & Billings, 1996); assist lecturers with competency statements and performance criteria (Marrone, 1999); support students with self-directed and computer-assisted learning and electronic communication activities (Teikmanis & Armstrong, 2001); advise students on coping mechanisms, communication, effective learning strategies and tailor support programs to individual needs (Hess, 1998); mediate on matters of time extensions and exam assistance and help establish learning networks. Ultimately, the adviser seeks to help the "faculty …create a climate of caring that fosters a positive learning environment and empowers both faculty and students" (Callister, Khalaf & Keller, 2000, p.269).

Conclusion

Universities need to take up the challenge to promote traditionally vocational areas like nursing such that its graduates are capable of taking up the challenges of an increasingly complex and demanding workplace. Mathematical skill will become even more important for nurses given predicted changes in the role of nurses. Rogers (1995) proposed nurses be involved in prescribing drugs because research has shown that it results in patients receiving the drugs they need more promptly and also it greatly reduces nurses' reliance on verbal prescriptions from medical staff – a common source of error. In order to function effectively, nurses and nursing students need to develop skills in solving a range of problems. Invariably, the solution of such problems in the workplace requires that nurses are adept at applying not only elementary mathematical concepts and procedures but also applying their linguistic competence in understanding the problems. Further in-depth research is needed in order to analyse more fully the nature of the nexus between mathematical and linguistic skills in facilitating nursing students' ability at solving workplace-based problems. Recommendations are that continuing instruction in mathematics and language needs to be part of the changing nature of nursing curriculum. Faculty-based development of numeracy and literacy promotes learning as process not only as product – a necessary part of any university's overall drive towards tertiary literacy.

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INTERDEPENDENT ACADEMIC IDENTITIES: LANGUAGE AND LEARNING PRACTITIONERS AND THE SUBJECT WHO WRITES.

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Starting with questions of how a language and learning practitioner might assist a student to write in ways demanded of them by a university, we argue that writing pedagogies at an undergraduate and postgraduate level must take account of and work with the complex of informing and transforming conditions of student identity and subjectivity. The identities-in-practice of language and learning practitioners have an interdependent relation to the identities-in-practice of the students with whom they work. In exploring this interdependence and its implications for writing pedagogy, we draw a distinction between the writing subject (a self that writes like an academic) and the subject who writes (an idea of self which

exceeds the notion of the writing subject through a recognition of the subject's embodied, affective and gendered history). We argue that consideration of the pedagogical interdependence needs to be seen through the experience of students as more than simply writing subjects. To do this, we work with an idea of the subject who writes. A crucial question in our consideration is, are new and developing subjectivities, as produced in and through the university context seamless and replicable or do they embody and challenge traces of the emotional, cognitive and experiential history of the individuals learning to be academics? We take an approach which allows us to explore the ways in which institutions attempt to 'discipline' students into their disciplines and we make the claim that this experience of being 'disciplined' is one which (for the subject who writes) exceeds linguistic, cognitive and textual competence.

Keywords: Writing pedagogy, The subject who writes, Ontology of becoming

INTRODUCTION

There is a debate occurring in Australian universities at present about how best to ensure that students gain access to instruction in the tertiary literacies that are often conflated with "Graduate Attributes". The imperative that both fuels and is produced by this debate is one concerned with the production of particular kinds of social subjects and the implementation of writing pedagogies (among other pedagogies) that will facilitate such a production.

In this paper, we take the notion of academic identities or subjectivities which seems to be a fairly unexamined "given" by those involved in the debate and we subject to closer scrutiny the conceptualising of academic identity joined to particular expectations of undergraduate and postgraduate writing practices Such an exploration questions the straightforwardness or the neatness of the subjectivities that are implied by the categories and assumptions of such things as graduate attributes.

We argue that students bring with them to their production of texts (visual, written, spoken and bodily) in the university particular emotional, cognitive, and experiential histories. It is these histories which inform our use of the term “subjectivity”. We use the term “subjectivity” to imply a self that is not only entangled with a social and cultural history, but one that is also mediated and made possible through discourse. We want to face this complexity of history and disposition and its impact on educational trajectories. We hope that our considerations of the practice of writing and the process of learning to write, seen as a process of discursive, subjective negotiation, will inform the debate at a level that is concerned with:

- who students are as social and educational subjects, and
- where current Learning Development or Learning Centre practices and philosophies sit in the context of this more elaborated and complex consideration of academic identity.

Our exploration is based on the hypothesis that writing is not just a cognitive or linguistic skill but is part of a more complex, elaborate and uncertain gendered, affective, and psychic process of becoming. It is this hypothesis and its framing within the work of authors more often associated with areas of philosophy, cultural, political and gender studies (Grosz, 1999;Butler, 1997; Deleuze and Guattari, 1987) which we hope allows us to contribute to the dialogue with other writers who, like us, are interested in exploring “…issues concerning the institutional and cultural possibilities for, and constraints on self hood [that]are thrown into sharp relief by considering what happens when a person is actually engaged in an act of self representation (Ivanic, 1998, p.20).

Theoretical and Conceptual Issues

A corollary of our attempt to step outside the usual considerations taken in the Australian debate about tertiary literacies is that we challenge both the genre approach to writing pedagogy, on the one hand, and the process approach on the other. The extremes of this debate form an arbitrary division between the technical

necessities of writing and the individualised experience of becoming a writer. By resisting these extremes, we are suggesting, by analysis, that writing for the academy involves both, and much more, in between and beyond the genre/process distinction. Our resistance here is founded on a broader resistance to any sense of fixable, finalising ideas about human subjectivity, and to romantic liberal ideas of the uniqueness of the human.

> Both sides of this particular debate [about subjectivity], those who want to pin the subject down definitively, and those who resist …— rest on the same mode of subjectivity. For those who believe that we will one day have a unique model of the self, subjectivity must be a consistent and quantifiable entity, a stable thing whose limits we can know and whose structure we can map. For those who believe the opposite, subjectivity is also a thing, but an ineffable one, producing intensities, emotions and values that are so beautiful or unique that they bear witness to an ultimate, irreplaceable and inexplicable individuality that is dazzling yet self contained, like a precious jewel (Mansfield, 2000, p.6).

We want to make our challenge in our analysis by introducing the notions of excess (Grosz, 1999) and flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) in order to re-examine our assumptions about what writing pedagogy might involve, by thinking more about what the writing process is for those who write. What these two ideas – excess and flight – allow us to consider is the process of 'territorial' negotiation. If territory is that which is marked and formed by certain discourses (the academic, the personal etc.) then flight implies movement in and between such territories, and the overstepping and negotiating of boundaries. By excess is meant the way in which the lived experience of a student exceeds that which is known or can be known by academic educational discursive practice. This includes, for us, the complexities of emotional and embodied experiences which are beyond the known territory of writing processes and disciplinary knowledges and the products and artefacts (texts and other demonstrations of competence) of 'academic' territory. Flight, given a focus on

lived and complex experience, is used to describe the way in which a student moves across and between territories, academic and other.

In our orientation, we want to apprehend and appreciate “the surprise of the new… the inherent capacity for time to link, in extraordinarily complex ways the past and present to a future that is uncontained by them and has the capacity to rewrite and transform them” (Grosz, 1999, p.7). Grosz, in her exploration of the temporal unfolding of experience as elaborating and contingent, sees time as "the process of production and creation in terms of openness to the new instead of preformism of the expected [that is, the reproduction of the given and ‘permitted’ forms of self via self representation/performance]" (1999, p.29).

We want to take this idea of elaborating (rather than foreclosing) temporal realisation, in systemic terms, “semogenesis/instantiation” (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2000) to the process and practice of writing, and writing pedagogy. We are looking toward an “ontology of being replaced by ontology of becoming” (Grosz, 1999, p.7) and are keenly interested in how such a perspective enables us to consider and appreciate the process of becoming an academic writer, and how this appreciation might inform writing pedagogy.

We attempt to see the experience of learning to write as unfolding along "lines of flight along which the assemblage [one’s habitus, disposition, subjectivity] breaks down or becomes transformed into something else.” (Paton, 2000, p.44). If every assemblage of self has both movements of reterritorialisation [a remarking of what is known and how it is known] which tend to fix and stabilise its elements and “cutting edges of deterritorialisation [which destabilise the ‘knowings’] which carry it away” (Deleuze &Guattari, 1987, p.88, cited in Patton, 2000, p.44), then how does a self in the educational environment of a university, experience this movement, and how do they negotiate the territorialisation/ reterritorialisations, which fix and carry away, as they learn to write?

To consider more fully the experience of writing, of becoming a writer, and to appreciate the complexities of who a student might be in this process and how writing figures in their experience, we will contrast an idea of the writing subject with an idea of the subject who writes.

CASE STUDY

The writer we are focused on in our case study is A, a visual artist and mature age student, completing the thesis component of a Masters Honours degree in visual Arts. Under-lying A's motivation for academic study and her art practice, was a desire to, in the first instance, visually communicate an experience which has had and will continue to have a profound impact on her life.

In our exploration of A's writing, we want to actively resist and avoid resolution, neat solutions or closure. At the same time, we want to face the "threat' of resolution, a threat that remains and is powerful (as goal — the final written product, judge — the assessment process/grade, requirement — completion/incompletion, appropriate 'disciplinarity') in most academic writing processes. This 'threat' is often projected as one of finishing, of completion, or having 'done' it, and, as a result, of 'being' something, or somewhere. This threat, present, articulate and reflexively determining of who a student might be, propels a set of desires (the student's and other's) in the domain of the academy.

In order to explore the process of becoming and its relationship to writing, taking seriously methodologically and pedagogically the complex subjective experience of the subject who writes, we take "moments" in the becoming of one academic subject and her experiences of writing. By taking moments rather than an individual or their 'texts' as focus in our analysis, we are methodologically resisting the ways in which ideas of writing subjects foreclose around that which is knowable and in view in the process of writing. There are several voices involved in the negotiation of this story and therefore an intermingling of narratives. A, the student; P, the supervisor; B, the Learning Assistance, writing teacher; and E, the examiner of the piece of writing ultimately produced by A.

Organising the material for the purpose of this paper has forced us to produce something tangible and coherent, negotiating some sort of order to produce an account of something that we would like to keep contingent, unfolding and indeterminate. This ordering is OUR order. We have struggled to do this and to still be able "to avoid the threat of resolution that narrative has" (Schlunke, 1999, p.8).

We have chosen excess; “narratives of narratives and narrator and narrative co-mingling so that there is no single home for the writing self” (Schlunke, 1999, p.8).

Our ordering in this paper recognises that a key concern for language and learning practitioners is with working with students to develop their control of argument, cohesion and grammatical metaphor. We have taken grammatical metaphor as one point of departure for organising this paper.

Grammatical Metaphor

Grammatical metaphor has two key functions in relation to the Humanities disciplines within the university. Typically grammatical metaphor is used by the "skilled" Humanities writing subject for both abstraction and textual organisation. The skilled writing subject within the Humanities will usually organise their text through the use of theme and new, producing a periodicity which generates abstraction and obscures reason (Martin, 1993). Reasoning will often be buried within clauses, assumed as extant entities or processes in experiential clause grammar, rather than explicitly foregrounded between clauses with conjunctions such as "because". Grammatical metaphor allows multiple readings of a text. What we will show is that for A, grammatical metaphor did two things; it allowed for a bridge into academic writing mode and, it allowed for a particular relationship to her experience.

MOMENTS

In this section, we explore the moments we have drawn from A’s writing. Each of these moments involves an intermingling of A's drafts with P's comments on A's drafts, B's comments on A's drafts, A's responses to those comments and relevant excerpts from an interview with A. At times, we make a commentary on aspects of the moments.

Moment 1: Draft 19

P's comments: "Writing is not a rapturous activity. A, when it comes to thesis writing you must resist being carried on a poetic swirl, only noting the emotive and eschewing arguments. You can however, run riot in your exegesis”.

Commentary: We have chosen to begin with P's comments concerning the rapturousness of A's writing because this seems to us to be a key concern in our exploration of the notions of excess and flight and their connection to the development of a writing pedagogy which replaces an ontology of being with an ontology of becoming.

A's writing in this section of draft 19:

> It is as if a gentle wind has blown over the painting Monk by the sea and like the footprints obliterated all conventional landscape motifs even suspending light itself. The Sublime feeling is created by the threat of nothing happening but if something does we are relieved and delighted. It could be that this something is one of great simplicity, that goes unnoticed and unseen like the tiny cry of the wave on the dark ocean.

B's annotations to A's draft: minor tense change suggestions

Commentary: B's annotations were minor amendments to sentence level features of the text. They did not pick up the shift in tenor which P later describes as "poetic swirl" in his later reading of the draft. While B was aware of the duality that students in the Visual Arts experience, positioned as they are as both performer/artist and theoretician, B only later became aware that something other than confusion about tenor was operating. A felt her experience to be dominant / primary.

A's Interview (the primacy of the experience)

> "There aren't words to write the experience…I realised that very soon after the experience when I was in a rapturous state and tried to describe it all to my family and there just weren't the words to describe it you know…so none of the traditional language that we have that communicates ideas and concepts to other people can be used. So that's why I have chosen painting rather than any other form of art, not installation, not anything else and I didn't choose to be an art

> theorist because it [the representation of the experience] only ever comes out once I start working and sometimes it might be the next day before I realise what I have done. …I think this has been the problem with the writing. I was making all the connections and I couldn't believe that it wasn't obvious because for me it was more than obvious". (Interview with A, April, 2001)

Moment 2: Draft 19 (begins with a quote)

> In experiencing a work of art, one is brought to the limits of self and made to look beyond. Central to this phenomenology was the state of contemplation, of disengagement from the active instrumental self and, in experiencing the sublimities of a work of art, the self was momentarily abandoned and communication with the transcendent achieved (Morley, 1999, p.28).

The next line in A's thesis is:

> The theory of the sublime has an historical position in eighteenth -century literature, philosophy and the arts, meaning different things to different people.

P's comment: "I don't see the connection".

Commentary: For A, the connection between the quote from Morley and the theory of the sublime is obvious - the quote is about HER experience. The theory of the sublime is one way of communicating this experience.

A's Interview:

> "I think I used the theory of the Sublime [to cloak my experience]. [I] felt very, very happy with the connection between the two- both Emmanual Kant and Lyotard. I thought, yes, I can do what I want and now I've got the language that I need to back up what I want to do and then

> when I went to work with Emmanual Kant … when I started investigating the artists that were working with having the knowledge of Emmanual Kant, I came across Caspar David Friedrich…so that's how it actually fell into place for me …When I first read that [theory] I felt that what I had come to uni to do sat comfortably within that theory, then when I looked at the paintings that reflected the sublime they moved me greatly, that's Caspar David Friedrich's Monk by the sea just took me to the limits again-the limits of my existence…".(Interview with A, April, 2001)

A's subsequent annotations on this same section of the draft:

As Morley is a contemporary writer I have relocated to page 32 (this is chapter 6 titled Adaption of the Sublime in Contemporary Art) in the next draft.

A's Interview:

> "… I think what I am trying to do is to take off all the layers like an onion- take off all these layers until… I find the purest line or the purest painting within myself…and I'm not sure I'm going to be satisfied with either". (Interview with A, April, 2001)

Commentary: The way A deals with P's comments is to shift the quote. In so doing, A is moving from the experience of becoming to an academic rendering of that experience as static. A's academic rendering of her experience involves her taxonomising her experience rather than presenting her experience as she did originally in this draft as layers of an onion. The layering doesn't work as a technique for organisation in the thesis. P demands an ordering - a linear development - which A accommodates, not as we might expect through a reorganisation of theme /new development but by moving the " undisciplined /becoming" text to another section of the thesis. In effect, she "disciplines" and "makes static" the text through a taxonomising according to the writer (ie. Morley as contemporary art critic is now grouped with the chapter on contemporary art).

Moment 3: Drafts 19 and 20: A comparison (P's comments inserted in **bold**, some of the original Friedrich quote has been deleted).

> In this given space, Friedrich, a deeply patriotic and religious artist believed that only through landscape could he capture his most powerful feeling regarding the ecstasy of death and the belief that God was closely felt in nature (**source?**). Friedrich's painting of landscape evokes the infinity of the Mathematical sublime with eerie apprehension and in the absence of precise concepts conveys spiritual dimension. (**How exactly?)**
>
> In Monk by the sea 1809, Friedrich saw himself as the reflective monk:
>
> > A man walking along the beach, deep in thought clad in black garments…a gentle wind blows over them [his footsteps] and will obliterate every trace of you, foolish man puffed up with vain conceit (Friedrich cited in Borsch-Supan, 1974, p.7). It is as if a gentle wind has blown over the painting Monk by the sea …something …unseen like the tiny cry of the wave on the dark ocean"(for full text see A's draft 19, moment 1) (**this style is far too poetic for a thesis**).

A's re written version of this page: p.20 (draft 20)

> In the silence of this 'space', Friedrich, believed that only through landscape could he capture his most powerful feeling regarding the belief that God was closely felt in nature.[1]" Why …do I so frequently choose death, transience and the grave as subjects for my paintings? One must submit oneself many times to death in order some day to attain eternal life" (cited in Borsch-Supan, 1974, p.9). Friedrich's painting of Monk by the Sea evokes the infinity of mathematical Sublime with eerie apprehension conveyed through the measurement

[1] Of significance to Friedrich was … (Gowing , 1993,p.226)

of space, low foreground and a middle ground that merges the expanse of sky. [**Double ticks from P**]

Commentary: A uses already extant abstractions of experience from art and other theory and taxonomies of the sublime. She hunts for theory as a way to give voice to her experience in her discipline area. Her experience sits outside the linguistic and texturing, and she uses the theoretical/grammatical renderings extant in order to allow for a rendering of her experience. She DOES NOT move from a grammatical rendering of material/concrete experience in experiential grammar toward abstraction, but must and does desire entry at the abstract level. In fact, P actively resists such attempts in the more poetic discussions developed by A in drafting her discussion of the sublime. Grammatical abstraction, rather than being used to develop abstraction from more material concrete texturings, is a device, facilitative of one way (among others) of communicating an experience.

For A, beyond the texturing effects of grammatical abstraction and periodicity, metaphor acted as a cloaking of experience, a silencing of aspects of her experience as it was 'understood' in her writing. As such, grammatical metaphor was a place for and result of a particular negotiation between the non-linear and ineffable complexities of A's experience and her competent execution of writing tasks for her higher degree.

We would suggest, rather than simply an authoritative linguistic and texturing technique, abstraction allows both the writing subject and the subject who writes to extrapolate from the personal, emotional and psychic to the impersonal, the conceptual, the abstract. Rather than grammatical metaphor being a way in which A could become an appropriate and compliant writing subject, it afforded her the capacity to render into academic written form a version or versions of her experience.

EXCESS AND THE SUBJECT WHO WRITES

What we are suggesting is that neither only the text, nor necessarily only the simple process of textual production, needs to be appreciated in writing pedagogy. We are not arguing that the written text needs to be an expression of feelings but that the

subject who writes is a subject principally constructed through affect who brings with them an embodied history. There must be some way of accommodating the complexities of affective subjective experience in coming to write and learning to write.

Becoming - Temporal Paradox

What A's account, as it emerges in a more complete telling, gives us is a de-centring of the written product, a movement away from thinking about the writing subject and a focusing on the contingencies of becoming. We have juxtaposed ideas of foreclosure and elaboration, not simply in terms of the 'mastery' of the technologies of writing, but more in terms of the foreclosing process of developing an academic subjectivity, a self that writes like an academic (the writing subject), in juxtaposition to a more elaborated self (the subject who writes).

In this paper, we have worked with a view of excess to allow becoming to emerge in its fragments, to resist cohesion and consequently to allow us to re-examine the interdependency of subjectivities of the subject who writes and those of us who are language and learning practitioners. Butler (1997) foregrounds this interdependency:

> A critical evaluation of subject formation may well offer a better comprehension of the double binds to which our emancipation efforts occasionally lead without, in consequence, evacuating the political. Is there a way to affirm complicity as the basis of political agency, yet insist that political agency may do more than reiterate the conditions of subordination? If, as Althusser implies, becoming a subject requires a kind of mastery indistinguishable from submission, are there perhaps political and psychic consequences to be wrought from such a founding ambivalence? The temporal paradox of the subject is such that, of necessity, we must lose the perspective of a subject already formed in order to account for our own becoming. That "becoming" is no simple or continuous affair, but an uneasy practice of repetition and its risks, compelled

> yet incomplete, wavering on the horizon of social being (1997, p. 30).

Butler enables us to move beyond the Foucauldian notions of regulation and discipline, to see the subject involved in a process of becoming, iteratively engaged in and resistant to constraint, enabled, in various ways and to various degrees, by the process of realisation.[2]

The desire to 'know' and view in text the 'meanings' of A's artwork keyed us into the second crucial dimension we have attempted to place in view. Beyond meaning, A's experience is a sensory and emotional one, an embodied experience that she found impossible to render into words. For A, this is a productive space of great tension – the space between the linguistic, textual and cognitive on the one hand, and the emotional, embodied, and psychological on the other.

CONCLUSION

We are not suggesting that a Cartesian dualism be reinvoked. What we are suggesting is that considerations of the academic writing subject MUST take account of the physiological and 'lived' affective experience of the writer – before, after and during writing processes. If affect precedes and modulates the cognitive, what then does the account of A's learning to write tell us about the modulating force between these two? Becoming a subject is a process that precedes and exceeds the process of learning to write, and learning to write as a different kind of subject.

We want to resist constructions of student writers as affectively neutral writing machines. Much writing pedagogy assumes a writing subject who is affectively neutral. We argue that writing pedagogies must take into account the way in which the subject is always already foreclosed and constrained in their responses to and investments in (including their urgencies, risks, desires and motivations) the process

[2] Grosz's work on becoming resonates with the work of Halliday and his discussions of realisation as a semiotic process of instantiation. See also Matthiessen. Though there is no time or room here, we would also suggest that the 'learning how to mean' work of Halliday provides useful, grounded research for the ideas of realisation and its iterative relationship to elaboration and foreclosure.

of writing. We leave you and ourselves with a question: How can we as tertiary literacy and learning practitioners work with this view of the subject who writes?

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STAFF AND STUDENT ROLES IN CENTRAL AND FACULTY-BASED LEARNING SUPPORT: CHANGING PARTNERSHIPS

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The changing face of universities today reflects their various responses to pressures both external and internal to the institution. External pressures include the exponential expansion of knowledge and the new technologies, the marketisation of education, combined with shrinking government funding and increased accountability. Within the university,

factors such as increasing student diversity and internationalisation, institutional devolution and restructuring along with decreased funding and a renewed focus on quality assurance in teaching have changed the way learning centres and their staff support students at a central level and within faculties. This paper will use case studies of the work of the Learning Centre at the University of Sydney to explore some of the challenges facing both forms of learning support and the responses we are making to these challenges. In the provision of central learning support our responses have included the evolution of a comprehensive and more flexible program and the increased refinement of skills development and learning pathways. The changing nature of Faculty requests for student learning support has meant a shift away from an 'ideal' model where learning development is embedded into the subject curriculum. This has resulted in a degree of compromise in the way in which we deliver learning support to Faculties and in the partnerships we create.

Keywords: academic literacies, generic attributes, collaboration, higher education

Introduction

The changing face of universities today in Australia and worldwide reflects their various responses to pressures both external and internal to the institution. External pressures include the exponential expansion of knowledge and the new technologies, the increased access to higher education, the marketisation of education as a 'commodity', and the push from the government and employment sectors for graduates equipped with 'generic attributes', all of which are taking place in a climate of shrinking government funding and increased accountability to government bodies. Within the university, factors such as the continuing trend in

student diversity and internationalisation, institutional devolution and restructuring, a renewed focus on quality assurance in teaching, along with a decrease in funding, are changing the ways learning centres and their staff support students at a central level and within faculties across Australia. In order to remain a viable force on campus, learning centres and their staff have had to adapt to these changes in their pedagogy and practices and to reexamine their institutional roles and also the partnerships they forge between student, faculty and the institution.

Although the external pressures may be universally felt and to some extent all universities in Australia share the same challenges, the ways in which institutions and their learning centres respond to these pressures and challenges will vary. Since it is not possible to address all issues arising from these challenges within the scope of this paper, we propose to critically reflect on aspects of our practice in order to draw out some of the key issues. We argue that a reflection on our role and the partnerships we create through the process of collaboration - between subject teacher, student and academic literacy teacher - is integral to an understanding of our practice. Taking the University of Sydney as an example, the paper outlines firstly, how the University has responded to some of the current external pressures and the impact of its response on the Learning Centre (LC). Secondly, we will explore the concept of collaboration in the provision of central and faculty-based learning support. In particular, we focus on the staff and student roles which emerge through the processes of collaboration and the changing nature of these partnerships. We are interested in exploring which partner in the process - the subject teacher, the student and the academic literacy teacher - is being privileged at different points of the collaboration.

Through an exploration of two case studies of our current work at the LC, we hope to show how each partner contributes in varying degrees to the partnership. The first case study will discuss aspects of the central workshop program, which provides students with generic skills support outside their degree course, to reflect on how we have responded to some of the challenges mentioned above. To illustrate the changing staff and student partnerships, the second case study will discuss a faculty-based program in which academic literacy support has been integrated into the students' course. Finally, it is intended that the reflections on each case study

will highlight the implications for our current practice (and survival) and point to the need for further research.

Background: The Learning Centre

The Learning Centre at the University of Sydney lies outside the College/Faculty structure and is located within the central administrative portfolio of Planning and Resources in the Registrar's Division, as a unit of Student Services, along with other services such as Counselling, Welfare and Disability and the Mathematics Learning Centre. Our Strategic Plan has been written to reflect the goals of the Student Services Plan, the Divisional Plan and in turn the University's Strategic Plan. Since its inception in 1991, the LC has offered a program of support in three modes: a Central Workshop Program, a Faculty Program and an Independent Learning Program. Development and research associated with each Program has helped to inform and enrich our practice and to redefine our institutional and teaching roles.

As elsewhere in Australia and worldwide, the Centre has lived (and survived) through a period of great change in higher education. Inevitably during that period, both external and internal factors have impacted on the Centre's approach to curriculum, on its status and position within the institution and on our own perceptions of our practice. To provide a context for the rest of the paper, three factors, the institutional responses to these factors and their impact on the Learning Centre can be isolated.

External and internal factors and their impact on the Learning Centre

First, the government and employment sector push for generic attributes and lifelong learning has led to institutional policies and curricula which focus on generic attributes. Different terminology exists both within Australia and overseas to describe these attributes and skills. Terms such as generic/core/key/transferable competencies, attributes or capabilities are used interchangeably. While the terms and their definitions vary considerably (Barrie & Jones 1999), the categories of skills and attributes typically relate to (1) the acquisition of a body of disciplinary

knowledge, (2) the critical understanding which comes from the communication, application and evaluation of a body of knowledge, (3) the commitment to ethical action and social responsibility, and (4) a capacity for employment and lifelong learning (Gibbs et al 1994; Nunan 1999).

The policy on 'Generic Attributes of Graduates of the University of Sydney', for example, states that among the desirable generic attributes students should have on graduation are 'knowledge skills' that enable the student 'to identify, access, organise and communicate knowledge in both written and oral English' and 'thinking skills' in which they should be able 'to exercise critical judgement' and 'be capable of rigorous and independent thinking' (Academic Board Policy, University of Sydney 1997). In addition, the University's policies related to teaching and learning mention the development of generic skills as a desirable learning outcome of subject curricula. Over the years the LC has responded to such policies by developing a Generic Skills curriculum framework which encompasses the Central Workshop Program and the Independent Learning Program and forms the basis for much of the Faculty Program. Aligning our Programs to institutional goals has helped to raise the Centre's profile within the university. In addition, maintaining links with key decision-making bodies on academic policies through membership of Committees such as the Teaching and Learning Committee, the First-Year Experience Group and the Academic Honesty Working Party are also vital in ensuring that our profile remains high.

The second factor is the increased access to higher education and the resulting diversity of the student population. For over a decade now the advent of 'mass' tertiary education and the increasing number of pathways to access it have meant a wider diversity of local students, as well as a growing number of international students. The diversity of our student population continues to have a major impact on our program delivery and our learning partnerships with students and faculty. There is thus a continuing challenge to adapt and diversify the curriculum in both the Central Program and the Faculty Program to ensure its relevance and to accommodate the needs of all parties.

The third factor is the Government agenda for quality assurance in universities with the establishment of the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and the

impact of this on the University. Internal funding at the University has recently become linked to teaching performance in faculties as well as research performance. Policies of performance-based funding for teaching, performance indicators for 'scholarship in teaching', resulting in a formula-driven 'Scholarship Index' for teaching, and the Teaching Improvement Fund are all part of the University's Quality Assurance agenda. A brochure summarising the University's policies in this area has been produced by the Institute of Teaching and Learning and can be accessed online at http://www.itl.edu.au/itl/TandL/images/brochure.PDF. However, at present, institutional devolution and restructuring has meant that this funding flows directly to Colleges and Faculties, making it crucial for the LC in its central location to continue to work collaboratively across the institution. The challenge for us is how to respond creatively to the quality assurance agenda in our program delivery and to gain access to institutional funding.

Collaboration as a core component of our role

The concept of collaboration with faculty as a core component of the role of academic literacy teachers is not new and has been the subject of much discussion in the literature. From within the discipline of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), key figures like Swales in the US and Dudley-Evans and Tim Johns at the University of Birmingham in the UK have been strong advocates of the value and power of collaboration with subject teachers across the academy since the early 1980s. Recently, Dudley-Evans (2001) has reflected on the changes in the Birmingham approach to team teaching, which originated over 20 years ago within the EAP program. The team-teaching approach at that time involved language teachers working together with subject teachers to support international postgraduate students in two departments.

To describe the shift in practice and in participant roles of this approach, he has proposed a useful taxonomy of three levels of cooperation with subject staff. The first level is described as ***cooperation*** in which language teachers seek information from the discourse community in the department about subject staff expectations of communication in the discipline, about the course content and assessment tasks. The second level, ***collaboration***, involves the language teacher and subject teacher

working together outside the classroom to devise specific activities 'that run concurrently with the subject course' to support students. The third level, ***team teaching***, is where the language and the subject teachers co-teach in the same classroom. He advocates moving beyond 'cooperation' to the 'higher' levels to 'develop collaborative and team-taught' approaches to language and learning support (Dudley-Evans 2001, p. 226). In the discussion of participant roles in collaborative approaches he refers to the triangular model of Swales (1988) which depicts the interrelationships between the three participants: the subject teacher, the language teacher and the student. The role of the language teacher, he suggests, is to act as 'an intermediary' between the student and the subject teacher. He goes on to argue that a concern and respect for the interrelationships between the three parties and a clear definition of their roles is the key to success for collaborative teaching (Dudley-Evans 2001, p. 228). He concludes with two key issues for the team-teaching approach - the issue of taking a more 'critical perspective' of EAP and the issue of transferability of the approach to other contexts involving collaboration. Both issues are relevant to our current practice in Australia and would provide fascinating opportunities for research.

The various approaches to collaborative teaching prevalent in the US and elsewhere include Content-Based Instruction (CBI), Language-across-the Curriculum (LAC), Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) and team-teaching within EAP. In reviewing these approaches Johns (1997) takes the roles of content and literacy teachers a step further. She brings into the Swalesian triangular model of roles and their interrelationships, another 'partner' - the administration - and calls for literacy teachers to act as 'mediators' among students, faculty and administrators to collaboratively examine the interactions of the texts, roles and contexts (Johns 1997, p. xiii). This empowered view of the literacy teacher's role and the strong partnerships which can emerge from taking such a view is a useful benchmark against which to reflect on our current practice.

Earlier echoes of an empowered view of the roles of learning centre staff, from a different theoretical and more local perspective, can be detected firstly in Candy's discussion of the task of developing lifelong learning strategies in students and of integrating such strategies into undergraduate curricula. Here he identifies learning

centres as key "change agents" (Candy et al 1994, p. 164). From a more ethnographically-oriented and critical perspective, Lee et al (1995, p. 465) argue for a shift in the partnerships between literacy and subject teachers towards a concept of 'co-production' in which each party is engaged in the creation of new meanings, moving from an 'informant role' to become 'co-producers of new knowledge' about literacy practices within disciplines. Finally, Threadgold et al (1997, p. 291) discuss the problem of the disjunction between literacy teachers and subject teachers, highlighting the need for 'translation and retraining on both sides' to enable these two groups to speak to and hear one another. At the LC we have also argued for the need for literacy teachers within learning centres to be committed to a more empowered role in our practice and respond to the challenges of collaboration (Webb & Bonanno 1995). However, despite the encouraging rhetoric in the literature, in many institutions across Australia (including ours) there still persist perceptions of the role of academic literacy teachers which would be far removed from the 'ideal' view of us as campus mediators.

Although not the focus of this paper, no discussion of collaboration and partner roles should take place without alluding in passing to the context of practice, since roles are defined and challenged by the contexts in which they operate. We would argue that our pedagogical and theoretical base at LC falls within the sociocultural models of academic literacies (Johns 1997; Lea & Street 1998). Since the inception of LC the theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics has played a key role in the development of LC practice and research. The theory has provided us with a rich and integrated model of language in context and is used as an explanatory tool which helps make explicit to students literacy practices across disciplines. It also helps build a metalanguage for students, subject staff and us to talk about language. This is not to say, however that other socially oriented and student-centred theories of learning (Ramsden 1992; Biggs 1999) have not played a vital role in shaping both our practice and our research.

To pick up on some of the issues raised in the discussion above on collaboration we will revisit the triangular model of partnerships (Swales 1988) to examine more closely the roles and partnerships in the LC at the University of Sydney. This simple triangular concept can be extended to encompass the University context and is

overlaid with a shaded representation of the two main ways in which the LC operates, the Central Workshop Program and the Faculty Program (Figure 1). The overlay is an attempt to depict how each Program overlaps and informs the other. The overlap in the two programs represents the common purpose and the pedagogical approach that they share - that of providing learning support, as well as the mutual enrichment and interchange of ideas that strengthens them.

The bi-directional arrows along each side of the triangle represent the two-way partnerships between each party (Figure 1).

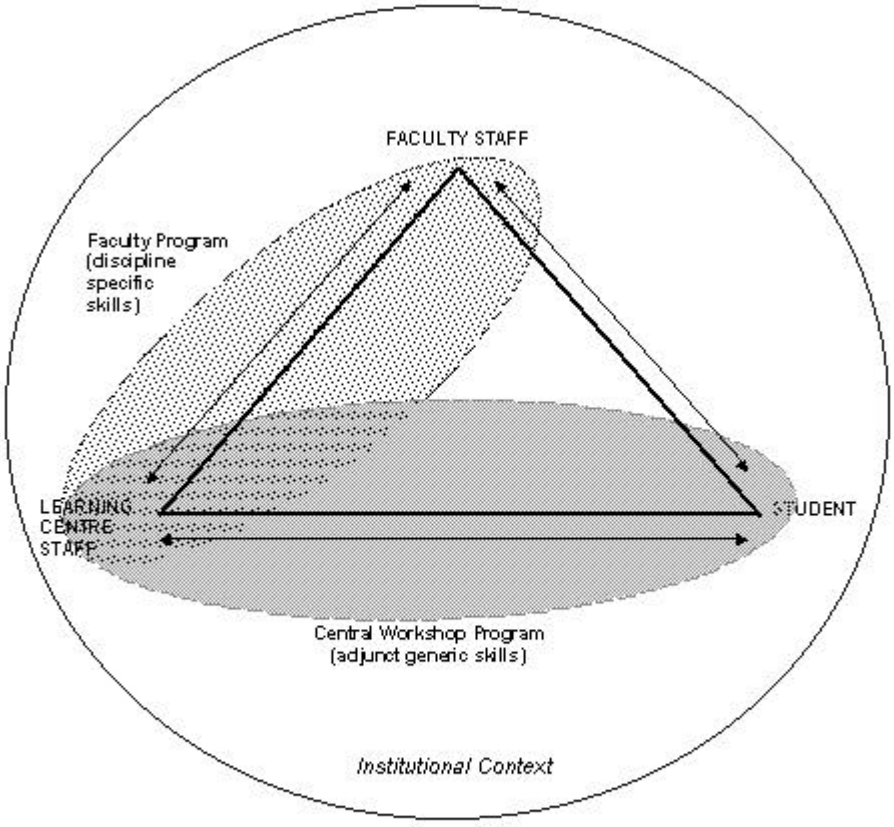

Figure 1: A diagram of partnerships and roles in learning support

(adapted from Dudley Evans, 2001)

The adapted diagram allows us to foreground and background the partners in the collaboration process according to which party has entered into a direct relationship with the other. For example, the Central Program has LC staff and students foregrounded in a direct relationship, with the third member of the partnership, the subject teacher, indirectly present or backgrounded. The content of the workshops in the Central Program is drawn from a range of disciplines and genres, and students

engage in reflection and analysis of the discourse practices not only of their chosen disciplines but those of other students, in which the faculty staff are indirectly implicated.

In the Faculty Program, LC staff and Faculty academic staff are foregrounded in a direct relationship, working together through a process of negotiation and collaboration to create some form of context-specific learning support for the student. This support can be either integrated into students' subject course or can be offered as an adjunct to it. The third partner in the relationship, the student, whose learning needs form the basis of the collaboration, while not in a direct partnership with the other two partners, is the indirect and backgrounded beneficiary of the process. The fulfillment of the students' needs shapes the objectives of the partnership, while the student evaluation of the outcome of the collaboration, that is, the learning support, helps to change and modify that support.

Thus the diagram helps to depict the variety of ways of delivering learning support that are needed to accommodate change. This is not so much a change of identity or role, since our job has essentially remained the delivery of learning support. It is rather an increased focus on flexibility of modes of delivery within that identity, and also flexibility within the partnerships we create as we respond to institutional priorities, both centrally and at a faculty level.

Within the Faculty Program, a number of ways of approaching the partnership are possible, resulting in a continuum of different types of context-specific support, ranging from adjunct workshops (workshops outside course timetables) through integrated to fully embedded programs (Figure 2), depending on the varying levels of contribution from Faculty staff and the constraints of the context.

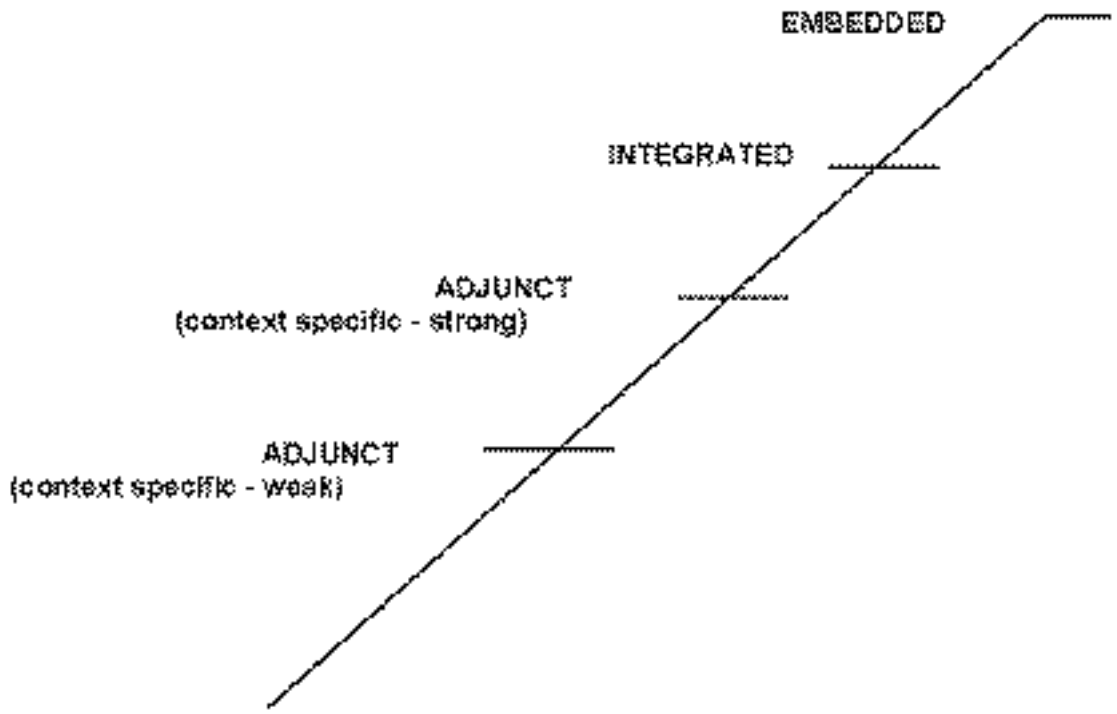

Figure 2: Approaches to Collaboration in the Faculty Program

Different approaches to Faculty collaboration are mapped along the continuum.

Although four positions are marked on the diagram, it should be noted that many variations exist and each new partnership between LC staff and Faculty staff has unique features. The points marked 'adjunct' mean that the learning support provided within the department occurs outside the students' timetabled course. Support in the adjunct category can range from that with a 'weak' discipline focus, (e.g. some workshops on essay writing from the central workshop program taught as preparation for an essay assignment in Nursing, with minimal context-specific adaptation and minimal collaboration from Faculty staff) to that with a 'strong' discipline focus. The latter might be designed specifically for a targeted group of students to focus on a particular genre or task, such as a series of workshops on reading cases in undergraduate Law. This type of approach would draw heavily on the target genres and tasks within the context of the course. The degree of collaboration may also vary in this approach. 'Integrated' refers to workshops or

lectures supporting the development of academic literacy within the students' discipline. This support is delivered by LC staff (often with subject staff present in the classroom) and is timetabled into the students' course as an integral component. An example of this approach will be discussed below in the second case study. 'Embedded' we use here to describe the collaborative design of a curriculum in which the development of generic skills and academic literacy is the organising principle for the course and which is ultimately taught by subject staff.

The fully integrated or embedded model of learning support has been the subject of much recent discussion in the literature (see for example Skillen et al 1999; Skillen et al 1998; English et al 1999; Barrie & Jones 1999; Bonanno & Jones 1996; Drury & Taylor 1996; Webb et al 1995 for some local examples). However, we are not suggesting at this point that the upper end of the continuum is necessarily the ideal approach to collaboration for all contexts or one which subsumes or negates the others. The intent is to map the complexity of the approaches to collaboration we have experienced, in an attempt to provide a framework to reflect on this complexity and to reflect on the need for flexibility in the way we support faculties and departments.

For over a decade we have worked collaboratively at different times with each of the 17 Faculties of the University, in an ever changing landscape of Faculty (and institutional) priorities and goals. Although this experience has been rich and rewarding, more recently we have had to shift somewhat from the goal of fully embedded models of curriculum collaboration, as a result of institutional pressures such as reduced access for us to internal funding through devolution and increasing demands from Faculty to cope with the diversity of student needs.

Our past experience of fully embedded developmental approaches in first-year Accounting and Biology was based on the assumptions that all students need learning and language development and that their needs are similar and simultaneous. Since the two programs have not lasted in their original conception or have been considerably 'watered down' (for reasons explored below), these assumptions have started to be questioned by Faculty staff, by our Centre and by the students. We also believe that such questions would be a fruitful area of research.

Possible reasons for the lack of durability of such programs include the absence of ongoing resourcing and staffing instability in the department responsible for teaching the program. To work effectively the programs need a great deal of initial resourcing of time, money and commitment, and this resourcing needs to be ongoing for such things as tutor training and student support. In the mid nineties the University distributed centralised Equity and Quality funds for such projects to 'kick-start' them and we were able to access this funding through submitting joint bids with academic departments. In the current climate, however, this type of resourcing is not as accessible to us. In addition, in our institution the initiation of these projects is often dependent on one or two extremely committed subject teachers, and when they move on, their successors are often not as committed. For us, the models of faculty partnership which have been flexible and lasting have been the discipline-specific adjunct and integrated approaches. To exemplify aspects of the foregoing discussion we will now focus on two case studies of our practice and the partnerships inherent in each case.

Case study 1: Flexibility in partnerships in the Central Workshop Program

The Central workshop program is depicted in Figure 1 as foregrounding the partnership between Learning Centre staff and student. Faculty staff are backgrounded yet curricular tasks and disciplinary expectations are represented through the student. To maintain a dynamic partnership between the two foregrounded partners there needs to be an ongoing link between central and faculty work. Student needs in the Central Program and the Faculty Program have informed the design of the LC's Generic Skills framework and the development of the skills framework has formed the basis for much of the faculty work, which has then fed back into the Central Program. The framework is aligned to the institutional policy on generic attributes and is also linked to institutional and divisional Strategic Plans. It encompasses the areas of ***Planning and Organising***, ***Learning***, ***Research and Analysis***, ***Structuring*** and ***Communicating***. The workshops underlying the framework are designed to develop skills within each category and, where relevant, link to those in other categories.

Over the years, the framework has had to evolve to become flexible enough to allow and encourage the growth and diversity of activities as students' and institutional needs change. It has attempted to respond to the three factors outlined earlier - the generic skills agenda, the increased diversity of the students and the quality assurance agenda - by providing a generic skills framework for course delivery, by offering greater flexibility of learning support and by aligning our Strategic Plan to the Teaching and Learning Policies and Strategic Plans of the University.

The flexibility of support is characterised by an ongoing refinement of skill development and learning pathways for students, by the modularisation of some larger and longer workshops in the Central Program to cater for their changing needs, and by targeting specific groups of students. These will be explored more fully below.

The continuing process of refining skills development and of creating new learning pathways and responding to student feedback fits into the current institutional policies on good practice in teaching and learning and on generic attributes. For example, the critical and independent thinking skills of the Generic Attributes policy is now acknowledged by many departments as an important course outcome and as an explicitly stated component in the assessment criteria of many written assignments.

These changes in policy have in turn influenced our workshops, for example, our series of workshops on critical reading and critical writing. In an attempt to unpack the meaning of the attribute of 'critical thinking' across a range of disciplines, a series of workshops has been designed in the Central Program to assist students to analyse the language and structure of set course readings and written student responses to various genres such as essays and critical reviews. A pathway through the series allows first year students to start with an introductory lecture on Critical Thinking as part of their orientation program. They can then follow this up through the Central Program workshops: ***Introduction to Critical Reading*** and ***Introduction to Critical Writing***. At a more advanced level students can attend ***Critical Reading of a Journal Article*** and at a postgraduate level they can enrol in ***Writing a Critical Review*** and ***Writing the Literature Review of a Thesis***. Many of these have been adapted to run in faculties with course specific content. Student feedback and a recognition of

the need for more refined development of these skills at first and second year levels prompted these changes. Students are of course free to do any workshop at any time they deem appropriate but a developmental pathway is there for those who need it.

At the same time as refinement of the workshops, several have been modularised. This process involves breaking up larger and longer workshops into smaller ones and has occurred in response to the changing needs of our students and their demand for more flexibility in the Central Program timetable. Increasing numbers of students are employed while they study or may be mature aged students with varying outside commitments so that maintaining attendance in our longer workshops has become difficult. In response to attendance figures and student feedback ***Essay Writing***, a twelve-hour workshop (4 sessions x 3 hours) was broken down into four shorter workshops - ***Analytical Writing***, ***Analysing the Assignment Question***, ***Planning an Assignment***, and ***Development an Argument*** - which can be attended separately. This move also recognised that not all students required the full workshop although it is still offered in the longer form. To provide more flexibility, the materials from the four workshops have been adapted into self-directed learning booklets for students who may not be able to attend the workshops due to timetable clashes or other commitments. Many of our resources are also being developed for online use.

The key issues of flexibility and student diversity have also meant an increased specialisation of learning support so that different groups of students can be targeted. For example, workshop programs have been designed to specifically support the developing skills of mature aged students, international students, students with a learning disability, and local students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Two of the above are presented as blocks of workshops separately timetabled for the targeted groups. For example, those for students with a learning disability covers reading and writing skills, time management skills and enhancing self confidence. The Program for International Postgraduate Students (PIPS) provides workshops such as ***Grammar Clinic for Editing and Proofreading***, ***Oral Presentation, Discussion Skills*** and ***Working in Groups.*** These students are of course eligible to participate in the full range of other workshops as well.

Finally, the central workshops are designed to encourage students to apply what they have learned to their assessment tasks and courses and to reflect on their own disciplinary expectations and on those of other students in the workshop who come from a wide range of disciplines. This practice has the potential to widen students' views of the differences inherent in academic cultures and literacies, which may not always be an outcome of a very targeted faculty-based workshop.

Case study 2: MASUS and the Faculty of Pharmacy

Our second case study discusses an example of a faculty partnership towards the 'integrated' end of the continuum in Figure 2, in which subject teachers and literacy teachers collaborate to develop students' academic literacies within their course. This case study illustrates the response of the Centre to the Faculty's perception of the inadequacy in students' academic literacies in first year and reflects the our joint commitment to improving the first year experience, which has become an institutional priority. It also illustrates the value of research in demonstrating the rationale for our work and in helping to maintain our academic credibility.

This faculty partnership between Learning Centre staff and subject staff in first year Pharmacy has proved particularly dynamic. Remarkably, our partnership has lasted for nearly a decade, despite fluctuations in the staff with whom we work, changes in the degree structure (from 3 to 4 year degree), and a shift in the status of Pharmacy from a Department to a Faculty in its own right. Our collaboration has been based on the use of the MASUS procedure (Measuring the Academic Skills of University Students [MASUS], Bonanno & Jones 1997), the literacy diagnostic instrument developed by the Centre during the mid 1990's. This diagnostic procedure has played a key role in our faculty partnerships targeting undergraduate students, because it acts as a change agent enabling the development of a systematic response to the diversity of literacies present among first year students. It achieves this by providing a flexible framework for follow-up support for those students identified as needing it, with the involvement and expertise of subject staff utilised in the process.

The Pharmacy partnership was initiated by the then Department of Pharmacy in 1992, arising from its concern for the poor communication skills of many of its students. They approached us with a request to be involved in the development and Faculty trials of the MASUS. The development and trials of MASUS were supported initially by central 'Equity' and 'Quality' funding, which is now no longer available, although other devolved funds still exist for improving teaching and learning in Faculties. A general procedure was developed for establishing the MASUS within a course, involving collaboration with Faculty at all stages. This included discussion about:

- the selection of the task and the subject content
- the link (if any) to course assessment
- the possible modification of the MASUS criteria to fit the task
- what form the support will take (integrated or adjunct or both)
- who will administer and mark the task.

In the version adopted by Pharmacy, subject staff were involved in all stages of the procedure except the last.

The duration of the partnership with Pharmacy staff has enabled the collaborating partners to engage in research which has helped to validate the diagnostic procedure and the aims of the curriculum integration and support.

Constants over the years of the partnership have been the concern of the subject staff for the communication skills of their students and our mutual understanding that neither we nor they had all the answers.

They were therefore interested to explore with us through research the literacy profile of their students and what it told them about their curriculum and about their students. The research was conducted by the Learning Centre and the Faculty of Pharmacy between 1996 and 1999. Using the results from the MASUS over this period, the research consisted of three separate studies of the academic literacy of their first year students and its relationship to progression through the degree, to

selection procedures, and to choice of Higher School Certificate (HSC) school subjects. It highlighted a number of important factors concerning the diversity of the literacies of first year students coming directly from school. For full reports of these research projects and their findings, see Holder et al 1999; Jones et al 2000a and 2000b.

The research findings have been powerful incentives for the Faculty to retain a high focus on the communication skills of their students in their curriculum and to discuss with us ways of adapting their curriculum to meet the needs of the students and the demands of the profession. The Faculty has taken on board the necessity of seeking external funding to support this research and has funded our continued involvement in the curriculum. Our role is to provide integrated lectures and tutorials for all students in the ***Professional Pharmacy*** course. The course outline states that 'oracy and literacy skills are developed in the context of professional pharmacy issues' and one of the objectives of the course is that students will be able to 'analyse, critically evaluate and communicate information both verbally and in writing at an appropriate level'. The MASUS task is an integral element of the course and a satisfactory performance is required to pass the course. .. We would describe this partnership as an integrated rather than an embedded approach, in which MASUS has been a powerful agent helping to change faculty staff (and student) perceptions of literacy.

These case studies of two different modes of learning support have been used to illustrate the need for Learning Centre staff to be adaptable and responsive to the external and internal changes affecting all the partners in learning support. In committing ourselves to the provision of a range of modes of support delivery we hope to be in a stronger position to respond creatively and strategically to changing institutional and faculty demands and to diverse student learning styles, preferences and needs. The students' need to access support in a variety of ways is a continuing challenge for learning centre staff in their partnership roles with both students and Faculty.

Concluding comments

What we have attempted to do in this paper is to reflect on our role and on our practice at the Learning Centre in order to provide an insight into some of the key challenges we face at our institution and to give a broader context for these challenges. We wish to stress, however, that while many of the challenges we face are common across Universities in Australia and elsewhere, learning centres will respond differently as their own contexts and demands dictate. We have explored the concept of collaboration with both students and faculty and what effect that has had on our perception of our changing professional and institutional roles. While we have been fortunate enough to have had a relatively long and reasonably stable existence, despite major internal and external change, we cannot afford to become complacent.

The unique work of learning centres lends itself to collaborative approaches to practice and opportunities to make useful and potentially powerful partnerships with Faculty. Whether we align ourselves with the more empowered conceptions of our role as 'co-producers' of new knowledge or as 'campus mediators' through our partnerships depends on us and our beliefs and values. One powerful way to maintain our profile within our own institutions and within the broader context is to continue to enter into new collaborative partnerships with Faculty and with students for the purposes of practice and research. It is through these partnerships that we can retain and contribute to critical perspectives on our practice and on our role and it is through scholarly inquiry that our practice can be informed and enriched.

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Changing Identities

GENERIC ATTRIBUTES: AN AGENDA FOR REFORM OR CONTROL?

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In the last decade, the concept of a set of generic skills, qualities and attributes that support lifelong learning has become firmly placed on the national and international higher education agenda. Higher education institutions in the UK, Canada, the USA, South Africa and Australia, in response to external pressures from the employment and government sectors, have been involved in major efforts to improve the quality of graduate outcomes. Whether this effort has been, or indeed should be, driven by educational, economic, political or social factors is a complex issue and one which continues to stimulate considerable debate across the higher education, employment and government sectors. Critics argue that the pursuit of the goal of graduates with desirable generic attributes and skills, equipped to participate effectively in society for life, is either unrealistic (Kemp and Seagraves 1995; Drummond, Nixon & Wiltshire 1997; Preston 1999) or a 'wasteful chimera-hunt'…which 'should now be abandoned' (Hyland and Johnson 1998, p.163). However, institutional policies and statements of generic attributes have led to changes in the curriculum and pedagogy of both academic departments and learning centres, as universities race to redefine their concept of 'graduateness' to

stake out their market niche. This paper is intended as a background paper on key issues in the generic attributes agenda in Universities in Australia. The impact of this agenda on learning centres will form the basis for discussion at the conference presentation.

Keywords: generic attributes, key skills, higher education

Introduction

> A graduate of the University of South Australia is prepared for lifelong learning in pursuit of personal development and excellence in professional practice.
>
> Graduate Qualities pamphlet http://unisanet.unisa.edu.au/gradquals/ [Accessed 18 May 2000].

In the last decade, the concept of a set of generic skills, qualities and attributes that support lifelong learning has become firmly placed on the national and international higher education agenda. Higher education institutions in the UK, Canada, the USA, South Africa and Australia, in response to external pressures from the employment and government sectors, have been involved in major efforts to improve the quality of graduate outcomes. Whether this effort has been, or indeed should be, driven by educational, economic, political or social factors is a complex issue and one which continues to stimulate considerable debate across the higher education, employment and government sectors. The exponential expansion of knowledge, changes to the nature of work and careers, the interface between education and employment, the marketisation of education, as well as the increasingly diverse nature and size of the student population, combined with shrinking government funding and increased accountability, are all factors which have exerted an influence on the development of generic attributes within the higher education sector. Critics argue that the pursuit of the goal of graduates with desirable generic attributes and skills, equipped to participate effectively in society for life, is either unrealistic (Kemp and Seagraves 1995; Adamson & Hunt 1996; Drummond, Nixon & Wiltshire 1997; Preston 1999) or

a ‘wasteful chimera-hunt’…which 'should now be abandoned’ (Hyland and Johnson 1998, p.163).

It is worth noting that different terminology exists both within Australia and overseas to describe these attributes and skills (Barrie & Jones, 1999). Terms such as generic/core/key/transferable competencies, attributes or capabilities are used interchangeably. While the terms and their definitions vary considerably, the categories of skills and attributes typically relate to (1) the acquisition of a body of disciplinary knowledge, (2) the critical understanding which comes from the communication, application and evaluation of a body of knowledge, (3) the commitment to ethical action and social responsibility, and (4) a capacity for employment and lifelong learning (Gibbs et al 1994; Nunan 1999). In the remainder of this paper, the term ‘generic attributes’ will be used as a generic term to describe graduate learning outcomes.

Universities worldwide in their policies and statements of generic attributes frequently refer to lifelong learning as a desirable outcome of higher education. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse the evolution and breadth of the concept of lifelong learning, except in so far as the concept relates to generic attributes. What I intend to do here is to highlight the key social, economic, political and educational factors which underpin the concept of generic attributes in higher education. This analysis will serve as a backdrop for the discussion at the conference of two major issues: the extent to which these key factors are competing or mutually reinforcing; and the extent to which the pursuit of the goal of generic attributes has become a dominating or a liberating agenda for institutional policy, curriculum reform and pedagogy in today’s universities. By examining some of the assumptions about generic attributes which underlie statements and policies within universities and reports from the government and employment sectors, I will attempt to show how these assumptions have evolved over the last decade as a result of major social, economic and political change. Although this discussion will be largely confined to the Australian context, it will also draw on events in the global context, with particular reference to events in the UK.

Generic attributes statements and policies in universities: the social dimension

Statements of generic attributes developed within academic communities are similar in some ways to employer-developed lists of skills, yet the former tend to retain a distinct academic flavour. Indeed, in one sense it can be argued that universities have always been concerned with students' generic attributes, albeit implicitly, in so far as they aspired to produce socially responsible citizens with inquiring well-cultivated intellects. The following words, spoken by Rev Dr John Woolley at the inauguration of the University of Sydney, are not too far removed from the claims and aspirations found in statements of generic attributes in universities today.

> Our undergraduates…will, we may reasonably hope, possess a well-cultivated and vigorous understanding; they will have formed the habit of thinking at once with modesty and independence; they will not be in danger of mistaking one branch of science for the whole circle of knowledge, nor of unduly exaggerating the importance of those studies which they select as their own. Above all, they will have attained the truest and most useful result of human knowledge, the consciousness and confession of their comparative ignorance (Woolley 1862, p 21 in Candy et al 1994, p. iv).

It should be acknowledged that, embedded within generic attributes policies and mission statements in English-speaking universities, is the rhetoric of university education as a social good, which, Coady and Miller (1993, p. 40) argue, partly stems from the liberal ideals of John Henry Newman's seminal work, ***The Idea of a University*** (1947). Today, the underlying social ideals of a university education can be found in statements of generic attributes across the world. Typical of such statements are the following:

A graduate of the University of Sydney 'should strive for tolerance and integrity and acknowledge their personal responsibility for…ethical behaviour towards others'.

A graduate of the University of South Australia ‘is committed to ethical action and social responsibility as a professional and a citizen’.

In the US, ‘effective citizenship’ is one of the eight specific ‘abilities’ of the graduate of Alverno College and in the UK, the graduate of the University of North London ‘will be able to act appropriately in the context of social and cultural diversity’.

Despite the social idealism inherent in such claims about graduate outcomes at the institutional level, debate continues among academic staff as to whether it is possible or even desirable for any curriculum or pedagogy to achieve such goals. One can teach a student about ethics and social responsibility but there is no guarantee that the graduate of any university will emerge with these qualities and attributes.

Economic and political factors underlying generic attributes

It is necessary to go beyond the social idealism embedded in the concept of generic attributes to examine more closely the political and economic factors of the last decade which have influenced its rapid rise. The ‘employability’ agenda remains high in the discussion of generic attributes found in reports from the government and employment sectors. While the rhetoric of ‘social responsibility’ is perhaps not so apparent in these reports, except under the guise of lifelong learning, what is apparent is the perception that universities have an overriding mandate to produce graduates who are well equipped to take their place as contributors to the workforce. The next section will explore the extent to which universities in Australia and the UK have been influenced by this agenda.

In Australia, key elements of the concept of generic skills in higher education can be found in government-commissioned reports such the Karmel Committee report, with the notion of ‘general competencies’ for primary and secondary education, (Karmel 1985) and the Finn report (1991), with the notion of ‘employment-related key competencies’, subsequently clarified in the Mayer Committee report (1992). Although these competencies were proposed for post-compulsory education and training, the higher education sector was at the same time under pressure from the government and business sectors to improve the quality of ‘generic’ skills in students

in order to contribute to the student's employability and capacity for lifelong learning. Two major government reports are significant in this regard. First, in 1992 the Higher Education Council (HEC) report, ***Achieving Quality*** (1992) claimed that 'the views of employers, professional bodies, students and staff of universities all converge when it comes to describing the desirable characteristics of graduates' which are 'the skills, personal attributes and values which should be acquired by all graduates regardless of their discipline or field of study' (HEC 1992, p. 20). Second, a later HEC commissioned report, ***Developing Lifelong Learners through Undergraduate Education***, (Candy et al 1994) stressed the need for universities to be more accountable for the development in students of the generic skills and attributes which support lifelong learning. Both of these reports led to a large injection of government funds for universities from 1993-1997 to improve the quality of teaching and graduate outcomes. The Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching (CAUT) and later, the Committee for University Teaching and Staff Development (CUTSD) funded innovation in curriculum and pedagogy (For details see CAUT and CUTSD Project reports, 1994-1996; Alexander and McKenzie, 1998). CAUT and CUTSD and current AUTC project reports will be available shortly on line at http://www.autc.gov.au/in/in_cu.htm [2001]). Despite innovative and creative projects addressing the development of generic attributes within disciplines, a higher education policy which supported their development and the wholehearted adoption by universities of formal policies of generic attributes, Clanchy and Ballard concluded in 1995 that there remained considerable barriers to the adoption of generic attributes in the curriculum. To date, there appears to be no convincing evidence that there has been a significant change in the graduate outcomes or curriculum practices of university education in Australia (Barrie and Jones 1999).

Similarly, reports from the government and business sectors have highlighted deficiencies in graduate outcomes, pointing to the need for improvement (Sinclair 1995). This year, a DETYA funded report conducted by AC Nielson Research entitled ***Employer Satisfaction with Graduate Skills*** (DETYA, 2000) set out to establish the extent of employer satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the skill performance of new graduates from the University and TAFE sectors entering the labour market. The quantitative part of the study conducted a survey of employers

across a wide range of businesses, industries and services to 'identify employers' attitudes to graduates' perceived skill deficiencies, where they occur, with the intention of developing polices to address these deficiencies' (p.61). The report identifies 25 'skills and competencies', categorised into 3 groups (p.56):

1) basic competencies such as literacy, numeracy, time management and basic computer skills;

2) basic skills such as leadership qualities, oral business communication skills, teamwork

3) academic skills such as capacity for independent and critical thinking, problem solving skills, creativity and flair;

They also identified other attributes such as enthusiasm, motivation, flexibility and adaptability.

Employers were asked to rank the skills in order of importance as well as to rate new graduates on their performance in the skills. Among the report's key findings were that although 'overall, the performance of new graduates employed appears to be reasonable, neither particularly low or high' (p. vii), 'the greatest skill deficiencies among new graduates were perceived to be in the areas of creativity and flair; oral business communication skills; and problem-solving', (p. viii); and 'that across all skill areas the University sector produced higher rating graduates', (p. viii). 'The highest rating graduates overall either had arts/humanities/social sciences qualifications or business/administration/economics qualifications', (p. ix). Several points of interest emerge from this report. First, there appears to be a clear convergence of the government and employment agendas in the delineation, measurement and analysis of a set of generic attributes deemed essential for successful employment and a clear focus on 'skills deficiency' and 'measurement'. Second, there is no discussion of how the list of skills and competencies was defined or differentiated, except to say that the list 'goes into more detail' (p. 61) than an earlier list devised for the Employer Satisfaction with Vocational Education and Training survey in 1997. Moreover, in the qualitative part of the study, which was based on an analysis of focus group discussion and interviews, employers ranked skills differently to their ranking in the

quantitative part, placing ‘academic achievement in a suitable discipline’ as an indicator of ‘intellectual capability, capacity to learn and motivation to pursue and achieve high goals’ (p. 8) at the top of the list. Finally, the report mentions the need for ‘skills for the future’ (p. 8) as ‘the world of work is expected to change rapidly in response to changing social and environmental conditions and technological change’. To this end, the report claims, graduates will need to ‘demonstrate adaptability and flexibility’ and an awareness of ‘the need for continuous learning and retraining throughout their careers’, (p. 8). Many of these key words can be found in current university statements and policies of generic attributes. Therefore, there is an emerging agenda which appears dominant in all sectors – that of the marketplace. Graduates and their generic attributes are marketable commodities.

Performance indicators and generic attributes

It is undeniable that government funding in higher education is becoming increasingly linked to performance indicators such as the level of employer satisfaction with graduate skills. Other measures such as the level of student satisfaction with their university courses are used by the government and higher education sectors as an indicator of performance. Since 1993, the level of graduates’ satisfaction with their course in terms of the acquisition of generic skills has been measured each year by the Graduate Careers Council of Australia (GCCA) in the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ). Results from the CEQ are now used as one of the three major data sources for the performance indicators for higher education institutions. Another key indicator is the Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) which measures the proportion of graduates in full-time employment of those who are available for full-time employment. Yet, another version of the CEQ is currently being piloted for postgraduates. This will provide the opportunity ‘to score universities, faculties and departments’ …on areas such as ‘supervision, infrastructure, intellectual climate and generic skills development’ (DETYA 1998, p. 2). Within Universities standardised surveys are being used as part of their internal Quality Assurance agenda. The University of Sydney now has an SCEQ (Student Course Experience Questionnaire) which gathers data on students' perceptions of the quality of teaching and student learning in their degree courses as well as their

perceptions of the administration and student support services. A number of the questions on this survey relate to students' perceptions of how their course has helped to develop their generic skills. The stated purpose of the SCEQ is 'to provide the University community with a basis for strategic, faculty level academic development and curriculum review to further enhance the quality of teaching and student learning' , http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/SCEQ/ (1999). The underlying , albeit implicit, agenda here appears to be that generic attributes can be not only defined but measured.

The Key Skills agenda in the UK

In the UK, the National Inquiry into the future of Higher Education (Dearing 1997) boosted interest in key skills. Earlier in 1992, the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ), developed a national framework for assessing and recording achievement in the following core skills:

- Application of Number
- Communication
- Information Technology
- Improving Own Learning and Performance (Learning how to Learn)
- Problem Solving.

While this framework was originally developed for use within post 16 training and vocational courses, one of the recommendations of the Dearing report was that institutions should 'develop for each programme they offer...the intended outcomes of the programme in terms of : knowledge and understanding..., key skills..., cognitive skills..., and subject-specific skills...'. Although there is general agreement that the development of key skills is 'a good thing', there have been criticisms of key skills projects and the assumptions underlying them (Barrie and Jones, 1999). There may not be any clear idea of what key skills are wanted for and the fundamental problem is the lack of transferability of skills (Whitston 1998). Despite the introduction of innovative practices in some areas, as a whole, the higher education

sector has not effectively addressed the issue of transferable skills (Kemp & Seagraves 1995; Hyland and Johnson 1998). As in Australia, reports from the employment sector still point out graduates' deficiencies in skills (Harvey and Green 1993; .Harvey et al. 1997).

Nevertheless, over the last few years, there has been significant government support for universities in the UK to develop key skills through the Enterprise in Higher Education (EHE) initiative and funding from the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and the UK Higher Education Funding Councils. This has led to a number of projects in institutions across the country, which have sought to implement key skills frameworks and policies, develop curricula integrating key skills into subject content, assess students' key skills upon entry to university and incorporate the use of information and communication technologies to support the development of students' key skills (for a report on key skills work in the UK see Jones, 1999).

Some universities, notably the Open University (OU) and the University of Lincolnshire and Humberside (ULH) incorporate the National (NCVQ) Key Skills Units in their degree programs while others have developed their own key skills frameworks and policies, using the national framework as a starting point. There are also systems in place in some universities to list skills as part of the degree transcript or to include them in a separate transcript and to implement a management information system to track students' skills achievement across courses.

Concluding comments

It should not be forgotten that the Australian and British reports outlined above have been formulated amid a period of major economic and political change, to which I can only allude to here in passing. Educational policy making and educational reform in Australia, as elsewhere in the West, have evolved against a backdrop of restructuring of the public sector along corporate managerialist lines to bring about 'greater efficiency and effectiveness in policy and delivery' (Lingard and Rizvi in Welch 1996). Although it can be argued that there are commonalities in educational reforms and policies across the globe, as Whitty, Power and Halpin (1998) point out, these policies and reforms should not be analysed in a decontextualised way,

without recognising their ‘distinctive historical and cultural dimensions’. Clearly, generic attributes policies in Australia and the UK have their similarities, but these are mediated by contextual differences such as the nature and size of the workforce; reforms in the higher education and economic sectors; changing political ideologies; and the differing impact of globalisation on each country.

In conclusion, there is clearly a global agenda in higher education, which prioritises the identification of skills and competencies, and gives considerable attention to the measurement of outcomes and performance relating to these skills. It has resulted in institutional policies and statements of generic attributes, and has led to major changes in curriculum and pedagogy, which are largely geared towards the employability of graduates. Performance indicators linked to generic attributes will increasingly determine the level of government funding to universities in Australia and elsewhere. Australian universities are currently redefining their concept of ‘graduateness' to stake out their ‘market niche’. A report by the Australian Technology Network (ATN) cluster of Universities (RMIT, QUT, UTS, USA and Curtin), entitled, ***Five Universities: One Vision -Generic Capabilities of ATN University Graduates*** (2000) provides a blueprint for action in curriculum reform and staff development relating to generic attributes. On the one hand, this strategy may be seen as a cynical exercise in the race for students and funding while on the other, it may offer an opportunity for creative and inspired pedagogical reform, which will lead to better outcomes for all concerned. Indeed, it should be argued that educational policy and practice ‘needs to be informed by a desire to go beyond the mere technical fit between graduates and the workplace, and allow itself to be inspired by new ideas, and new ways of seeing’ (Soucek 1995, p.241).

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Changing Identities

THE PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE OF ONLINE ESL CREDIT SUBJECTS

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The identities of both lecturers and students in Universities are being challenged as their roles in the teaching and learning process are changing. This paper examines how Internet Based Learning can provide for best practice within three principles of learning: fostering a critical and reflective approach to learning, encouraging independent and collaborative learning and motivating students. It reports on the reflections of both students and lecturer in an IBL credit subject at La Trobe University. It concludes that there is a degree of conflict between the pedagogical and practical issues in IBL.

Keywords: Internet Based Learning, English as a Second Language, Credit subjects

Introduction

Over the past two decades the trajectories of Australian universities have altered. The student body, the teaching staff and the institutions themselves have undergone significant change. This change, in part, is due to the emergence of constructivist theories which view knowledge as a social construct, developed via an ongoing "conversation" in which all the community of learners participate and each reaches her unique, individual understanding of a particular phenomenon. Sherry (2000, p. 2) argues "Learning is inherently a social, dialogical process in which learners benefit most from being part of knowledge-building communities". And learning, from the constructivist viewpoint, has taken place when there is a change in the individual.

Constructivism has challenged the identity of teachers, as it has contributed to their role being changed from that of the keeper and disseminator of knowledge to that of facilitator, manager and collaborator (Tilson et al. 2001). Students, as learners, have also been challenged by this postmodern paradigm as they are no longer the Dickensian "empty vessels", but must contribute actively in their learning, through participation, reflection and communication. Many tertiary course designs, as a result of this paradigmatic shift, now employ methodologies such as Situated Learning or Problem-Based Learning as best practice. Moreover, many changes in both teaching and learning are increasingly being facilitated and moderated through technology, in particular the Internet. The use of such a medium is a further challenge to the traditional identity of tertiary teachers.

In fact, the dynamic change of terminology for computer-based learning reflects both the change in our understanding of what constitutes good teaching and learning and also our increasing sophistication in the use of such technology. In the early days it was referred to as Computer Assisted Learning (CAL) or Computer-Aided Instruction (CAI) (Sherry 2000). More recently, terms such as Internet Based Learning (IBL) (Curtin University 1999), elearning (Farrington, & Bronack 2001), online learning (Tilson et al. 2001), internet education (Hara & Kling 2000), and Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL) (Sherry 2000) have been used. Further to this, if computer based learning is to be effective it should employ Computer-Mediated Communications (CMC) (Curtin University 1999). Hence, the epistemology

of computer based learning mirrors that of good teaching and learning practice – a shift away from a passive to an active environment.

This paper then will, through a case study of a university credit subject, English as a Second Language 2, identify and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of IBL for tertiary learners in terms of the principles of best practice in 21st century tertiary education. It will identify how this technology can contribute and smooth the path for our changing identities as teachers, as we reconceptualise our role in teaching. It will first describe the online subject, both content and the technological environment employed, and then consider its strengths and weaknesses in terms of just three principles of good teaching practice, informed by a constructivist view of knowledge. These principles are fostering a critical and reflective approach to learning, encouraging independent and collaborative learning and motivating students. It will finally examine the problems faced by students and by teachers in participating in IBL, as experienced during semester 2, 2001. (This paper will generally use the term Internet Based Learning (IBL) when referring to teaching and learning via the web.)

English As a Second Language 2 – subject content

English as a Second Language 2 (ESL 2), is a 20-credit point subject offered by the Language and Academic Skills Unit, through the Institute for Education at Bundoora Campus of La Trobe University. It is offered to students from all faculties and can be credited from second year through to a Master's course work subject. It was first offered as a face-to-face subject in semester 2, 2000 and has been offered as IBL in semester 2, 2001. The general objectives of the subject taken from the student handbook are to:

- Enhance the critical reading and writing skills of students for whom English is a second language.
- Apply a critical framework to the use of English in global communication
- Explore the range of issues relevant to the role of English as a tool of global communication

- Deepen awareness of global issues in terms of their applicability to students' intended professions, through the study of internationally relevant texts

- Identify and apply linguistic features of good models of writing.

ESL 2 has a number of assumptions that underlie the content and framework of the subject. These are presented to the students in the following form in order to encourage reflection on the assumptions they bring to their learning:

- Languages, especially English, play a role in shaping global culture.

- Understanding, applying and creating English texts (written, spoken, and electronic communications) in the context of global communication, requires not only understanding of the words and sentence structures used, but also: familiarity with relevant concepts, identification of, and critical reflection on the values, assumptions and (power) relations which the language in the text expresses, particularly in relation to global culture.

- Different approaches to teaching and learning reflect different educational purposes, reflecting the values of the culture. In the context of the continuing globalisation of education, it is arguable that students should not have to adapt their English to expressing English ways of thinking, valuing and learning (e.g. through critical thinking, direct expression, English forms of logic). Rather, the style of teaching, learning and assessment should reflect multicultural approaches. On the other hand, students who succeed in adapting their learning approaches to another cultural set of values and ways of thinking, tend to be among the highest achievers in our education system. This suggests that using two learning approaches or multicultural learning approaches, provides enriched learning and communication skills. Therefore, an assumption which underpins this subject is that the approaches to learning which students bring from their mother cultures are of great value, but there is also great value in developing the approaches to learning which are a part of other learning cultures, such as that in Australia.

- The constructions in this subject are informed by concern about equity, in terms of the role of English in shaping values, power relations and access to opportunities

To achieve the objectives and in line with the assumptions outlined above, the content of the subject has two sections. The first analyses the literature for the theoretical framework of English as a tool of empowerment, English as contributing to cross-cultural communication and English and cultural identity and the second examines a range of authentic texts in the light of the theoretical framework. In all texts studied, there is not only conceptual analysis but linguistic analysis as well.

English As a Second Language 2 – technological learning environment

The IBL ESL 2 is delivered through WEBCT. This environment is specifically designed for tertiary online learning and has a number of features which promote good practice (http://www.webct.com). It presents a homepage to students from which they access the tool pages. The most important tool pages for ESL 2 are: Subject Information (handbook information), Assessment (details of assessment and tasks), Study Material (lecture notes), Communications (email and bulletin board) and Student Tools and Utilities (drop box for assignments, calendar). (See Figure 1)

Figure 1. WEBCT Homepage for ESL 2.

In addition to offering students a structured learning environment, WEBCT also provides the teacher a comprehensive course management tool. It allows for tracking of all students' participation in the subject, by, for example, counting the number of hits a student has on each page, recording the number of entries they have contributed to the bulletin board and allowing for all assignments to be submitted via a Drop Box. Thus, WEBCT is an environment accessed via the Internet specifically designed to provide a range of tools for tertiary learning.

Good Teaching Practice

So how does this web learning environment provide for quality teaching and learning? This section will look at just three areas in which good teaching can be evaluated: fostering a critical and reflective approach to learning, providing for independent and collaborative learning and stimulating student motivation to learn.

A Critical/Reflective Approach To Learning

Farrington and Bronack (2001 p. 3) question the ability of IBL to foster critical thinking – a skill central to deep learning. “Can information technology replicate the “in your face” and “in your mind” experiences that foster critical thinking and sensitivity to the audience that we provide, person-to-person, in the walled classroom?” This paper argues that there are a number of features of IBL which do allow for critical analysis and that students themselves in ESL 2, report increased reflection and a deep approach to learning.

The design of ESL 2 is central to fostering this critical and reflective approach of the students. The course is provided in twelve blocks, which are each structured in similar ways to avoid confusion. For example, each session has the following outline: objectives, preview of last session, introduction, lecture notes, discussion questions (integrated into lecture notes), quiz or self test, review, tasks for next session, references. Students, as they are presented with these on screen in each session, are clear about the objectives of the session and how these fit with the overall subject goals. This allows them to reflect on and relate the parts of the subject to the whole: an essential element in a critical approach.

Further to this, the interactive component of ESL 2 promotes critical thinking. Integral to the lecture notes online is the bulletin board – a discussion list. Students at a particular point in the lectures are asked to click onto the bulletin board and respond to a prompt that is provided in the lecture notes and repeated in that session’s forum on the bulletin board. They are asked to post their response to the prompt and also to respond to another student’s comments. Although Donnan (2001) has identified “a lack of depth” in student postings as a problem for IBL, Tilson et.al (2001) note that research has shown that students participate more in online than in classroom

discussions and are more willing to contribute their personal reflections. Tilson et al. also argue that online discussions are more fruitful as the students have time to think about their response. Thus, the extensive use of the bulletin board in ESL 2 is another factor which may encourage students to take a critical approach in their learning.

Student self-reports also suggest that learning via WEBCT allows them time for such critical reflection. Anecdotally, learners have commented on the depth of the discussions online, compared with group discussions in tutorials. They see this as a result of both being able to read other students postings at their leisure and having the time to compose their response online. Student A noted on the bulletin board, “I think doing this course online is more effective in terms of improving my language skills. Discussions in class tend to be bit superficial”. Student B noted, “About language, I believe that I improved myself in writing and discussion fields. The question discussion of each weekly session pushed me into writing more. As for discussions, I had to discuss more on line, than I would have even when I attend the face to face classroom situations”.

Hence, IBL can foster a critical and reflective approach to learning through careful course design and through the use of the bulletin board.

Independent and collaborative learning

Although there is continuing discussion about the isolation of online learning for students, “cyberia” (Donnan, 2001, Hara & Kling, 2000), there is evidence to suggest that this need not be a factor and that IBL can simultaneously encourage independent and collaborative learning (Tilson et al. 2001, Sherry 2000). One basic factor which encourages independent learning is access to the learning environment. Students can logon to the web at any time and thus have control over the time and space in which their learning is activated. Other factors are that students learn at their own rate, can focus on what they find the most difficult and are not distracted by the irrelevant happenings in a face-to-face learning context (Tilson et al. 2001).

Students taking ESL 2 were aware that the subject would be delivered via the IBL mode and perhaps this indicates that they were comfortable with an independent learning style. However, elements of the subject design encourage students to be responsible for their own learning. IBL allows for hyperlinks to other internet sites to extend the community of knowledge, to expose students to texts, both spoken and written and thus allow them to readily explore beyond the walls of the classroom.

A further factor that promotes independent learning is that IBL focuses on learning rather than teaching. To be successful, online design must conceptualise the learning process and how students may access and interpret the material. Hence the organisation of the site is critical in allowing students to move comfortably through the subject. To this end, ESL 2 has a structured format, but students can move between one section and the next through a network of internal links, which allows them to make decisions about their own learning path within the subject.

IBL becomes collaborative through online discussions. Sherry (2000 p. 7) explains Pea's (1993) theory of conversation, ". …people use conversational space to construct their common ground of experiences, meanings and understanding collaboratively". She goes on to further explain; "Expertise is developed dynamically through continuing participation in the community's discourse, rather than simply through the individual's possession of a knowledge base and a set of problem-solving skills". In this way, IBL is not Computer Aided Instruction but Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (Sherry 2000).

ESL 2, through the WEBCT tools, has provided for such collaborative learning through "conversational space" in two main environments, the bulletin board and the built-in private email. As discussed previously, students contribute to prompts on the bulletin board each session and also respond to others' postings. The lecturer synthesises these contributions weekly and provides feedback to the whole class – both in terms of content and language. In addition, she is able to email individual students with comments when necessary. WEBCT also allows the facilitator to set up groups on the bulletin board. ESL 2 has used this in establishing heterogeneous groups for particular discussion purposes. Hence, in this web environment all stakeholders are working together to construct the learning that is taking place. As Sherry (2000 p. 15) writes, "Online conversations are goal related, blending the

goals of the course with the intentional goals of he students in constructing knowledge and solving problems collaboratively".

Motivation

Finally, a learning context that motivates is central to achieving high learning outcomes for students. Initially, IBL per se is attractive to particular students, as it is a new learning experience for them and they are keen to experiment with this environment. However, a number of other factors are central to motivating students learning. These include among others: contact between the lecturer and students, prompt feedback to students on their learning, creating a learning environment that is comfortable and encouraging for students and valuing student input in the learning process (Chickering & Gamson 1997, Codde 1999, Chizmar & Walbert 1999, Sherry 2000).

In IBL, it is easy for the student to see the contact between the lecturer and herself as one-to-one. In ESL 2, it is the practice of the lecturer to respond to individual students, via email on a weekly basis. This response may be feedback on the student's posting to the bulletin board either in terms of the content or the linguistic features of the students writing, feedback about a recently assessed piece of work, follow up on the access records of the student or a reply to an email sent by that student about some aspect of the subject. In addition, the lecturer uses the tips facility provided in WEBCT to communicate with the students and the message on it is changed weekly. So, when students logon they automatically get the tip, which may be a message of encouragement, a reminder about submissions etc. Thus, students have significant one-to-one contact with the lecturer.

Prompt feedback is another feature of IBL. Students get feedback from the lecturer not only on assessable pieces of work, but also on their contributions to the bulletin board and this occurs weekly. In addition, students are also comfortable using the email tool to contact the lecturer about any issues they have with regard the subject and whilst feedback on the bulletin board is weekly, the emails are checked at least daily and often two or three times a day and a reply sent immediately. So, students have frequent and timely feedback on both the academic nature of their learning and

other issues which arise in the course of the subject. This acts to maintain their enthusiasm and interest in the learning process.

The interactivity of WEBCT contributes to the creation of a comfortable learning environment for students. The bulletin board helps develop cohesion within the group, as they respond to each other's postings. In fact, it is probably one of the few tertiary learning environments where students know the names of their co-learners! The prompts to which students are asked to respond have been written to ensure that their previous experience is valued and the group as a whole can co-construct meaning via dialogue with each other. Thus, students are engaged in a real-life collaborative construction of an area of knowledge. The use of email also supports their being comfortable in the subject, as they are able to access the lecturer at any time to ask for clarification, check requirements etc.

Hence, there are a number of ways in which IBL can contribute to student motivation. Perhaps the most important factor is that their individual voices are being heard in their learning environment and both co-learners and the lecturer are responding to those voices. For many students, this is an empowering experience!

Constraints of IBL

However, there are constraints in IBL and these are mostly of a practical rather than pedagogical nature. This section of the paper will examine some of the difficulties faced by the lecturer and students participating in the ESL 2 IBL subject in semester 2, 2001.

For the students, the initial difficulties arose, as in Hara and Kling's study (2000), due to technical problems. In this case, students were unfamiliar with WEBCT and had no computer lab based instruction on how to use it, but were reliant on "playing" with it, the built-in help files for students and contacting the lecturer via email to ask for clarification/instructions etc. The process of familiarisation took students, on average, about a week, although there were still some hitches over the first five weeks. This did lead to some frustration on behalf of the students. Here is an extract from an email received from Student C who was attempting to complete an assessable task, writing a journal entry. He had to download it and save it onto disc before he began

writing, but unfortunately had not read the instructions about this carefully enough! “Hi Jennie. I'm a little bit upset right now. I just wrote my Journal 1 and as I tried to save it, it only saved the original document … I sat for over an hour and thought we managed to save the file, but we didn't. So we lost all information and had to re-do it. That's too bad, because the second one is not as good as the first one...” A student from China was severely embarrassed as she misquoted the population of China in a bulletin board discussion and was confronted with her error, in an extremely polite way, by a Brazilian student hyperlinking a population graph from a website to his response to her posting! When such errors have been sent on the internet, students cannot recall them as in face-to-face classroom discussions!

Related to technical difficulties is students’ confusion in the bulletin board when there are many simultaneous forums and within each forum, many threads. Donnan (2001) also reports such confusion. If the students post in the wrong forum or the wrong thread, their contributions to the discussion will be lost. This issue has become less of a problem as students become accustomed to the forums.

A major constraint that students have indicated is the time taken to study online in ESL 2. One posting in the anonymous subject evaluation forum reads, “Never was so much effort put in a subject in so many hours for so few credit points” (Student D.) A snapshot of students’ access and use of the bulletin board at the end of session four revealed the following staggering statistics.

	Highest student	Lowest student
No of hits on the site (this counts each page hit)	996	389
No of bulletin board postings read by students	455	90
No of postings to bulletin board	35	15

Table 1: Snapshot of student use of ESL 2 site after session 4.

Students also report that it takes time to respond to the prompts, as apart from reading and reflecting on other postings, they sometimes find it difficult to compose exactly what they want to say. Although, they also report that this is having a positive effect on their English language written skills. (These statistics have not taken account of the email correspondence which is also quite significant.)

As you can imagine, such an active learning environment has its effects on the lecturer! A weekly log of time spent by the lecturer on ESL 2 shows on average 13-16 hours were spent and this of course does not cover preparation as the course has been all pre-designed and uploaded onto the site. The time is spent on replying to emails, reading all the postings (a total of 608 in the first four weeks) synthesising them and responding both to the group in a feedback forum and individually to students via their emails. Donnan (2001) reports that some tutors at the University of Maryland are paid an additional loading to work online because of the extra time involved.

However, there have been many positive responses to this IBL subject. Both students and lecturer report on the value of the interaction between them which has also been noted in studies on IBL (Chizmar & Walbert. 1999). Students feel they are

able to move on confidently in their learning as they receive individualised, frequent and timely feedback from the lecturer. The lecturer feels she has a better knowledge of students learning motivations and skills because she is able to read their postings and communicate with them on a regular basis. Students value being able to be flexible with regard to accessing their learning, although they are required to logon at least twice a week. (In fact, records indicate most students logon much more frequently than this.) Overall, IBL has been an exciting learning experience for both lecturer and learners. However, future development of the subject will take into account the evaluations and reports by students as well as the reflections of the lecturer.

Conclusion

As teachers, we are continually faced with the challenge of providing a learning environment which can lead to enhanced outcomes for all our students. Overall, IBL can fulfil the requirements of good teaching practice in terms of fostering a critical and reflective approach to learning, providing for independent and collaborative learning and stimulating student' motivation to learn. However, there are two essential requirements for this to occur. The first pertains to subject design and second to the essential element of interactivity. Content of the subject has to be arranged in a logical and coherent way so students can navigate the site easily; they can only contribute to decisions about their own learning path in the subject, if this is the case. Secondly, online conversations are essential to the learning process; through these students feel connected, valued and are able to construct meaning through shared dialogue. Our changing identities as teachers are supported via IBL. In designing online subjects within the framework above, we act as facilitators, managers and join with our students as collaborators in learning; we are no longer keepers and disseminators of knowledge.

However, the practical constraints of IBL must also be taken into account, in particular the amount of time needed for both learners and lecturers. If students are to achieve high outcomes in their learning, they must perceive the learning environment in a positive way. Thus, when there is a perception of the workload

being too high, students will not achieve such outcomes. So this factor must be addressed in IBL.

IBL can address our changing identities as teachers and learners. As Riel and Fulton (2001 p. 1) argue, “Technology supports and expands the sociocultural links that help give us intellectual identity. It also provides the new “power tools” for learning that enable students to develop the interpersonal and intellectual skills necessary to construct shared understanding of their world”.

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Changing Identities

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF IDENTITY: A CASE STUDY

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As university students, particularly non-recent school leavers, re-position their lives according to the challenges of higher education, there are concurrent changes to their sense of identity. This paper reports on a case study of three students, their experiences of tertiary study, and their sense of identity. There are many different theoretical frameworks that can be used to investigate the experience of higher education on the construction of identity; this paper looks at how the case study data provides links to several areas, including issues of gender, socioeconomic and educational disadvantage and empowerment. Some of these issues are introduced in the light of the students' changed and evolving perspectives on their lives.

Keywords: ***mature age university students, identity***

Introduction

As university students, particularly non-recent school leavers, re-position their lives according to the challenges of higher education, there are concurrent changes to their sense of identity. For most mature age students, the educational process has stopped or been interrupted. They have had time to consolidate a perception of themselves in roles other than a learner. Combinations of several roles may include parent, spouse, carer, wage-earner, professional, community participant. For the older person, they may well have "settled in" to a particular view of themselves in their world, which will be challenged in the tertiary study environment. Thus the changes experienced can be dramatic, for the better, for the worse, or just very different. In this preliminary study, the changes reported on from the participants' perspectives seem to be mainly positive.

Changing views of self, and perceptions of identity are part of everyone's life to some degree. The process of formation of identity is subject to what Melucci (1996, p. 49) refers to as 'metamorphosis':

"Identity, then, is a process involving constant negotiation among different parts of the self, among different times of the self, and among the different settings or systems to which each of us belongs. In its various components, identity considered as negotiation involves the capacity to respond to the multiplicity and contradictoriness of the elements of which we are composed at any given moment". (Melucci 1996, p.49)

Changes in perceptions of identity, or metamorphosis, then, for mature age students, can be heightened during the period of deciding to embark on tertiary study and by the educational and social experiences encountered during the course of their studies. It is the nature of these changes and choices that forms the focus of interest here.

This paper reports on a case study of three mature age students and how they perceive their changing identities during their tertiary studies. Although the study was not specifically limited to women, or to students from disadvantaged backgrounds,

the three cases presented here are of mature age women students, two of whom identified that they were from educationally disadvantaged backgrounds as part of the university enrolment processes. The main themes that emerged from this case study are connected with the students' perceptions of themselves as wives and mothers, as university students 'becoming' professionals, and as people for whom a university education was the means by which they could achieve personal freedom and empowerment.

Background

The educational experience of mature students has become a significant focus of research as their participation in higher and further education has increased from the late 1970's onwards (Britton & Baxter 1999). The emphasis of most of the earlier studies of large-scale quantitative research has been on the documentation of participation rates and the educational background and achievements of mature students. Studies by Smithers and Griffin (1986), and Woodley et al (1987) are cited in Britton & Baxter (1999) and reflect the situation in the UK. In Australia the publication of 'Mature Age Students in Australian Higher Education' (eds. Hore & West 1980) drew together a series of large-scale studies from 1970 onwards to provide a comprehensive overview of the situation here, and was since updated in a report in 1986. Many American studies, some of which drew on material as early as the 1950s, have been cited in Lavin and Hyllegard (1996). Such research tended to stress the homogeneity of mature students and their difference from conventional age students.

More recently, research in this area has shifted away from a preoccupation with quantitative indices to studies that focus on the quality of the mature age student experience. Such studies are necessarily qualitative in approach, and tend to be based on interview data from fairly small samples of selected mature students (Britton & Baxter 1999).

In contrast to quantitative indices, selecting some of the more recent studies, one can trace the increasing interest in identity formation from a variety of perspectives. In their UK study, Britton and Baxter (1999) draw on accounts of twenty-one mature

age students to highlight similarities and differences of how they came to be at university. They argue that “for all these mature age students education is a key site for the construction of identity”, but also that it varies for individuals (p.1). They focus on gender differences and how these construct the experience of returning to education. Many other studies have concentrated on gender as a differential, for example, Winefield’s (1993) quantitative study of older students’ perceptions of study satisfaction and social support, which found that women students were as committed to study as were the men despite previous studies which suggested lower rates of participation and levels of achievement. Winefield concludes that “sex role differences may have declined in size” (p.65) as the commitment to academic and career success in women students has increased. Paasse (1998) also explores the impact of higher education on the identity formation processes of mature age women students within a framework related to feminist theorizations of identity and difference. It can be seen that ‘identity’ in various forms and from different perspectives has been an important focus for many of the more recent research studies.

As well as research that approaches the experience of mature students from the perspective of gender, other perspectives include socioeconomic and educational disadvantage. Greagg (1979) refers to ‘second chance’ education and says that being an older undergraduate was thought of as a second-chance experience for mature starters who had been denied a place when younger because of inadequate financial resources or because of blunted aspirations due to lack of confidence or social pressure. Munns et al (2000) investigates the educational experiences of a group of students who accessed tertiary education through alternative entry programs, in the light of ‘second chance’ education. The authors say that the students had to challenge and redefine the identity they had accepted and utilized as a resource since they had left school: “Reconnecting with education coincides with wider processes of individuals defining and redefining their identities in the period between school and university” (p.4). These were students who had perceived themselves as failures at school, having formerly rejected and / or been rejected by the educational system. The individual and collective stories in this study have shown how they were able to renegotiate a precarious educational path and so more productively reposition their own lives.

In trying to determine the relative importance and roles of the different factors that influence changing perceptions of identity during university study, Lavin and Hyllegard (1996) cover some interesting ground. They encapsulate the possible role played by universities when they say that higher education provides fertile soil for intellectual and psychosocial growth and development. University should be intellectually empowering, should nurture the ability to think critically, to help broaden cultural interests, tastes and perspectives, and stimulate greater concern with civic issues and participation in the political process. It has also been seen as an important catalyst in personal development, which aids the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Although there is disagreement about how this transition should be characterized, Lavin & Hyllegard (1996) conclude that it is generally thought to involve the further acquisition of moral sensibility and the on-going development of personal identity, self-esteem, a sense of control over one's life and feeling of personal well-being. Each of these areas is worthy of investigation in relation to students' changing perceptions of self, and the renegotiation of their place in the world.

When the characteristics of university transitional experiences are applied to mature age students in particular, the experience of these changes can be dramatic and significant. Whether in fact university does produce such benefits for all students and, if so, what elements of this experience might have that effect, are questions that have stimulated a huge volume of research over the past four or five decades. This body of work has been reviewed, critiqued and synthesized in three encyclopedic works - Feldman and Newcombe in 1969, Bowen in 1877 and by Pascarella and Terenzini in 1991 (cited in Lavin & Hyllegard 1996, p.175). But the limitations of this work are that it deals with predominantly American middle class students who went straight to university from school, rather than students from minority backgrounds, who entered university as adults, have children, and hold full-time jobs. The work McGinnes and his team (2000) has surveyed Australian universities to provide a comprehensive view of 'the first year experience'. Valuable information on the major patterns of stability and change in the previous five years are presented, but apart from examining work and study patterns of students in different age groups, the data generally relates to all students in their first year, and does not differentiate between mature age and school leavers in reporting on the major trends.

Rather than the university experience itself being the catalyst for change, one of the narratives produced by Britton and Baxter's (1999) study focuses explicitly on changes in the self and identity as the catalyst for returning to education. It strongly indicates that the significant changes in identity which are frequently seen to be the result of undertaking higher education (Maynard and Pearson 1994) are in fact part of the process leading up to the move into higher education. Thus change in perception of identity is complex, and possibly influenced by a combination of internal and external factors, with those engendered exclusively by the university experience being secondary and /or complementary. The issue of self-directed learning or self-regulation is one which may impact on the change of identity for mature students in this way. Radloff & Styles (1998) cite many studies that support the claim that students who are self regulated learners are also likely to be effective and successful learners. Adult learners as a group are often characterized as self-regulated or self-directed learners. (Candy 1991; Confessore & Long 1992, cited in Radloff & Styles, 1998). Some of the mature age participants in Radloff and Styles' study mentioned changes in their views of themselves as learners with the majority reporting increased confidence. Significant numbers also reported a broadening of horizons, better self-knowledge, increased self-assertiveness and feelings of self-satisfaction and pride. Negative aspects of the experience of study included "stress, lack of time with family and loss of contact with friends" (Radloff & Styles, 1998, p.5, 6), which could contribute as strongly to changed perceptions of identity.

Finally, in considering the changes in perceptions of identity of mature age students, it is interesting to relate them to the wider context of what Gergen (1995) describes as 'social saturation', a phenomenon of the twenty-first century that brings with it more challenges to the construction of identity. Gergen (1995, p. xi) discusses the impact of 'social saturation' on our ways of conceptualizing the human self and related patterns of social life. He maintains that a new culture is in the making because with the intensifying saturation of culture (globalization, variety of high technologies etc), our previous assumptions about the self are jeopardized. There has been a "massive increment" in social stimulation which results in "radical changes in our daily experiences of self and others and for an unbridled relativism in the academic sphere". With social saturation, "all beliefs are thrown into question by one's exposure to multiple points of view. This is no less true in academic matters of

truth and objectivity than in our daily experiences of self" (Gergen 1995, p.xi). By taking into account the different issues already identified in the literature as being significant to the experiences of mature age students, this case study focuses on the perceptions of changing identity of three mature age students at the University of Western Sydney.

The case study

Having taught in many university orientation, bridging and undergraduate programs over the last ten years, my informal observations of mature age students is that most undergo quite significant changes during their years of tertiary study. Increased confidence is the most obvious external change, although there are others such as improved communication skills and greater self knowledge. In order to explore whether changes in students' perceptions of identity do take place, a number of mature age students are being interviewed. Three students were selected for this case study and took part in the first of a series of unstructured in-depth interviews in a one-on-one situation. This paper reports on a preliminary analysis of these interviews. Each participant is a female student from the western suburbs of Sydney at a different stage of her studies. All normal methodological and ethical issues such as voluntary participation and confidentiality, were addressed. The following portraits use pseudonyms.

Pia

Pia arrived at the interview, smiling and confident and very enthusiastic to tell her story. She relaxed back in her chair and spoke about her childhood in Argentina. She had been a good student at school and was very interested in art, so when she was offered a post-secondary scholarship to study a craft in Europe, she left Argentina with the blessing of her family. Her subsequent marriage and birth of her children tied her to a narrow domestic life that continued when she and her family migrated to Australia. At the age of forty she decided that her gradual "intellectual death" had to be stopped. She desperately wanted to read about "philosophy and ideas" and applied to the university to study for an arts degree. After a year studying in a part-time enabling program, she started her Bachelor of Arts, and when she completed

that, continued with a second degree in languages. She is now qualified as a secondary language teacher, and is about to start her professional teaching career.

Carmen

Carmen bustled in for her interview, in a very businesslike way. She had finished her work shift in a nursing home and was fitting in her interview before an evening class. Like Pia, she had been a good student at school in Chile, but had left to marry at fifteen. Three children followed and although she was happy and working successfully part-time, she agreed to migrate to Australia at 20 because her husband wanted to join his family here. Socially and financially it was a tremendous struggle. Although her husband was employed, he persuaded her that she needed to work too in order for the family to survive, and for sixteen years she performed all the traditional domestic tasks, looked after the children, and worked seven days a week in a nursing home. She also taught herself English “on the job”.Finally she decided that she was tired of “cleaning up s---” and applied to study nursing. Now in her mid-thirties, with her eldest child at university, she is determined to start a new life for herself, where she is in control. She is studying in a university preparation program and will start her Bachelor of Nursing next year.

Barbara

When Barbara arrived for her interview, she said she was anxious about whether her story would be of any interest. She interrupted herself several times during the first ten minutes to say “Am I talking too much?”, “Is this all right?” On being assured that everything was fine, she slowly relaxed and spoke more fluently and with more spontaneity, eventually laughing at herself and her anxieties. Barbara had never been particularly interested in study at school but had always been in the “B” class. Of anglo-celtic background, she had been born and lived all her life in the western suburbs of Sydney. She did not see herself as educationally disadvantaged. She had left school at 17 without any plans other than to marry and become a mother. Working part-time after her youngest child started school, she was successful in a bank, and then started working as a teacher’s aide. Now that she is forty-five, she wants to become a primary teacher and is currently in her second undergraduate year.

Wives and mothers

For all three students, being a wife and mother was a significant issue that had previously led to their feeling unable to pursue their own professional lives because of the demands of their role. They all saw their identity in these terms. Their maternal domestic lives demanded the sacrifice of their own intellectual fulfilment and had precluded their furthering their education until now when their children are older. All three women described their relationships with their children as close. At least one child in each family was at university and the women said that studying together seemed to help their children to remain motivated. Pia's daughter was also her 'best friend'; Carmen's son was transferring from his interstate university to study in Sydney and be closer to his mother; Barbara's children were proud of her achievements, and the son who had dropped out of university was returning to give it another try. As mothers, the sense of identity was intensified as the women perceived their relationships with their children were enhanced by their entering tertiary study. They all felt they had more to offer their children. Their children's encouragement and pride in their studying was also an important confirmation of their changing identity. The stereotyped gender role of mother was still a major part of their psyche, but now there was more.

As wives, the women held different perceptions about themselves from before. Issues of gender and power were strongly linked to these stories. Pia had "got rid" of her husband in her final year of study. Whenever she mentioned him, her nose wrinkled up and she frowned. He had wanted to "hold her back" when now she was "ready to fly". Carmen also had divorced her husband last year after she had been studying for six months. His constant objections to her study and his reluctance to change his own life in any way led her to perceive their relationship in a negative light. In retrospect she could see that she had complied with his wants, sacrificing her own. Now she wanted to regain her true identity that had lain hidden for years and to realize some of the potential she had subjugated. In terms of identity change, Carmen had made some significant external changes. She had reverted to her maiden surname, and to a diminutive form of her first name. She had taken to wearing jeans and cut her hair differently. From my observation of her over two years, I noticed that she moved differently, with more precision and energy. She seemed more dynamic and her spoken English had improved. She had moved in to

a flat with a couple of nurses and was enjoying her freedom. Her identity was no longer predicated upon being “a wife”. She was still a mother, but also a university student on her way to becoming a nurse.

Given that both Pia and Carmen came from South American backgrounds, we can assume that for cultural and religious reasons, their marriage break-ups were significant.. For example, Pia bemoaned the loss of family friends she had before her divorce and with whom she no longer had contact because she is now “single”. She said she does not have her own house or marital establishment and has lost the status of being a part of a “couple”. For Barbara also, she indicated that being firmly grounded in her Catholic faith, her marital relationship is central to her sense of identity. In relation to the changes experienced at university, she felt guilty that she did not have as much time to look after her husband and family as before, but was coming to an understanding that “they should stand on their own feet”. Although he did not actively encourage her, she said her husband was “quite happy for her to study if it made her happy”. She saw her identity change as “adding on” an extra dimension to the wife and mother she was. For all three students, the strongest family encouragement came not from spouses but from children, parents (especially fathers) and, for Barbara, her sister-in-law.

Teachers and nurses – professional vocation as identity

For all three students, the decision to embark on tertiary study was the result of a desire to change their lives. For Carmen and Barbara, their sense of vocation, in nursing and teaching, meant the choice of a degree course that would lead to the profession. Their identity was changing in becoming a professional nurse and professional teacher. For Pia, the thirst for knowledge and intellectual stimulation resulted in a sense of changed identity, which then led her to discover that a qualification in teaching languages would provide secure employment. However, in describing her identity now, she still describes herself as “an artist” who has many facets, realized through the confidence gained in her tertiary studies. The women have all sought empowerment through education and the attainment of professional qualifications.

For Barbara, the change in her identity is described in terms of how she is perceived by others. She still works part-time as a teacher's aide and has noticed that other staff now treat her differently, with more respect and equality. In describing her changed identity, this is the most important to her. Her central role in her home and family life remains almost the same, but it is in the outside world, the professional realm, where she is really gaining a stronger sense of self and self-worth. She related the satisfaction she received from showing her results notification to her work colleagues and how impressed and pleased they were for her. Despite attaining academic results of high distinctions and distinctions, she still lacks some confidence in her academic ability. "I'm really surprised when I get high marks," she said, "when I got my last essay back, I cried, and everyone thought I'd failed." 'Becoming a teacher' is the major change in her perception of self.

For Carmen, becoming a real nurse -as opposed to an assistant – is also a major change in identity. The decision to be a nurse was also the catalyst for the other life changes she has embarked upon. Support and encouragement from her friends and colleagues at work sustain her, and her ambition is to continue working in a nursing home with "the elderlies", in a professional role where she can be more useful to her patients to whom she is devoted. She perceives that the construction of her true identity has been "on hold" until now.

For Pia, having a degree – in her case, a double degree – makes her a new woman. Now that her journey to self-fulfilment is well on its way, "there's still so much more to read, to learn!" A professional life beckons that she sees will gain her respect from others in the community. She knows that her new identity empowers her to interact with other people on an equal footing.

Metamorphosis

It appears, then, that for these three mature age students, the beginnings of a change of identity or metamorphosis started before they came to university when the actual decision to study was made. Pia and Carmen applied to enter through bridging programs for educationally disadvantaged students while Barbara applied for alternative entry by doing the STAT test. The time at university is part of the

process of the reconstruction of identity. Successful university study is a means to freedom, empowerment and enhancement of their maternal roles by their becoming fuller persons and acquiring the benefits of a professional qualification. All three are experiencing or have experienced academic success in their studies resulting in changes in their views of themselves as learners (Radloff and Styles 1998). They exhibit skills of self-regulation in their learning. Organizing their time, managing their households and maintaining jobs are an important part of their achievement, although Barbara still bemoans the fact that her housework is neglected.

These women have benefited from their 'second chance education' (Greagg 1979, Munns et al 2000) and have renegotiated their own position in their world. Lavin & Hyllegard's (1996) contention that higher education is an important catalyst in personal development holds true for these mature age students. It has helped the acquisition of self-esteem, the sense of control over their lives, and their general satisfaction. All reported that when they began their studies, they were very scared of failure and anxious about their perceived ignorance. The unfamiliar environment was initially threatening and they felt out of place. However, their application to their studies and their high motivation to succeed has resulted in their being effective and successful learners.

In this study then, the first interviews with these three students revealed a somewhat surprising and overwhelmingly positive view of the effect of their university experiences on their changed perceptions of self. Even the sacrifices they had made in order to achieve their present positions were seen in a positive light.. The stresses and anxieties they had experienced, also, were regarded as inevitable and necessary, and over which they had triumphed, or were still triumphing. When asked if being from spanish-speaking language backgrounds was an issue for Pia and Carmen, each replied that it was, in terms of how much harder they had to work and how much longer it took them to read and write in English, but they both dismissed it as an issue that was not nearly as significant as the changes in their relationships, and domestic and professional roles. They seemed uninterested to dwell on their NESB status further, preferring to return to the other issues which preoccupied them and dominated their stories in these first interviews. Language background, however, is an area which will be investigated further in subsequent

interviews. Because this is a preliminary study, several of the issues already raised will be revisited in greater depth, as well as other issues identified in the literature, but not yet come to the surface here. More interviews are planned, and several more participants will be involved in order to investigate further the changing perceptions and redefinition of identity of mature age students.

In general, Gergen's (1995) theory of social saturation and its effect on redefining identity can be said to connect with the ways in which the three women in this study have responded to the changes in their lives. In all three instances, they have moved from one type of social and cultural context to another far more complex life situation resulting in the increased social stimulation which gives rise to redefinition of self. "Conceptually, it is important to shift from a consideration of identity in terms of either/or to a non-linear perspective which includes the possibility of and/and. The back-and-forth between these perspectives depends on who asks the question of identity and from which point of view" (Melucci 1996, p. 51). This description of understanding identity formation resonates strongly with the stories told by the three women in this case study. Rather than changing from one sense of self to another, all three see their identities changing by "adding on" the freedom and empowerment generated by university study.

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DOING IT TOGETHER: THE PAINS AND GAINS OF COLLABORATING TO PRODUCE ONLINE RESOURCES

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One of the recent changes within the University of South Australia has been the re-invention of teaching and learning support together with counselling services to form a unit called Learning Connection. Another major change has been an increasing emphasis on online provision of services and resources. These two changes have themselves brought subsequent changes in work practice for Learning Advisers within the University. The requirement to produce online resources has brought what we do very much into the public domain; no longer is our work something that takes place privately between individuals behind closed doors. Online workshops and downloadable resources are there for the world to see and are vigorously promoted by Learning Connection to the University community. The pressure to quickly produce a comprehensive suite of high quality online resources led the Learning Advisers' team to work collaboratively on their production. This has raised a number of professional issues in terms of principle and process including: articulating and resolving implicit and explicit views of teaching and learning;

developing effective ways of writing collaboratively and of respectfully engaging in extensive and rigorous peer reviews; and resolving the tensions associated with intellectual property and individual, group and corporate ownership of the materials produced. This paper draws on some of the literature relating to collaborative writing and peer review; relates the experiences of those involved in the process of collaborative production at the University of South Australia and suggests ways in which this process may involve minimal pain and maximal gain.

Keywords: collaborative writing, peer review, online resources, online teaching, online learning

Background to the Study

In May 2000, the reconfigured student support and professional development services of the University of South Australia were launched to the University community under the badge of Learning Connection (George & Hicks 2000; Hicks & George 2001). The Learning Connection: Portfolio of Services (n.d.) documented the changes inherent in the reconfiguration and the implications for service provision. These changes included a move from ‘a mainly equity based client group’ to support for the ‘universal student population’, from primarily ‘face to face delivery’ to ‘technology facilitated delivery’, and from service provision from ‘a free-standing entity within the University’ to a model of ‘student services delivered from a group whose activities are directed by the strategic directions of the Divisions/University’.

Thus a major focus of the work of Learning Connection staff was to be the provision of online resources for the general student population and this provision was heralded by the sounding of a loud public fanfare within the University. Our work was no longer something transacted between consenting individuals behind closed

doors; it was to be very much in the public domain, freely available online for all the world to see. There was an imperative, therefore, that the online resources representing this work be of a standard befitting universal public scrutiny. One strategy for meeting the quality demands entailed in the production of high quality resources was to adopt a model of rigorous and extensive peer review, involving a process of collaborative writing (and ownership). Although there was some variation to the model, the typical pattern was for a resource topic to be decided on, a document drafted by an individual, submitted to two or more peers for review, redrafted, submitted to a group peer review session by the whole professional team (of up to eight individuals, depending on the team), redrafted and published. In addition to this peer review process, Learning Connection management could (and did) intervene at any stage in the process, requiring minor or major revision of the material being developed.

This activity resulted in an intensive and extensive flurry of productivity, culminating in the development of, to date, 25 online Learning Guides, 12 generic workshops and 25 task- and course-specific workshops in the area of learning support alone, with corresponding development in the other professional areas associated with Learning Connection. The learning Guides (see http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/learningconnection/learnres/index.htm) are essentially online study skills leaflets, designed to be downloaded and printed off as required. They cover the traditional range of learning topics such as writing various generic forms including essays, reports, article reviews and journals, as well as other learning and assessment tasks and processes including notemaking from reading and working in teams.

The online workshops are designed to be more interactive in nature, replicating in a virtual way, what students experience in a face to face workshop, with the advantages of being accessible when and where the student chooses. The student is able to navigate their own path through the various pages and links provided, repeating or omitting sections as they choose. Some of these workshops are generic in nature (see http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/learningconnection/wkshpol/general.htm), covering topics similar to the Learning Guides. Even more innovative are the course-specific

workshops (see http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/learningconnection/wkshpol/specific.htm) which guide students through the processes involved in completing the specific tasks required in particular courses.

So there has been an outcome of demonstrable quality and quantity of online resources, which have received considerable acclaim from students as well as from staff within and colleagues outside the University. But what has the experience been like for the participants? Has it all been worth it? Where might we go from here?

A comprehensive program of evaluation is being developed to assess the online resources from the perspectives of staff and student users. This study considers the experience of those involved in the resource production, the Learning Connection staff. Interestingly, within the wider context, a paradigm of self- and peer-review is intrinsic to the national quality assurance process as outlined in the audit manual currently in draft form (Woodhouse 2001). So, formal review of various aspects of our work may well become an integral part of all our professional existences.

The Study

A questionnaire (see Appendix 1) was sent to the 26 Learning Connection staff who had been involved in the development of online resources, seeking responses to questions relating to their experience of writing collaboratively. The staff comprised learning advisers, counsellors, career advisers, international student advisers and professional development staff. The various professional teams had worked to various extents as teams and, in some cases across teams, in the collaborative writing of the resources, using some variation on the model described earlier. Because of the small numbers involved and the close working relationship between the researcher and the participants, the questionnaire did not ask the respondents to identify their professional area (or to identify themselves). Ten completed questionnaires were returned and the various issues raised in the responses are discussed in the remaining sections of the paper. These issues include the nature of collaborative writing, the quality of the product and the efficiency and effectiveness of

the process, the voice and authorship of the resources produced, and the professional development aspects of collaborative writing.

Incidence and Nature of Collaboration in Academic and Professional Writing

It seems that there is no common definition of 'collaborative writing' (Couture & Rymer 1987), the term encompassing a huge range of endeavours (Borden 1992). For a start, there is the issue of what is meant by 'writing'. Lunsford and Ede (1990, p.14) define it as 'any of the activities that lead to a completed document', such activities including 'written and spoken brainstorming, outlining, note-taking, organizational planning, drafting, revising and editing'. Generally, 'collaboration' is taken as broadly meaning more than one person being involved in some way in some or all of these writing activities (Lunsford & Ede 1990; Couture & Rymer 1989; Harris 1992). Bruffee extends the term even further by asserting that, because of the essentially social nature of language, all writing (and indeed reading) is collaborative. He says (p.168) that 'in order to learn to write, we must learn to become our own representatives of an assenting community of peers with whom we speak and to whom we listen in our heads'. Although 'collaborative writing' ***per se*** was not defined in the study (by the researcher or requested of the participants) there was a tacit assumption that 'collaborative writing' would equate to what the participants had been doing, namely speaking with and listening to and working to produce documents together with their real life work community of peers.

Research into the process of collaborative writing is spread across a range of disciplines, each exploring their own aspects from their own perspectives to their own audiences (Porter 1990). Forman (1991) conducted a detailed survey of the literature on collaborative writing and discovered 'the pervasiveness of collaborative writing across industries and functional areas'(p.236). Her study found that the vast majority of professionals wrote collaboratively 'at least some of the time'. Despite the assumption that writers work in solitude (Bruffee 1983;) and the fact that this assumption informs both the theory and practice of the teaching of writing (Lunsford & Ede 1990), it appears that writing collaboratively is a common activity for many

professionals, academics and students and the literature on collaborative writing is largely concentrated in these three areas.

While collaborative writing occurs widely, there is little in the way of 'formal peer review processes in professional communities-of-practice' (Casey, Branwold & Cargille 1996, p.33). Considering the literature relating to peer review, there seems to be, in this area, even less that is directly relevant to this study than there is in the field of collaborative writing. Some of the literature deals with peer review of college teaching as it is used for tenure and promotion processes (Quinlan 1995; Mignon & Langsam 1999; Bernstein, Jonson & Smith 2000), as professional development with the purpose of improving teaching (Keig & Waggoner 1995) or as a basis for funding (Over 1994). There is also a wealth of literature dealing with issues of peer review of manuscripts submitted for publication (Fagan 1990; Silverman 1993; Fontaine 1995; Murray & Raths 1996) and with peer review as a teaching strategy used with college students reviewing each other's term papers (Vatalaro 1990; Haaga 1993; Murau 1993; Mendonca 1994).

In relation to models of collaborative writing, Lunsford and Ede (1990) reported having difficulty eliciting information relating to this 'primarily because we lack a vocabulary to discuss what people do when they write collaboratively' (p. 63). They did, however, identify seven different organisational patterns of collaborative writing, determined by what tasks were performed by what individuals or groupings of people, but they had no labels to attach to these various patterns. They did come up with two general modes of collaboration, hierarchical and dialogic. The hierarchical mode is 'rigidly structured' with 'highly specific goals' which are 'most often designated by someone outside of and hierarchically superior to the immediate collaborative group or by a senior member of the group'. The dialogic mode 'is loosely structured and roles enacted in it are fluid…The process of articulating goals is often as important as the goals themselves…Those participating in dialogic collaboration generally value the creative tension inherent in multivoiced and multivariant ventures' (p.133). Forman (1991) found that the most common model of interactive writing was a hierarchical one involving a supervisor and subordinate, often after a draft had been written by the subordinate.

Although arguably less common, a dialogic approach can be highly successful. Rogers and Horton (1992) recommended a face-to-face mode in which 'coauthors are physically present in the same room and interact directly in every aspect of the writing process'. This, they say, allows 'the kind of "talk about talk" that Bruffee deems necessary' (p.122). Locker (1992) reported on a productive writing team who had collaborated with a very high level of collectivity, the implication being that being highly dialogic was somehow related to the highly successful outcomes.

Ewald and MacCallum (1990) found that groups usually settle on one model of collaboration and work with that. Whatever the pattern decided on, Lunsford and Ede (1990) maintain that having an agreed upon, established pattern was 'indispensable to success' and that 'collaborative efforts need to be carefully organised or orchestrated' (p.64).

The group under study here evolved its own unique process which was partly dialogic and partly hierarchical. While there was the usual kind of jostling that goes on when passionately committed people work closely together, the process could generally be described as 'dialogic'. There were, however, hierarchical elements involving imposition of the power associated with position, personality or prestige. Considerable tensions were inherent in this hybridity and in an initial lack of clarity with regard to the process to be followed. However, as the following responses indicate, there did seem to be some optimism that a satisfactory process had been reached, or at least was being evolved:

- ***Individuals need a history of sharing their writing or it can be a difficult process. To this end, the processes and purposes need to be clearly articulated and people need to feel comfortable offering up their writing to others to read and making comments on others' writing. Some framework and agreed understanding of what the writing will look like at the end is essential.***
- ***Collaborative writing is a good way to go, but it requires a more defined operating framework.***
- ***I think that collaborative writing is useful if it is defined, the steps of the collaborative process are clear, and boundaries are put around it.***

- ***A lot of this [negative experience] was to do with the process and, once this changed, things improved significantly for me.***

The quality of the product

One of the main motivations for working collaboratively was the imperative to produce high quality resources. Not all collaborative endeavours, however, result in superior products. Over a third of respondents to Lunsford and Ede's (1990) survey reported unproductive collaborations and Cross(1990) reports on a monumental collaborative failure. This was a project in which the coauthors took 77 days to compose a two-page letter, which was deemed unsatisfactory even in its final form. Borden (1992) sits on the fence and says 'Yes…and no' in answer to the question 'Do collaborations produce "more" or "better" knowledge than individual efforts?'. It all depends on what you mean by success.

For the participants in the current study, whatever the angst associated with the process, satisfaction with, and even pride in, the outcome was a major feature:

- ***I have seen a resource move from a first shaky draft to a very professional product and this was very satisfying in the end***
- ***It has allowed me to be co-author of an extensive package of resources of a very high standard and which have been acclaimed both within and outside the University***
- ***My satisfaction came from seeing the final products, which I believe were (usually) superior to what might have been written by an individual writing in isolation.***
- ***Over time I have learnt to write feeling less precious about content, knowing that the final product will be quite different and improved due to the collaboration.***

Time efficiency

As well as the issue of quality, there is also the matter of quantity of output, the need to produce a large number of resources in a relatively short time. There are two points of view in the literature as to whether writing as a group is more or less time efficient than writing as an individual. For some, the complex and cumbersome nature of collaborative writing was essentially less time-effective than individual writing ((DuFrene & Nelson 1990; Lunsford & Ede 1990) whereas, others claimed that sharing the task with others spread the workload and so led to time efficiencies (Singh-Gupta & Troutt-Ervin 1996; Lunsford & Ede 1990; Casey, Branwold & Cargille 1996).

Both these perspectives were represented in the current study:

- ***It's a very time-consuming process***
- ***Everything takes longer and getting responses back can be like pulling teeth without anaesthetic***
- ***A collaborative production effort means that some of the job is shared and deadlines can often be met***
- ***The task (and corresponding workload) is made more manageable***

There was also the perspective that shared commitment prompted more time efficient practices in the individual:

- ***A commitment for the individual to do their bit, usually by some agreed deadline, so resources actually got produced.***

Perhaps the apparent contradictions in relation to time efficiency of the process have to do with a fundamental understanding of what collaborative writing actually is. Borden (1992) says that it is important to distinguish (as our broad definition does not) between division of labour and collaboration. The former, where tasks are identified and allocated to individuals, may be more time efficient, whereas a process

involving two or more people working together to formulate text may be substantially less so.

At least one of the respondents favoured the former approach:

- ***I find collaborative writing constructive if the actual task of writing is divided up in some way. I find it difficult to do the pen on paper stuff with someone else looking over my shoulder. But if I can go away and do my bit and then run my part of the writing by others in any form, no matter how rough, and get useful feedback, it works better.***

Group processes

A major factor determining the efficiency and effectiveness of a collaborating group is the way the group works together and this, in fact, was one of the most important aspects identified in the study. There is a considerable body of theory relating to group processes. For example, Tuckman's commonly accepted model of group stages, namely Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing (Moxon 1993), with sometimes the additional stage of Adjourning, describe stages worked through by groups. Typically groups have an initial tentative phase; one of competition, conflict and control issues; a more cooperative, collaborative phase; eventually arriving at a stable cohesive productive phase. Individual groups may progress slowly or rapidly through these phases; may become stuck in one of them or may proceed through them iteratively depending on the composition and dynamics involved.

Groups develop norms (Napier and Gershenfeld 1993) which implicitly or explicitly guide the behaviour of group members and these members perform identifiable roles in relation to the group function in order to carry out the task and maintenance functions required of the group (Barker et al. 1987).

The importance in this study of group factors corresponds to its significance in other research findings (Singh-Gupta & Troutt-Ervin 1996; Locker 1992; Lunsford & Ede 1990; Lay 1992). Porter (1990 p.18) found that 'group character is influenced by a variety of factors, including the experiences and backgrounds of the participants, the constraints provided by… the supervisor and organisation and by the group dynamic

itself' and also by ideology, 'sets of beliefs about what exists, how it exists, what is good and desirable (and what is not) and so on'.

Group norms seem to be of particular importance in the productive functioning of groups. This refers to such qualities as 'the degree of openness and mutual respect characteristic of group, members'(Lunsford & Ede 1990, p.65), the ability of the group to resolve disputes to 'soothe hurt feelings' and 'involve all group members' (Locker 1992, p.46)'and the level of trust existing within the group (DuFrene & Nelson 1990). Lunsford & Ede (1990) go so far as to say that the most important factor in collaborative writing is the ability of group members to work well together, their ability to write well being of secondary importance.

These findings were reflected in the current study, with comments such as:

- ***There has to be a good basis for collaboration or it won't work eg trust, respect for others' ideas***
- ***All participants need to know their contributions are equally valued and acknowledged***
- ***Able to feel that my efforts while not perfect, were acceptable; receiving positive feedback***
- ***The generous nature and good humour of my colleagues, who tend to be positive albeit highly critical and pedantic***

And when things did not work so well, factors identified included:

- ***A team member who is not prepared to bend***
- ***I didn't like the way certain people in the group claimed greater authority (ie they could override the decisions/work of others)***
- ***I think that many people used the term 'collaboration' as an excuse for saying whatever they wanted without due regard for the feelings of others.***
- ***When the excitement and passion of producing the goods overran respect and sensitivity for each other***

Issues relating to group norms and dynamics accounted for a large portion of the response data, indicating the importance for the participants of a healthy, well-functioning group in collaborative writing. There is a need for group norms to be agreed and followed and for individuals within the team to perform the various roles necessary for the task and maintenance functions of the group to be performed.

Single or multiple voice(s)

One of the issues to be negotiated through group process is that of 'voice'. Whose voice is represented in the final product and is it a single or multiple one? Some writers claim that collaborative writing has the advantage of enriching the product by incorporating a diversity of perspectives (DuFrene 1990; Singh-Gupta & Troutt-Ervin 1996). Others assert that this diversity may be difficult to reconcile, leading to a diminution of the product with 'consensus compromising excellence' (Borden 11992; Forman 1991), this being particularly difficult when 'several members of the group have distinct and well-developed individual styles' (Lunsford & Ede 1990 p.60).

The participants in this study experienced some of those tensions:

- ***More perspectives led to a richer result***
- ***Varied and diverse inputs of knowledge, skills, insights, experiences, creative insights***
- ***Consistency; shared understandings; fewer idiosyncratic differences between particular items making up a suite***
- ***When there were too many divergent voices saying what should be done and how***
- ***The individual can lose their voice***
- ***Very difficult to amalgamate many voices into one harmonious presentation. It might help if some of the voices were trained***

- ***People have different writing styles and some negotiation of the style that suits the audience and purpose helps***
- ***Products sometimes a bit dry; lacking variety in style/voice; a sameness about them***

So there may be an ongoing dilemma around how or whether to unify, or at least harmonise, those potentially discordant voices and what (if anything) gets lost in the process. Or maybe there is the possibility of realising Rogers and Horton's (1992, p.124) optimistic notion that groups writing together 'evolve a shared understanding' and ultimately develop a coherent 'group voice'.

Ownership

Associated with the issue of voice is that of ownership of the product and how credit (or indeed blame) can be ascribed or claimed (Lunsford & Ede 1990; Forman 1991; Trimbur & Braun 1992). Lunsford and Ede report how they were warned by colleagues that publishing collaboratively would jeopardise their chances of ever receiving favourable tenure decisions or promotions.

The issue of ownership was certainly a concern to some of the respondents:

- ***Given we are academics, used to claiming 'ownership' of texts, there needs to be some recognition of the importance of the authorial position***
- ***No intellectual ownership in terms of management***

On the other hand, there was some support for the notion of shared ownership, one respondent listing it as one of the strengths of collaborative writing.

As well as concern about ownership of the final product, there were also issues associated with when, how, and even if, ownership by the original author should be relinquished to the group and with the identity of the group ascribed authorship:

- ***I felt that there was not enough respect for the author of the original draft***
- ***More respect for the individual writing style of the original author(s)***

- ***When the agreement about…indicat[ing] which professional group had written the materials was inadvertently ignored, I felt very angry because that meant that none of us had any claim to the intellectual property in the document.***

The issue of attribution of authorship is a difficult one. Acknowledgment of published writing is the everyday currency of academics and for that to be invisible or non-existent has significant consequences both for the academic's identity and status and for their promotion and further employment prospects. The practice arrived at within Learning Connection is group ownership of the generic resources, the production of which involve a high level of collaboration and extensive peer review. So far, there is still individual attribution of course-specific resources, these often being developed through collaboration of individual Learning Connection staff and Divisional academics.

Professional development

An important aspect of collaborative writing is the part it plays in the professional development of those involved. Casey et al. (1996 p.45) maintain that such activity provides a means by which those more experienced or more skilled can 'model expertise, provide coaching, and scaffold support for the novice in a subtle, professional way'. The collaborative process can help those writing together to 'stay fresh by discussing writing and seeing how other writers work' (Lunsford & Ede 1990, p.65).

According to Schon (1983), professionals engage in their practice more or less spontaneously, making decisions and choices by a process of tacit 'knowing-in-action', until they are somehow 'stimulated by surprise' and forced to reflect consciously on what they are doing. Until then, they function according to certain internalised rules and procedures 'that we cannot usually describe and of which we are often unaware' (p.53). In the case of collaborative writing, the 'surprise' can be the frameworks, ideas, challenges and questions that arise as part of the collaborative process. We may be forced to, in Schon's terms, reflect-in-action and reflect-on-action as we engage at a meta level with what, how and why we are writing or have written. This can lead to a 'reflective conversation' in which those

participating move progressively up a ‘ladder of reflection’ involving successive steps of acting (in this case some aspect of writing) and reflecting on that acting (Schon 1987). While Schon developed his model of reflective practice based on expert/novice interactions, the process may apply in situations of greater mutuality where the expert and novice roles are taken by whoever is appropriate at any given point in the process. This application of Schon’s model is more in keeping with the principles of Action Learning, involving people who work together and which is based on the ‘strong belief that we can learn [from each other] without experts, lecturers and specialists’ (Weinstein 1999, p.34).

This kind of professional development has been an important aspect of the current study:

- ***I believe my writing skills are improving***
- ***Learned a lot from other team members***
- ***Developed better turn-taking strategies by watching others***
- ***Developed new skills***
- ***Ongoing learning from one another***
- ***Dialogues where we built on one another’s ideas***
- ***Gave me an experience of working with another team; drew on my own experience (I felt I was contributing to and helping a colleague’s work).***

The mutual professional development inherent in the collaborative writing process is being formalised by the counselling team in a project that uses Schon’s models of reflective practice. This project is still in its early stages, but promises to be a creative and productive endeavour.

Overall assessment and where to from here

In response to the question ‘Do you consider that, overall, the collaborative production of resources is a good way to go?’, one respondent answered ***Definitely,***

six said ***Yes,*** one ***Yes, but…***and two gave somewhat more equivocal responses, ***useful if…***and ***It depends….*** There were no outright negative responses to the question. Despite the many and varied pains along the way, the gains seem to have made the whole thing worthwhile. One respondent took the 'To what extent was this collaborative activity a positive, constructive experience for you?' question very literally, giving the answer ***40%,*** then adding earnestly, if not mathematically, ***the positives outweighed the negative.***

Some of the elaborations on the overall responses include:

- ***If the product is to be owned by the 'team', then I think the team needs to be involved in the process of development and review…I prefer to have feedback from others whose opinion I respect to ensure that I have not 'missed something' and to make sure that the message is clear and accessible to my target audience***
- ***Ultimately the benefits of process and product outweigh the bad.***
- ***It depends on the context and the desired outcomes. I don't think a written product is necessarily of better quality purely because it was collaboratively written. It's a good way to go in the hands of committed and experienced people, but not always the best way.***

Respondents had suggestions to offer in relation to how the process might work better for them:

- ***To make the process more effective (and less traumatic at times), a mutually agreed process should be followed, perhaps with a smaller group, and ample recognition given to the initiators (original authors) of the first drafts.***
- ***Quarantined time is respected and acknowledgment of effort, admin. support in the typing, formation etc., reasonable timelines.***
- ***Groups of 4 rather than 8 – too hard to work with so many people at the same time – especially when new team players joined the group. Set up agreed norms to start with.***

- ***I think that collaboration needs to be focussed on specific steps of the writing process, i.e. at the beginning for brainstorming ideas and perhaps before it goes to the resources review group for editing. If there is need for materials to be developed collaboratively the number of people collaborating could be limited to 3.***

Commonly the recommendations included smaller working groups, clear and agreed norms and processes and appropriate allocation of resources especially time.

At around the same time as this study was being carried out, something else was happening in relation to the collaborative writing and review processes of Learning Connection. Management decided to set up a Resources Review Group comprising five members, one from each of the professional groups making up Learning Connection. Its task is to develop consistent guidelines and procedures for and generally oversee the ongoing production of print and online resources. It is envisaged that the membership of this group will be somewhat fluid to allow both input and skill development by those who are part of the group for some period of time. The group is still in its early stages, however it has developed terms of reference and a resource production procedure, which are attached as Appendix 2. The findings of the study will be sent to this group, and to Learning Connection management and staff with the anticipation that the ideas and suggestions it contains may inform future practice in relation to collaborative writing in Learning Connection.

This study has identified some of the bits involved in collaborative writing and addressed some of the issues of the immediate context. There still remains the bigger ‘so what’ question of what does it all mean? In order to start exploring this question it might be worth going back to Lunsford and Ede’s (1990) nameless patterns with the insight of Borden’s (1992) distinction between ‘real’ collaboration and division of labour. There are more possibilities than just hierarchical and dialogic.

There is what we might call a Jigsaw model, where individuals work on separate bits, then bring them together, moving the pieces around, trimming off their edges, making internal adjustments, getting them to fit. Then there is a kind of Pass the

Parcel, where the thing gets passed serially between two or more people, each doing something to it. A Critique model where the critic assesses the product at the final or some interim stage, the writer responding to the critique, the process being either one way or reciprocal. A Procrustean model where someone is responsible for (or takes on the responsibility of) modifying the work of others to make it 'right'. A Working Bee model where people engage together creatively, constructively, perhaps conflictually, to generate the product. And a Tower of Babel model where coauthors make their individual contributions without reference to each other and without the mechanism (or capacity) for hearing each others' contributions. And probably more.

There may be various combinations of these models at the various stages of the writing process. Interleaving these ways of collaborating are dynamics of power and control. Who decides how and what happens? Are the decisions imposed or consensual? Are they made on the basis of position, personality or prestige? What other dynamics shape the functioning of the group processes?

And finally, having identified the possibilities of what might happen and how, there are questions around which models and processes suit which kinds of tasks, for which kinds of people, in which kinds of contexts. It seems that collaborative writing is here to stay for us as professionals, as academics or as students. What is needed is a conceptual framework and theory of collaborative writing that can be translated into effective and satisfying practice.

Appendix 1

Questionnaire

1 What do you see as the strengths of developing online resources collaboratively?

2. What do you see as the weaknesses of developing online resources collaboratively?

3. To what extent was this collaborative activity a positive, constructive experience for you?

What factors contributed to that?

4. To what extent was this collaborative activity a negative, destructive experience for you?

What factors contributed to that?

5. What alternative procedures, if any, would you favour over collaborative writing? Why?

6. Do you consider that, overall, the collaborative production of resources is a good way to go?

Please elaborate:

7. What would help make the process better from your perspective?

Appendix 2

Learning Connection Resources Review Group

Terms of Reference

Group members have drafted the following terms of reference, which have been approved by the management team. The Resources Review Group aims to:

- Ensure quality, consistency and inclusivity in the content and form of Learning Connection resources
- Provide feedback to the professional teams on the range of resources being produced
- Through the review process, provide professional development in the production of resources
- Ensure the resources meet the diverse needs of students and staff by including the perspectives of different professional groups
- Expedite resource development

Review Process

A recommended process for the development and review of resources has also been generated and this will go to professional teams for discussion and feedback. It is understood that the process may need modification as it is translated into practice. The following full process is recommended for new resources; that is, teaching and learning guides or online workshops on completely new topics (as the Recording of Achievements documents were) or a suite of resources in a new form (such as the ISAS Information sheets). Parts of this process may be bypassed when the resources are adaptations of already existing resources (see below for modified process).

Stage One – consultation in professional team

1. Idea for resource generated from:
    - Service contract
    - Requests from Divisions, Units or other groups within the University
    - Individuals/groups within Learning Connection
    - Student request
    - Management
2. Proposal agreed to and prioritised by professional team.
3. Reviewer/s (possibly including Divisional or other staff) nominated by the professional team.*
4. Proposal circulated by professional team to other managers, liaison personnel and chair of the Resources Review Group to identify opportunities for collaboration and avoid unnecessary duplication.
5. Framework of form and content developed in consultation with professional group and relevant stakeholders.

[* For example, it is necessary for a resource requested by Divisional academic staff to be reviewed by at least one of the lecturers. The question then is when that review should occur. There is an argument for taking drafts to all reviewers early, but an equally strong argument for waiting until the document is a certain standard before submitting it to 'external' review. Professional team managers may need to decide according to the particular situation]

Stage Two – Authoring

6. Author produces first draft in accordance with resource development guidelines

7. First draft to nominated Learning Connection reviewers for comment and return

8. Second draft to manager and professional group for peer review and return

Stage Three – Final stages of review

9. Third (and subsequent) draft/s to Resources Review Group for comment

10. Authors will be invited to attend a meeting and receive feedback in person. Alternatively, they can meet with one member of the group, who will relay feedback from the whole group. Authors can also elect to receive written feedback only, or written feedback in addition to feedback in person.

11. Last draft from step 9 to any stakeholder/s external to Learning Connection

12. Final draft sent to manager, cc to liaison person (if relevant) and author, recommending publication

Modified Process

This process may be modified when an existing resource is being updated or adapted. If this is the case, and only minor modifications are being made (eg changes of dates, assignment numbers etc or update of a resource published annually) then the final draft can bypass the Review Group and go straight to the professional team manager. This will often apply to course specific online workshops that mirror other course specific workshops already developed. However, if there have been major changes to the content, wording and/or structure, the manager may still refer the resource to the Review Group for response.

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ACADEMICALLY SPEAKING: NEW IDENTITIES OR OLD REALITIES?

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Many students who come from language backgrounds other than English have considerable difficulties in speaking English. Difficulties exist at the discourse, the interactive, the morpho-syntactic as well as at the suprasegmental and paralinguistic levels. This paper examines some of problems in spoken English faced by university students . Particular emphasis is placed on the problems faced by students from differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The paper gives a brief analysis of the causes of the main pronunciation problems of South East Asian students. Students of South East Asian backgrounds, speak languages (Cantonese, Vietnamese, etc.) which are based on suprasegmental and paralinguistic codes considerably different from English. This results in them having more serious pronunciation problems than students who speak languages, closer to English at the suprasegmental level (Danish, Dutch, German, etc.). A range of academic contexts, formal and informal, where spoken language is the main communication channel is examined: these include seminar presentations, tutorial participation, casual conversation and 'administrative negotiations'. The role of formal tuition in spoken communication (at discourse, suprasegmental and segmental

level) and several options to integrate the development of spoken discourse skills into courses is also discussed.

Introduction

Academics working in the areas of academic support, education and applied linguistics are focusing increasingly on the features of academic discourse and the measurement of students' literacy skills (Webb and Bonanno, 1993). The debate about how generalisable generic skills are and how academic literacy is specific to different purposes and contexts is gaining more attention from academics.

At the same time, the industry and employers are becoming increasingly alarmed about graduates' lack of written and oral communication skills. In 1993, the National Board of Employment, Education and Training commissioned a study of skills required of graduates as part of its examination of the quality of Higher Education in Australia.

> The survey found that employers use academic results as the initial basis for selection, but after that they select graduates on the basis of their communication skills (...). These skills were perceived to be generally lacking in new graduates (...). The report emphasises the importance of communication skills for industry, based on findings of other studies and concludes by suggesting that the equipping of graduates with communication and social skills perceived to be deficient will assist graduates' transition to the work environment (Stockwell & Associates, 1993).

Increasing efforts are being made to improve students written communication skills. Australian universities provide assistance to students and, in many cases to staff, through academic support units. Yet, one of the areas which has still not received the attention it deserves is oral communication skills.

> There are at least two other reasons for taking the spoken language seriously. One is that its is now coming back into

> its own as a bearer of cultural value. (...) The other reason, and no less important is (...) that we learn by listening and speaking, as well as by reading and writing. Learning is essentially a process of constructing meanings; and the cognitive component in learning is a process of constructing linguistic meanings - semantic systems and semantic structures. (Halliday, 1985)

This paper will attempt to place spoken discourse and the development of students' oral skills on the agenda of universities. It will make a claim about the specific role of spoken communication in tertiary education and will suggest several options to incorporate the development of oral communication skills into courses.

The place of academic oracy in comparison to academic literacy

> Speech and writing are in practice used in different contexts, for different purposes - though obviously with a certain amount of overlap. This is partly a ritual matter, a form of social convention (...). (...) speech and writing impose different grids on experience. There is a sense in which they create different realities. (Halliday, 1985)

Australian universities are not places where oral discourse is favoured. Knowledge is transferred through the written word. Lectures are by and large based on written texts. The purpose of most tutorials is to provide support to and clarification of written texts and or lectures. Most assessments are written: essays, reports, theses, examinations. When oral assessments (formal seminar presentations, interviews, etc.) are part of assessment schemes, their weighting is usually much lower than written components.

Preliminary research into the assessment, definitions and development of oral competence is scarce and does not get the same degree of acknowledgment or resourcing as research in the areas of written communication. A project to diagnose the oral and written communication skills of Pharmacy students at Sydney University (Jones, 1993) was not funded.

Books about studying at universities and communication skills mention oral skills, but emphasise academic literacy skills. At conferences aimed at academic support staff only a small number of presentations deal with spoken academic discourse.

Academic support units focus mainly on developing students' written skills despite the increasing number of students of non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB), both full fee paying overseas students and permanent residents, who have considerable difficulties in communicating orally in English. Their difficulties are exacerbated by cross-cultural communication factors which vary considerably from one culture to another. The 'in-house' culture of an Australian university is an additional factor which heightens the complexity of oral discourse(s).

Contexts and features of academic oracy

Contexts

The contexts where spoken discourse is used at universities could be categorised into three broad areas of formal, semi-formal and informal contexts.

The most common formal situations where spoken discourse are used is in formal/assessable seminar presentations, formal/assessable interviews and role-plays (Jones, 1994), oral exams and committees (Faculty Boards, etc.) and lectures.

Tutorials and discussion groups are the most common contexts where semi-formal spoken discourse is used. Semi-formal situations also include contexts where students discuss their studies and assignments with academic staff, for example to seek clarifications about work requirements or to explain or justify the validity or value of points or arguments not accepted by a lecturer. An important element here is the students' ability to transcode from the written to the spoken discourse (eg. orally paraphrasing and rewording an inappropriately constructed or worded argument in a written essay).

Further situations which should be included in the category of semi-formal oral discourse are most of the administrative and organisational contexts, where students need good oral negotiation skills, in particular at the time of enrolment, changing

subjects, making arrangements to change assignment deadlines, convincing counsellors that they need support (financial, personal) or simply making appointments (directly, or indirectly through administrative staff) to see academic staff.

At the informal level, most situations of socialising (student-student and student-staff) would be included. While the features of, say casual conversation, may not differ enormously from a university context to other contexts involving people of similar socio-economic and educational backgrounds, the role of informal contexts at universities should not be underestimated. It is a well documented fact (Gumperz, 1982, Stubbs, 1983) that informal discourse is frequently a prerequisite as well as an adjunct feature of semi-formal and formal situations (small talk on the way to a meeting, brief chit chat before and during a meeting with a supervisor, etc.). Features of, and interactional strategies specific to casual conversation have been documented and are frequently incorporated into courses of English as a second language (Slade and Norris, 1986, Zawadzki, 1994)

Features

In addition to characteristics specific to spoken discourse, one of the main features of spoken discourse is the fact that, irrespective of its context (formal, semi-formal, informal), spoken discourse is interactive and that this interaction is its integral dynamic.

Overall, spoken discourse, has specific characteristics which differentiate it from written discourse. It can be described as a system of interrelated codes at the paralinguistic level (gestures, facial expressions, proxemics, eye contact, posture, physical contact, appearance, etc.), at the suprasegmental level (expressing attitudinal meaning through pitch, pause, silence, speed, intonation, rhythm, stress patterns, etc.), at the segmental level (reduction of unstressed vowels, modification of sounds at word boundaries through assimilation or liaison, articulation of sounds in isolate word forms, etc.), at the syntactic level (complex, incomplete sentences, etc.) and at the lexico-semantic level (limited lexical density, repetition, redundancy, use of idiomatic expressions, etc.).

Factors such as gender and age, as well as socio-economic, educational, geographic (eg. Irish, American, Australian accents) affect these characteristics considerably. Users of spoken discourse must be sufficiently familiar with the characteristics of the codes specific to different contexts, both as decoders (listeners) and encoders (speakers) to communicate effectively.

The main skill used by learners in decoding meaning in spoken discourse relies on their ability to identify the main points or important information through recognising features specific to spoken discourse such as vocal underlying (eg. decreased speed, increased volume), end-focus, end-weight, verbal cues (eg. 'the point I want to make ...'), topic sentences. Listeners rely on similar features to distinguish main ideas from supporting details and to reduce spoken texts through rejecting redundant or irrelevant information (noise) by recognising digressions, false starts, etc.

One of the major problems encountered by students at this level is their lack of both the decoding (listening) skills and their limited familiarity with the complexity of the spoken codes used in university contexts. Spoken and written codes vary considerably from one area of study to another. This is what makes their description and categorisation difficult.

If a spoken text has been inappropriately decoded or decoded according to a different (culturally, linguistically, contextually) system of codes, the ensuing encoding (speaking) is also likely to be inappropriate or inaccurate. This can result in misunderstandings, communication breakdowns and frustrations.

One of the major difficulties faced by NESB students is to decode a wide range of English codes. This is particularly true for students who come from language and cultural backgrounds which use codes different from English codes which interfere with their decoding process. For example, intonation, rhythm and stress as they are used in English are not used in any similar way in languages such as Cantonese or Vietnamese which are mono-syllabic (each word is one syllable long) tone languages (up to 6 different tones can be applied to each syllable, thus changing the meaning of words).

Furthermore the difficulties of NESB students is exacerbated by cultural factors affecting their decoding (and encoding) skills: the different levels of significance of paralinguistic codes (eye contact, gestures, proxemics, etc.) within Western and non-Western cultures and between these cultures.

In addition to the decoding and encoding skills required by speakers, they also need to be familiar with the interactive strategies used in spoken discourse which include:

- initiating (opening) which involves starting the discourse, introducing a topic by using verbal, vocal and non-verbal cues,

- maintaining (developing) the discourse by responding (acknowledging, replying, giving feed-back), asking for reformulation/clarification, extending discourse (exemplifying, adding points), shifting the topic, marking time (stalling), turn-taking (interrupting, challenging), 'repairing' in discourse, etc. and

- terminating (closing) the discourse by marking the boundaries, coming out of the discourse and concluding a topic by using appropriate micro-functions such as substantiating and verbal cues for summing up, etc.

These strategies, like the characteristics of spoken discourse are affected by cultural, contextual, socio-economic and educational factors.

One of the most complex tasks, specific to the university context, which students have to complete throughout their studies, is the continuous transfer from written to spoken discourse and vice versa.

This happens in the contexts of note-taking in lectures and using these notes to write assignments. But the most common occurrence is the transcoding from written work (assignments, exams) to spoken forms, in particular in situations where students need to explain or justify what they have written, to academic staff.

The process of transferring information from written to oral discourse, involves transcoding features of written discourse (at a structural, content and conceptual level). It also means that there is a degree of recoding involved in expressing and understanding equivalence of meaning within similar styles (eg. paraphrasing to

avoid repetition), across different styles (eg. from technical to lay) or shifting from the formal to the informal (eg. explaining something colloquially) as in tutorials, where frequently, highly abstract theoretical concepts are discussed in colloquial spoken discourse.

The transcoding process also applies to information presented in visual, non-verbal codes. This involves the straight conversion of diagrams, tables, graphs, visuals into speech, but also the interpretation or comparison of these non-verbal codes in speech.

Lectures are a fairly unique form of spoken discourse as their characteristics are different from those of spoken discourse in at least two major aspects: lectures are based on written 'scripts' (linearity, lexical density, syntax of written texts, etc.) and they are non interactive.

This means that in the context of a lecture, students are not able to use most of the interactive strategies specific to spoken discourse (asking for clarification, giving feedback to indicate lack of understanding, etc.). They have to use strategies similar to those they would use when facing a written text and they have to be able to understand:

- not explicitly stated spoken information through making inferences,
- the communicative value of spoken discourse without explicit indicators (eg an interrogative that is a polite command, a statement that is in fact a suggestion, etc.),
- relations within sentences, especially complex embedding,
- relations between part of oral discourse through lexical cohesion devices of repetition, synonymy, etc.,
- relations between part of a text through grammatical cohesion devices, etc.

Options

There is a place for generic type workshops to address say, pronunciation problems of students from specific language backgrounds. Over the past 10 years for example, the English Language and Study Skills Assistance (ELSSA) Centre, at the University of Technology, Sydney, has offered pronunciation workshop which focus more on the suprasegmental (rhythm, intonation, stress, etc.) than on the segmental (vowels, consonants, etc.) features of English. Attendance rates of approximately 90% and students' (most of them of East and South-East Asian background) increased intelligibility are indicators that there is a place for this type of workshops.

The role and importance of academic oracy needs to be recognised more generally and become an integral part of the curriculum. Oral problem solving tasks could be incorporated into first year subjects, in particular tasks which require two speakers to get information from each other through a process of negotiating meaning, seeking clarification, etc.. These tasks would develop participants' interactional skills in non-threatening contexts. For example, one student has to complete a flow chart by asking another students who has a completed flow chart for details (Lynch and Anderson, 1992).

This could be extended and more confronting situations could be developed where the participants have or are given roles or opinions which will require them to negotiate meaning under pressure and use spoken language in situations which reflect more unpredictable situations than in more linear clarification seeking problem solving activities than the one described above. Role plays reflecting the reality of work contexts could be incorporated into the curriculum and the weighting of oral assessment tasks could replace written assessment, where relevant.

A third type of activity which would focus on the more formal aspects of spoken discourse, and which is already an integral component of many university courses is based on seminar presentations, interviews and, to a lesser degree, tutorial participation. For example, at the University of Technology, Sydney, courses are offered for credit by the ELSSA Centre where the assessment is almost exclusively based on students' performance in spoken English.

Conclusion

There are clearly sufficient reasons why academic oracy should not only be the focus of further research, but should also be addressed in its own right by academic support units and by faculties more generally.

The whole area of academic oracy needs to be researched. Before more accurate assessment criteria of spoken discourse are developed, we need to look more closely at academic spoken texts and professional oral communication in their own right and their roles as social and professional practices. Investigations of discoursal strategies similar to those conducted in the context of white-collar professional multicultural workplaces (Willing, 1992) or research specific to the oral communication needs of graduates in a specific profession (Jones, 1993, 1994) need to be developed.

Academic support units provide substantial support to students in the area of academic literacy. Workshops specifically aimed at developing students' academic oracy skills could be developed.

In addition to generic courses, faculty specific speaking workshops should be provided by academic support units to develop students spoken discourse skills within the contexts of their course of study.

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MAPPING THE CONCEPTUAL WORLD OF THE STUDENT WRITER

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This paper is positioned within ongoing debates about the meaning and role of academic literacy in shaping and framing the academic and professional writing practices of student writers. It explores the relationships between literacy, individual writers and the academy, and points to the way that particular student groups describe academic writing practices, and in turn act upon their descriptions. The key to understanding what-counts-as-academic literacy is grounded in the social processes and practices that organise the 'everyday' world of the student. This world is explored initially through a content analysis of 175 student responses to 'what counts as good academic writing' and is confirmed using factor analysis. The emerging conceptual map represents an aggregated description of 'what-counts-as-good-academic-writing'. This description of good academic writing captures certain aspects of inter-subjectivity amongst student writers – its form, purpose and structure. Once embedded, this inter-subjectivity further enables student writers to collaborate in the construction of knowledge and practice relating to academic literacy. In mapping the conceptual world of the student writer, the paper offers a view of academic literacy as a socially constructed and

signifying space. It is within this institutional space that opportunities reside for students to assume ‘powerful’ and/or ‘less than powerful’ identities’ as writers and as members of the academic community.

Keywords: Academic Literacy; Discourse and Textual Studies.

What does good academic writing look like?

As the title of the paper suggests, I began writing with the broadest possible framework in mind. My initial focus was on whether academic writing has a discernible form, but in contemplating how to frame this inquiry I became much more concerned with the epistemology of 'locating' the paper and how to dignify and support its thesis. I became very aware of the accountability relations that govern academic writing and in doing so stumbled upon an interesting paradox: the subject of this paper is also its object. The same identity relations that frame my academic writing practices, apply equally to the student writers whose words and descriptions form the content of the paper.

As the abstract suggests, this paper is about the meaning and role of academic literacy in shaping student writing practices. It is also about the complex of literacy relationships, which are embedded in the everyday practices of the business faculty. The paper relies on student descriptions of good-academic-writing as a means of capturing and categorising data about what-counts-as-academic-literacy. Yet in many ways this story is as much about 'changing identities' as it is about 'changing practices'. In the university sector, subcultural differences are becoming more rather than less pronounced (Reid 1996; Postle, 1995). Differences of identity and affiliation are becoming more and more apparent in institutional measures and social markers related to gender, ethnicity, sexual preference, age and so on. The standards debate (Garcia, 1995; Jackson, 1995: HEC, 1992) points to these 'differences' as evidence of the decline and subversion of communication and

literacy standards in higher education. Add to this the recent phenomenon of 'on-line learning' and the established myth of 'collective audience and common culture' is dispelled once and for all (Kalantzis, 2000). Now more than ever before, the issue of 'identity' is particularly pertinent for the student writer. While the writer is able to shape the processes and contents of writing, the challenge of adapting to existing disciplinary and institutional conventions has far-reaching implications in terms of how the ‘social self' is defined, and how subsequent community orientations and relationships are formed. The assimilation strategies that characterise Higher Education institutions in Australia have in the past tended to ignore rather than recruit 'different' identities and affiliations.

Successful academic writing therefore comes down to questions of ‘who is who’ within the 'local' student text (Ivanic, 1997). What knowledge is attributed to an authoritative source, and what belongs to the student? How much impact does the reader have on determining the meaning of a text, and what leverage does the academic community bring to a writer's conceptualisation of writing? What basic strategies do students use in their texts to claim that they are members of this community, and how do these same student writers position the reader into attributing identities to them? These kinds of questions, in which versions of the self are implicated and enacted through the process of writing, are the focus of this discussion. By acknowledging the social processes that underlie academic writing, practitioners are better placed to explicate and interrogate academic writing as critical social practice.

Methodology

In asking 'what counts as academic writing' I provide a content analysis of 175 student responses to the open-ended question ‘what is good academic writing?’ By analysing student conceptions of ‘what-counts-as-good-academic-writing’, my aim is to identify convergent and divergent perspectives that work to establish shared knowledge about academic writing amongst student writers (Geertz, 1973). The assumption here is that the resultant ‘inter-subjectivity’ (shared understanding) is what defines the students’ conceptual world, and is therefore integral to how academic writing is constituted at a community level. This intersubjectivity also

frames and anchors assumptions about what the academically literate person may look like on paper. In short, I am asking to what degree, if at all, student-writers employ discernible aspects of language and/or genre to (co)construct knowledge about 'what-counts-as-good-academic-writing-practice'. Content analysis is used as a categorisation device, frequency analysis is used as a means of classification and factor analysis is employed to confirm data categorisation and classification processes.

Results: Student perceptions of academic writing

An important part of gathering data in a discourse community involves locating and collating "shared perspectives among its multiply connected individuals", what Geertz (1983:157) termed interpretive ethnography. Interpretive ethnography enables the mapping of community ideology through extended social engagement with a range of its informants. My 'extended engagement' with this writing community took place over four years. My study of its descriptions of literacy began with a content analysis of 175 written responses to the prompt "what-is-good-academic-writing?"

Initially 60 student responses were randomly examined in order to identify the categories used by students to describe good academic writing. This process of classification was carried out until no new categories emerged. In total, the pre-reading of the papers produced sixteen key word categories (Table 1.1 below). The list of categories derived from the initial reading was used by a second reader to analyse a further 50 randomly selected student responses from the remainder of the corpus. At this point no new categories were added, and consensus between readers as to the relevance of the classifications derived was reached. The entire corpus of student responses were read in detail by a third reader who completed the process of determining and recording descriptive categories and devising frequency tabulations (ie. yes/no attribute response). This analytical method identified key terms that "light up a whole way of looking at the world" of student writing (Geertz 1983:157). All 175 responses were analysed, and each variable named and categorised according to the key word classifications cited in Table 1.1. These classifications reflect both personal and institutional inflections on 'what-counts-as-

good-academic-writing'.

In Table 1.1, each categorical variable is listed (column 1), described (column 2) and presented with total mean frequency response (column 3). What-counts-as-good-academic-writing relates to the how academic writing is structured (M=0.83) and to the need for good academic writing to uphold an overriding sense of neutrality and detachment on the part of the author (M=0.82). Technical correctness is also a strong feature of good academic writing (M=0.53), as is the need to demonstrate a capacity to source knowledge relationships to existing (locally known) authorities (M=0.46) through the processes of referencing, knowledge networking and intertextuality.

Table 1.1 ***Linguistic Classifications – Categories of "Good Academic Writing"***		
Category	Descriptor	Mean %
Structural Correctness	Response that refers to aspects of structure - ie: polemic structure of introduction, body, conclusion, and paragraphical sequence.	.83
Author Neutrality	Responses that refers to authorial voice as impartial, non-committal and non-partisan.	.82
Technical Correctness	Response that refers to technical correctness - ie: grammar, word count, and spelling.	.53
Reader Orientation	A response with explicit reference to serving the reader's interest in contrast to just writing for writing's sake.	.46
Acknowledges Authority	Response that indicates the importance of inter-textual references, authorship, knowledge networking.	.46
Clarity and Economy	A response that placed particular emphasis on aspects of clarity, conciseness, and word economy.	.45
Analytical Purpose	A response that placed particular emphasis on aspects of argument - features analysis, comparison, dissection.	.43
Relies on Evidence	Response features evidence/empirical data as a core requirement. Features include logic, rational deduction, and/or hypothesising.	.43
Stylistic Aspects	Response with reference to any particular type of writing - ie: formal/informal, report, essay, position paper.	.39

Internal Cohesion	A response that places particular stress on the importance of internal links and cohesion as evidence of good academic writing. Stresses interrelationships between concepts and contexts.	.37
Informs the reader	Response that makes explicit provision that academic writing is essentially informative.	.29
Communicates Effectively	Response stresses the importance of functional communication - is functional, carries a point of view, achieves a social purpose.	.19
Teleological	Response focuses on academic writing as a self-journey - a progression from a metaphorical point A to a point B.	.11
Honesty	Responses that focus primarily on the need for intellectual honesty - ie: plagiarism, authenticity.	.10
Biographical	A response that locates the academic writing process as an extension of the self - a view that personal experience is relevant.	.04
Originality	A response that places emphasis on simple originality - ie: students as contributors to tribal knowledge-making practices.	.03

Table 1.1 - Mean Frequencies for Key Category Variables for students' response to 'What is good academic writing?'

A strong reader orientation (M=0.46) indicates that student writers place a significant weighting on the needs of the reader in constructing their written response. Similarly, they favour an analytical mode (M=0.43) of writing with a heavy reliance on empirical evidence (M=0.43) to sustain and build an argumentative presence or position. The low frequency of categories such as biographical reference (M=.05), originality (M=.03), teleology (M=.11) and honesty (M=.10) suggests that good academic writing is more impersonal than personal in nature, more positivist than constructivist in orientation, and places a much higher emphasis on conformity and assimilation than it does on self-representation.

Confirming the frequency solution: Dimension reduction using factor analysis

A ***principal components factor analysis*** with varimax rotation was performed using the sixteen items presented in Table 1.1 as categories of student description related to 'what-counts-as-good-academic-writing'. Six factors, with ***eigenvalues*** greater than one were extracted using SPSS, accounting for 53% of the total variance for the

sixteen items (Table 1.2 above) Because all ***eigenvalues*** in Table 1.2 are greater than one, all six factors can be taken to represent substantial dimensions in defining "what-counts-as-good-academic-writing".

The factor analysis is useful in confirming the frequency figures (Table 1.1). Factor one (***self-representation)*** is evidenced by close relationships between the subjective categories of academic writing - teleological, biographical, honesty and originality. Given the low frequency of each of these variables (Table 1.1) the relative strength of the factor suggests that academic writing is seen by perhaps a handful of students as an act of 'self-representation'. The factor analysis also identifies and confirms the formative influence of institutional or academic conventions in what has been labelled 'rhetorical structure' (factor 2) which charts how categories of structure, evidence, internal cohesion and analysis constitute student conceptions of 'good academic writing'. Higher frequency ratings on each of these categories indicate that rhetorical structure is an underlying factor in a majority view of what constitutes 'good-academic-writing'.

High positive factor loadings (Table 1.2) on matters of technical correctness, acknowledging authority and honesty give rise to a form of disciplinary writing that is perceived by students to meet ***'existing writing conventions'*** (factor 3). High frequency ratings on each of these categories indicate that 'good academic writing' is traceable to existing and established technical and referencing practices and standards. Taken together, the categories of self-representation, rhetorical structure and conventionality (factors 1, 2 and 3) account for 30% of variance across student descriptions of 'good academic writing'.

'***Aspects of argumentation'*** (factor 4) related to 'good-academic-writing' features positive loadings for author neutrality, information processing and analytical style. Good academic writing is therefore guided by a 'net-to-gross' logic that sees it argumentatively framed, objective, analytical and pseudo-scientific. A '***Readership***

Focus' (factor 5) confirms that 'good academic writing' is relevant to the reading community, and that 'good' writing in an academic context conforms to common aspects of style, and patterns of analysis. The readership focus described here is largely an instrumental one. 'What-counts-as-good-academic-writing' also tends to be '***form driven'*** (factor 6). Positive loadings on markers related to technical correctness and internal cohesion characterise 'good-academic-writing' as functionally and specifically oriented. The form of 'good writing' presented by students' correlates closely to academic assessment practices, as most of the 'academic writing' in which students engage is illuminated by assessment procedures. Hence academic writing tasks are likely to vary according to purpose and disciplinary conventions, while retaining common structural aspects. In this way, the results presented in Table 1.2 indicate that 'what-counts-as-good-academic-writing' is in part contingent upon 'instrumental' notions of form (factor 6).

Relevant Category Items ***Eigenvalues*** ***% of Variance Explained***	***Factor 1*** 2.01 12.55	***Factor 2*** 1.40 8.72	***Factor 3*** 1.33 8.28	***Factor 4*** 1.27 7.94	***Factor 5*** 1.20 7.52	***Factor 6*** 1.18 7.35
Self Representation						
Biographical	**.79**.					
Teleological	.74					
Originality	.64					
Honesty	.47					
Rhetorical Structure						
Structural Correctness		**.64**				
Relies on Evidence		.57				
Internal Cohesion		.44				

Analytical Purpose	.42				
Observes Convention					
Technical Correctness		**.68**			
Acknowledges Authority		.51			
Honesty		.49			
Argumentation					
Author Neutrality			**.55**		
Informs the Reader			.51		
Analytical Purpose			.46		
Clarity & Economy			.40		
Reader Focus					
Stylistic Aspects				**.55**	
Reader Orientated				.48	
Communicates Effectively				.47	
Form Driven					
Internal Cohesion					**.49**
Technical Conventions					.42

Table 1.2: Factor Loadings - What-counts-as-good-academic-writing

Items in bold are the marker items for each scale

Taken together, the six factors underlying 'good academic writing' (Table 1.2) point to the existence of an established community discourse, and identifies a common view on what constitutes ‘good academic writing’. This data also confirms the following relationship in terms of knowledge about academic literacy.

AI = f (Sr, Rs, Oc, Ar, Rf, Fd)

where: ***Academic Literacy***(Al) is a function of (f) ***self-representation*** on the part of the writer (Sr); the ***rhetorical structure*** of text (Rs); the writer's acknowledgment of ***academic convention*** (Oc); a tendency ***to linear and conclusive development of argument*** (Ar); a ***reader orientation*** and focus (Rf) and a ***correlation to existing academic writing forms*** (Fd). This equation posits a complex relationship between the features of literate products and the academic writers who produce them. Around this construct contesting notions of literacy reside; contradictions and continuities characterise literacy as a socially organising force within the academy (Graff, 1986).

Points of Convergence: Continuities in Academic Literacy.

In the following excerpts, each respondent is identified by a numbered response. Each excerpt has been chosen from the corpus of data to illustrate the dynamic of the factor analysis (Table 1.2). The elevation of 'evidence' over 'experience' is captured in the following student' responses. Here, the literacy of the non-specialist (student) is constructed more through social-organisational relations, than it is the product of individual attributes. The individual is effectively silenced (for the most part) through the practice of institutional literacy, and the institutional voice alone is the product of articulation. The notion of a form-driven, and functional (means-ends), literacy is reflected in respondent accounts.

> An academic piece has the sole purpose of arriving at a pre-defined position. (45)

> Good academic writing is unemotional, contains relevant and strong evidence and communicates in a clear, set and structured way. (154)

> A proper and appropriate position must be taken when forming a piece of writing. (104)

The concept of silence is both applicable and relevant here. Making 'the personal' irrelevant to the production of academic literacy increases the reliance and dependence of student writers on hegemonic writing conventions.

> Good academic writing means telling the marker what they want to hear. A form of prostitution really…(9)

> I understand good academic writing needs to focus on facts. These are always objective and cannot involve any opinion or personal voice. (67)

Striking the ‘right balance’ in relation to academic literacy is about displaying in an authentic way, a sense of writing competence over a range of literacy events. This involves stepping ‘inside’ the discipline, which is first and foremost an impersonal act, but one that must eventually become personal.

> Good academic writing must be supported by references to give credence to the ideas presented, but also must have some independent opinion or conclusion that reflects the writers viewpoint from their reading or life-experiences. (134)

Yet this progression to a comfort zone within the discipline (Bartholomae, 1985) is a mediated process for the student writer. Structural and rhetorical modelling is an overriding feature of 'good-academic-writing'.

> Academic writing needs to be a factual piece of writing with supporting evidence and link words between information and paragraphs. The word limits must be adhered to and the introduction, body and conclusion should be in line with these limits and not exceed them by more than 10% of the total word limit allowed. (25)

> Good academic writing should be logically set out
>
> - An intro/body/conclusion
>
> - Linked paragraphs completing the circle from intro to conclusion
>
> - Each paragraph backed by evidence. (1)

Each composite part of the paper serves a concise function in the overall (re) production of text. Students often devise rules for individual and strategic sentences, forming part of the linear journey from abstraction to concrete outcomes.

> The introduction should clearly state what you are trying to achieve in your essay. It should include the question in your first sentence and have your four main points outlined. An argument should also be included in your introduction. (64)

> The conclusion or finishing piece of academic writing reiterates the introduction and does not add any new information. (9)

> > At the beginning of an essay, the author may introduce the reader to a fairly abstract idea in order to engage his attention. As the introduction moves on in concise points, the level of abstraction breaks down. (173)

A common theme was one of recipe writing - ***tell them what you will tell them in the introduction, tell them in the body, and tell them what you told them in the conclusion*** (34, 38, 39). This was referred to by some students as a "***formula"*** (100, 93) and by others as the "way" (106, 113).

> Good academic writing is about clearly communicating to your intended audience. They expect to read things in a certain way. (102)

> It is a crucial factor with good academic writing to be aware of who the target audience is. You need to make it easy for them to read. (113)

What emerges from the tapestry of student accounts offered here is awareness that 'what-counts-as-good-academic-writing', ***'always already'*** exists in the host

community. Poynton (1990:251) suggests that the theoretical and discursive considerations of good academic writing are traceable to a complex of:

> "(1) Culturally learned forms of interaction, (2) structures of knowledge formed by the habitual forms of representation available to and used by the individual … (3) structures of feeling about those structures of knowledge and interaction."

Conclusion: What about Identity?

The data presented here confirms that culturally learned forms of interaction give rise to academic writing practices in this particular writing community. What also emerges from this analysis is a quantitative 'snapshot' of the structures and forms of knowledge underpinning 'what-counts-as-good-academic-writing' at the community level. Qualitative data presented here confirms that structures of feeling, belief and compulsion **{AI = f (Sr, Rs, Oc, Ar, Rf, Fd)}** drive student conceptions of what 'good writing' should be. What-counts-as-good-academic-writing in this community is 'functional' and 'process driven'. Just as this acts as a means of affirmation for some students, for others it works as a far more problematic ordering device.

> Good academic writing? - as you can tell from the previous question I have not received it and I'm sure that other people haven't either. (67)

> Good academic writing - Unfortunately I find it very difficult to put into practice, especially if it comes to topics I don't know anything about. (126)

> Academic writing is an activity, which many people do not like - including myself. (169)

> I understand good academic writing to be something that I just can't do. (175)

The community under study is therefore both ‘divided’ and ‘together’ in its conceptions of 'good-writing-practice'. Good academic writing has a discernible ‘form’, yet this from cannot be easily acquired by all student writers. While often viewed as an objective attribute of the academic person or community, 'good-academic-writing' is primarily and simultaneously an individual subjective and inter-subjective experience. What the student achieves through the process of academic literacy is essentially candidate membership; what the disciplinary community achieves on the other hand is a reaffirmation of its mission, and at a basic level, a constant re-inscribing of its encoded symbols. This ‘mutually reinforcing’ network of 'social understandings' constitutes the particular shared-reality that is ‘good-academic-writing’ within this local community of writers. This shared reality, and the inevitable tensions that surround ‘good academic writing’ as a social construction, do little however to rebut the long-standing presumption of difference.

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Changing Identities

INTEGRATING ESL IN THE CURRICULUM AND IN THE FACULTY

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Although content-based ESL has been advocated by practitioners in the field for over 15 years (Mohan 1986; Brooks 1988; Guyer & Peterson 1988; Brinton, Snow & Wesche 1989; Iancu 1993; Cargill 1996; Sagliano & Greenfield 1998, among others), very few universities in Australia offer such courses for credit*. One reason for the paucity of integrated ESL courses in most universities is that current tertiary infrastructures preclude effective inter-faculty collaboration. Content specialists usually work in their particular departments, and language instructors are most often found in separately housed student support centres. Researchers who advocate a content-based ESL curriculum invariably highlight effective inter-faculty collaboration as being central to the success of the course (Benesch 1988; Guyer & Peterson 1988; Cargill 1996; Pantelides 1999; Sagliano & Greenfield 1998). This paper will provide a brief overview of the development of content-based ESL courses in the School of International Business at the University of South Australia, and suggest ways that similar courses could be established in other institutions.

Keywords: ESL, content-based teaching, collaboration, integrated language and academic skills.

Introduction

The majority of universities in Australia provide academic support to their Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) students in the form of an on-campus centre, where students attend sessions or have individual consultations with “Learning Advisers” in their own time.

Evolving from the "Language Across the Curriculum" and the "Language for Specific Purposes" movements, which both began in the 1970s (Brinton, Snow & Wesche 1989, p. 5), content-based language teaching has come to be regarded by many practitioners as an alternative strategy to deal with NESB language and learning issues.

In 1997 a new, elective course was piloted in the Division of Business and Enterprise at the University of South Australia, to provide language and academic support to 21 Malaysian students from the Sepang Institute of Technology. “Business Communication Skills for NESB students” (BCS), used the content-based model of ESL teaching (Brinton, Snow & Wesche 1989), and incorporated three core subject areas of the business degree - accounting, law and economics. Content specialists introduced each module, attended one or more tutorials as required, and double-marked the assignments with the BCS lecturer.

This subject, worth 4.5 credit points, ran in the second semester, and eventually became open to other NESB students from a diverse range of countries. By second semester 2000 there were over 100 students, from 13 different countries.

Until this time, BCS had been coordinated and taught by an hourly paid Learning and Academic Skills (LAS) lecturer from outside the University of SA. Unlike other courses in the Division of Business and Enterprise, BCS did not belong to a specific “school” (department). Every year, in the second semester, the BCS lecturer would have to set up an office, make contact with the appropriate content specialists, and begin the task of organising the course for the coming semester.

Given the politics and conditions of hourly paid work, it is not surprising that by 2000 there had been three different lecturers teaching the subject. Santina Bertone says that this type of teaching situation is the result of the "casualisation of the ESL

workforce", and that there are negative implications for teaching standards and professional development (2000, p. 30).

With these issues in mind and the increased enrolment in BCS, the Dean of Teaching and Learning made a recommendation to the Division that the subject be given a “home” in the School of International Business, and that a lecturer be employed on a permanent basis. By housing the course in the School, Business Communication for NESB students has had the opportunity to build on the foundation, already established, to provide quality, integrated academic and language skills to the University’s international students.

Business Communication Skills (NESB) in 2001

The development of collaborative relationships

A key element in developing a course that integrates content with ESL methodology is the collaborative relationship between content specialist and ESL practitioner (Benesch 1988; Guyer & Peterson 1988; Cargill 1996; Pantelides 1999; Sagliano & Greenfield 1998).

Most ESL educators agree that content-based ESL is highly beneficial to students, and a very practical way to overcome the deficiencies of relying solely on IELTS results to ascertain students’ readiness to begin academic study (Brinton, Snow & Wesche 1989; Iancu 1993; Grabe & Stoller 1997). However, most would also agree that developing a truly collaborative relationship with specialist lecturers requires commitment from both parties to the content-based model (Snow & Brinton 1984; Benesch 1992; Babbitt & Mlynarczyk 2000). This is not always easy.

To begin with, the ESL educator needs to spend time with the content specialist, explaining the need for, and the multiple benefits of the model. In the case of BCS, hourly paid staff, working on the fringes of the Division’s activities, rarely had the opportunity to develop collegial relationships with those whose expertise was vital to the success of the subject. Sarah Benesch suggests that unless both lecturers enjoy a collegial relationship as "equal partners", then the language specialist will be treated (and feel like) a "second class citizen" (1992, p. 4).

A number of researchers (Spiller 1992; Pantelides 1999) have suggested that this type of collaboration is made difficult by current university infrastructures which typically house LAS lecturers in a separate facility to academic faculties, usually with other "counselling" services. Dorothy Spiller mentions two disadvantages to such an arrangement:

> Learning assistance tutors may misjudge the context in which students are being required to learn and write, and there is always the possibility that distance and separation will distort our vision of mainstream academia....[Learning assistance tutors'] separation from the academic mainstream, and perhaps the original proximity to counselling services, leads some students to have negative ideas about learning assistance...(1992, p. 147)

By placing BCS within the School of International Business, and giving the BCS lecturer the appropriate academic status, the subject quickly gained acceptance within the School. For the first time, BCS staff were approached by lecturers wanting to know how their own content area could be incorporated into the curriculum of BCS

Developing a curriculum based on students' needs

Prior to 2001, BCS was taught only in second semester, and often by a newly recruited lecturer. This model provided little opportunity for the BCS lecturer to build on the lessons of the previous semester. In addition, because the subject was not part of a school, there were no formal mechanisms for evaluation.

In the first semester of 2001 Business Communications Skills (NESB) was coordinated and taught by the same lecturer from the previous semester. This lecturer had conducted informal student evaluations in 2000 and was now able to incorporate some of the feedback into the curriculum. In response to students' requests, the content modules now focussed on jobsearch, marketing and accounting.

Another advantage of rewriting some of the curriculum was the opportunity to invite new members of staff to be involved. After three years of providing input (with little or no formal recognition of their efforts), some of the content specialists had expressed reluctance to continue being involved. Again, being a recognised member of the academic staff of the School of International Business meant that approaching and recruiting new content lecturers was relatively easy.

Other advantages of in-faculty ESL programs

As a full-time academic with the same workload commitments as other staff members, time has now been allocated for regular student consultations. Previously, students had to rely on irregular email communication and catching the lecturer at the end of lectures and tutorials.

Being "in-school" has also resulted in communication with other staff members, not necessarily involved in the course, regarding "at risk" students. BCS staff, informed of particular students' learning difficulties, can now incorporate specific strategies and classroom exercises to address those concerns.

Taking the Business Communication Skills model to other schools

The BCS model has recently been adapted for NESB students enrolled in the MBA program. Using the same design of content-based ESL, although following the 11 week MBA term, rather than the 13 week semester, Integrated Business Communication for NESB Postgraduates (IBC) includes three modules from a core MBA subject, “Management Foundations” – Dialogue, Business Economics and Research Methods in Business.

Like its undergraduate counterpart, each module in IBC is assessed with a specific written document (reflective journal, essay and report) and three corresponding oral presentations. Content specialists – lecturers from Management Foundations – give a three-hour introductory lecture to each module, and the IBC lecturer provides between 9-12 hours of integrated language and academic skills workshops, to work towards the specific assessment task. The postgraduates of the IBC also have the

benefit of a half-time tutor for further assistance outside classes and one-to-one consultation.

As a result of the content-based models developed for both undergraduate and postgraduate students, a new course has recently been established for NESB Master of Property students.

Taking the Business Communication Skills model off-shore

The University of South Australia has a total of 5,600 international students, with 4,200 enrolled in offshore programs in Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, China and Indonesia. Significantly, the Division of Business and Enterprise is responsible for nearly 60% of the University's international students and over 76% of the University's offshore students (University of South Australia 2001). Clearly, the Division of BUE has a responsibility to meet the language and academic needs of this significant student population.

Recently, a team-teaching approach, using an adjunct content-based model (Snow & Brinton 1988 & 1997) has been piloted for the subject "Communication for Information Managers" (CIM) in Hong Kong. Although the teaching and learning environment in Hong Kong is vastly different to that of Adelaide, NESB students studying in both countries have a number of fundamental things in common, including:

- Often inadequate or barely adequate English language proficiency for university study;
- A lack of understanding of academic conventions (such as referencing);
- A tendency to plagiarise in assessment tasks, largely because of the two factors above;
- An expectation by some students that because of the huge expense involved in studying at the University of South Australia, students can expect to be given "special consideration" (in terms of grading and overall results); and

- A cultural and linguistic background that may not have fostered the development of critical thinking.

With these similarities in mind, the BCS lecturer worked closely with the CIM lecturer throughout the first semester to adapt the curriculum, and then both lecturers delivered the course, using adjoining lecture theatres and complementary materials.

With only one visit completed, and no assessment tasks submitted, it is difficult to predict whether the new team-teaching approach has had a positive affect on students' learning. However, anecdotal evidence would suggest that students enjoyed and felt that they benefited a great deal from the new approach.

Developing similar courses in other tertiary institutions

Content-based ESL may not be appropriate for all universities. However, for those institutions wishing to integrate ESL in the curriculum and faculty, a number of prerequisites need to be established. These include:

- recognition from management of the particular needs of NESB tertiary students;
- acknowledgement from management and faculty that a minimum IELTS score is barely adequate for successful academic study (Pantelides 1999; Wajnryb 2000);
- acceptance of language specialists as qualified academics, rather than academic support staff;
- the housing of a language specialist in the faculty so that meaningful collegial relationships can be developed (Pantelides 1999);
- approval from management for additional workload points to be allocated for developing content-based courses, in recognition of the "double-load" such courses entail, both in curriculum development and assessment (Snow & Brinton 1988);

- commitment at all levels to being responsible for providing meaningful assistance to fee paying International students (Pantelides 1999).

Conclusion

The University of South Australia has made a commitment to developing appropriate models of language and academic support for the high proportion of International students studying in the Division of Business and Enterprise, both in Australia and in the offshore programs.

After the successful pilot and ongoing development of the content-based ESL course, “Business Communication Skills for NESB students”, a permanent position has been created for a full-time lecturer to work in the School of International Business. In making this position part of the faculty, rather than employing LAS lecturers on a semester-by-semester basis, significant progress has been made towards expanding and delivering other integrated ESL courses for undergraduate and postgraduate students.

In addition to providing an alternative strategy to the traditional model of occasional, not-for-credit assistance offered by a student support centre, this arrangement has been instrumental in changing the way other academic staff view language and academic support.

It is the contention of this paper that integrated, content-based ESL courses, taught by appropriately qualified language specialists, working within faculties, is a highly effective model that has been advocated by many ESL practitioners for over 15 years.

As Sarah Benesch so eloquently argues:

> Rather than remaining isolated from the academic mainstream or acting as a tutoring service, [LAS lecturers] can bring a critical and informed perspective to [university] teaching practices by collaborating as equal partners with other faculty members. (Benesch 1992, p. 8)

The next stage in this project will be the development and implementation of a clear program of evaluation to verify the anecdotal evidence on which this paper is based.

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* Of the 40 universities in Australia, Central Queensland University, The University of Sydney, Griffith University, Adelaide University, The University of Melbourne and The University of NSW are known to offer content-based ESL courses for credit. These courses are usually facilitated or taught by LAS lecturers working outside faculties.

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ENHANCING ESSAY FEED-BACK USING 'MINDTRAIL'® SOFTWARE: EXACTLY WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE IN STUDENT DEVELOPMENT?

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As part of my changing identity as an LAS lecturer, I find myself working with lecturers to help them provide students with worthwhile feedback on essays. This is a demanding task, particularly when classes are large. Comments in the margins take time to write, and markers often find themselves repeating comments on many papers. With multiple markers, consistency of approach to feedback is elusive. 'Mindtrail'® software offers lecturers the opportunity to construct a detailed 'knowledge tree' based on their assessment criteria, so that when assessing an essay a marker can select appropriate marks and comments from a pre-existing bank, with the option of editing bank items if necessary. This process leads to the production of a detailed printed report for each student, which may include directions to appropriate learning development resources. Limited initial

experience with this software during 2000 suggested that its use could improve the degree to which first year students improved their marks on a re-submittable essay. However, it was unclear what component/s of the new approach were making the difference. This presentation reports on a small comparative study in Semester 1, 2001 which aimed to differentiate between the effect of using the software to provide printed reports to students, and that of using the same detailed criteria but marking the assignments 'by hand'. As well as reporting on the study findings, the presentation introduces the software package and discusses its strengths and weaknesses as a tool for providing essay feedback in the university context.

Keywords: rubric, automated feedback provision

Introduction

The overall goal of the intervention underlying this paper was to facilitate the provision of feedback by tutors on written work, with the aim of improving student learning, in this case of essay-writing skills in the context of a first year agricultural science subject. The subject Environment and Society has for a number of years used a resubmittable essay marked against clear criteria as a tool to encourage students to focus on the relationship between the what and the how of essay writing. A range of detailed learning resources has been prepared to help students develop the skills needed to succeed in this assignment and build a foundation for future skill development, but lecturers report that a substantial number of students fails to consult them appropriately. Thus there was a need to link student outcomes more closely to the resources they need to use to improve their performance. The software package Mindtrail[å] was identified as offering the potential to facilitate this kind of feedback to students, and preliminary results suggested that its use could enhance the improvement students achieved on a resubmittable essay (I.Nuberg, pers. comm. July 2000). A study was set up to compare the improvements in marks obtained on resubmission between students in three tutorial groups where feedback

was provided using the Mindtrail program and those in five groups where tutors provided feedback ‘by hand’, using the same detailed criteria that formed the Mindtrail schema.

Mindtrailâ : automated feedback provision

Mindtrailâ is a computer software package marketed by Mindtrail Software Pty Ltd, Brisbane. Unfortunately, between when this paper was accepted for presentation and the time of the conference, the company has experienced some difficulties and has ceased trading. Therefore it is no longer appropriate to pursue the aim stated in the abstract of introducing interested LAS professionals to the software package. Nevertheless, a basic understanding of what the package offered is necessary to follow the research project being discussed, and so an outline is provided here.

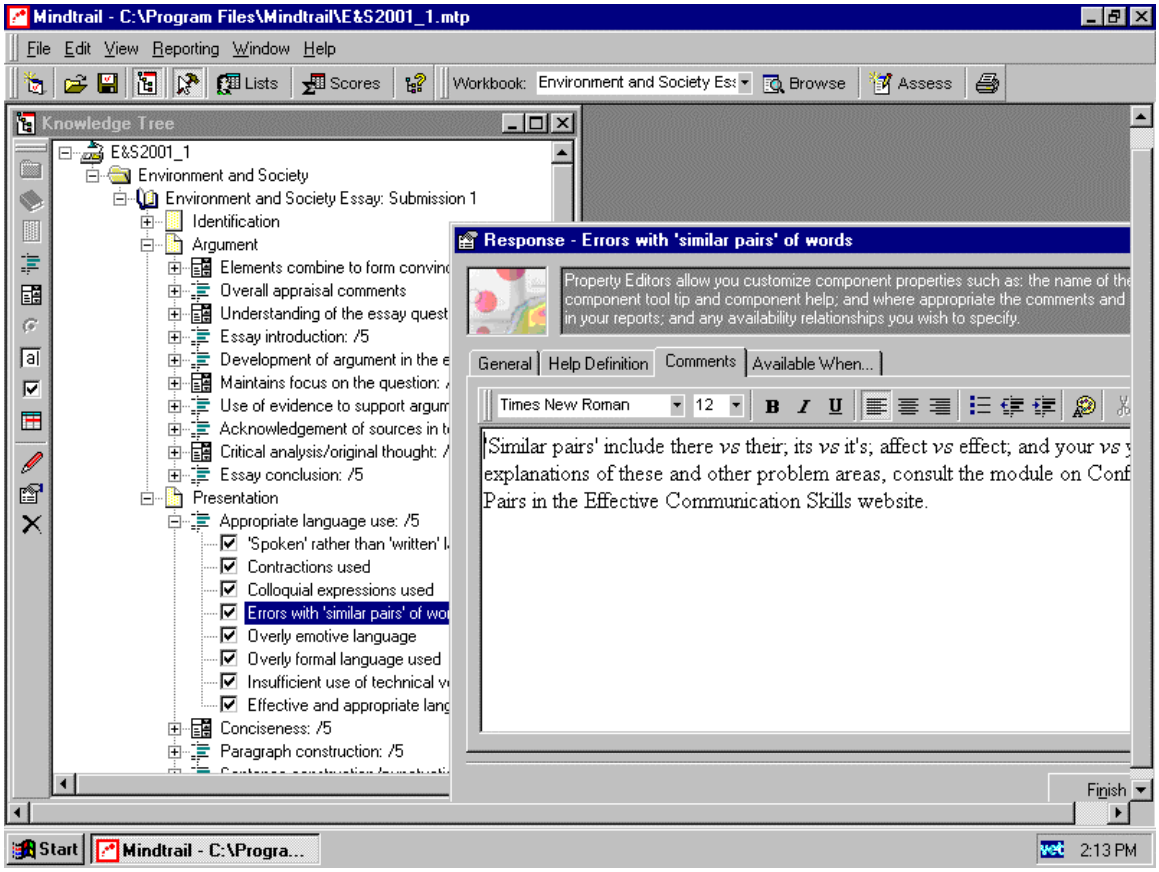
To use Mindtrail to mark an assignment, lecturers first develop clear criteria for each aspect of the assignment they want to assess. Using these they develop a ‘Knowledge Tree’ (KT) within the software program. The KT incorporates a response choice (which can include a mark) for each level to which each particular criterion could be met. Each response option can include a comment, explaining what was wrong and/or directing the student to resources they can use to improve their performance. This feature was thought important for the trial we conducted, as detailed learning resources are available to address many of the areas where students need to improve, but they had not been used appropriately in past years. Figure 1 illustrates these features as they appear on a user’s computer screen.

To mark a student’s assignment, the lecturer or tutor creates a new report from a class-list downloaded into the program . For each assessment criterion, the marker then selects the response that corresponds to the student’s performance. Default responses and associated comments can be overridden or additional comments inserted if required, and all reports associated with the knowledge tree can be retrospectively updated to include additional features if desired. Markers can also customise the level of detail in the reports printed out for each student to receive. The sample report included as Appendix 2 contains all available levels.

Method

The study reported here compares the improvements in marks obtained on resubmission of an essay between students in three tutorial groups where feedback

Figure 1: On-screen representation of a Mindtrail Knowledge Tree showing the comment option



was provided using the Mindtrail program (n=40) and those in five groups where tutors provided feedback 'by hand', using the same detailed criteria that formed the Mindtrail schema (n=64). Thus the assessment criteria were the same for both treatments, and the variable of interest was the way in which feedback was provided to the students. Each group had a different tutor, of whom two were experienced lecturers and the remaining six were postgraduate students. .

The effect of tutor was a possible confounding influence. All teaching about the essay and what was expected of the students' texts was given by the tutors, following a training session run by the researcher in her role as Language and

Learning lecturer. The faculty which offers this subject provides to each first year student a hard-copy booklet entitled 'Written Communication in the Faculty of Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences' (http://www.waite.adelaide.edu.au/Courses/written.html), and this serves as a common base for the skills teaching, together with specific materials provided to tutors which incorporate annotated examples of good and poor attempts to address each of the assessment criteria. The same tutors then mark the essay, return it to the students and re-mark it when it is resubmitted.

The essay topic was a challenging one for first year students and read as follows. "The general public is becoming increasingly mistrustful of science and technology, especially in agriculture and environmental management. Many scientists argue that the blame for this lies with those presenting misinformation for political or monetary gain, and that the skepticism produced will make it difficult to implement beneficial technologies in the future. In the light of the above statements, select one of the issues below (or an alternative that has been the source of recent controversy) and write an essay which:

- investigates the scientific background to the issue;
- evaluates the presentation of the issue to the public; and
- states and justifies your views on the issue.

For each information source you use, consider how the author is a stakeholder in the issue and how this may influence the information presented.

Issues: The use of genetically modified organisms in food production

BSE ('mad cow' disease)

Logging of old-growth forest

Increased vineyard establishment in relation to the availability of water"

Results and Discussion

The mean improvement in marks out of 20 for students who resubmitted in each tutorial group is shown in Table 1.

Mindtrail			Non-Mindtrail		
Group	**n**	**Mean improvement**	**Group**	**n**	**Mean improvement**
M1	14	4.75	NM1	16	4.81
M2	14	3.71	NM2	17	4.11
M3	12	4.77	NM3	12	2.17
			NM4	11	1.65
			NM5	8	2.44

Table 1: Mean improvement in mark/20 for tutorial groups given feedback using Mindtrail (M) and without it (NM)

Average student marks improved for both marking systems (***P*** < 0.001). Although improvements were generally higher for students in groups where feedback was prepared using Mindtrail, there was no significant effect of feedback system on improvement (***P*** = 0.19). There were significant main effects of feedback system and time of marking, ie. Mindtrail users gave higher marks on both occasions (***P*** < 0.001; $\boldsymbol{Mean}_{\text{Mindtrail}}$ = 12/20; $\boldsymbol{Mean}_{\text{NotMindtrail}}$ = 10.6/20).

However, the variance in marks between individual tutorial groups was three times greater for groups where Mindtrail was not used than those where it was. This suggests that the use of Mindtrail could help to promote consistency across multiple markers of a single assignment. Indeed, other academics who use the software for

their own marking report anecdotally that they are more confident of their own consistency as a result.

An additional advantage of the software is the in-built requirement that a marker must develop detailed assessment criteria for any assignment to be marked using it. However, such detailed criteria can also be used without a supporting software package, and the results of this study are inconclusive in determining whether use of the software improves student learning outcomes over use of the criteria alone. Further research with a broader range of markers may help to answer this question.

Disadvantages of using the software include the time required to learn the program and develop the knowledge trees, as well as the possibility that markers may feel overly constrained by the need to select from a given number of pre-determined choices, rather than being free to respond more globally to student work. As long as the ability to respond globally is accompanied by a willingness in markers to provide useful written feedback to students, such a claim can be accepted. However, where pressure of time decreases the likelihood that any useful feedback will be given, the constraints of a semi-automated system such as Mindtrail may well be the lesser evil. Students generally responded positively to the personalised reports they received as a result of their tutors' using Mindtrail in this study, and it is possible that such a response could translate into pressure for improved feedback across the board in the future.

Many of the staff at Adelaide who have begun to use Mindtrail as part of this trial and associated activities will continue to do so, but the degree to which its use can spread will of course be limited by the difficulties currently being experienced by the company which was marketing the software. Anyone interested in pursuing the idea is encouraged to keep abreast of developments on this web-site: http://www.mindtrail.com/

Appendix 1: Essay Assessment Criteria: Environment and Society 2001

Argument

Understanding of the essay question	/5
· Both ‘content’ and ‘action’ words understood	
Essay introduction	/5
· Connects essay to the ‘big picture’	
· Does not assume too much knowledge	
· Includes clear focal statement	
Development of argument in the body of the essay	/5
· Points within paragraphs well linked	
· Ideas well linked between paragraphs	
Maintaining focus on the question	/5
Use of evidence to support argument	/10
· No unsupported opinion	
· Evidence used is relevant and up-to-date	
· Evidence used is credible in the context of this essay	
Acknowledgment of sources in the text	/10
· All sources are referenced in the text of the essay	
· All in-text referencing follows set style accurately	
Critical analysis / original thought	/5
· Essay evaluates evidence presented	
· Own judgements are presented and justified	

Essay conclusion /5

- Does not simply repeat earlier sentences; brings argument together
- No new material introduced here
- Relates clearly to points raised in introduction

Elements combine to form a convincing essay /10

Presentation

Appropriate language use /5

- Avoids ‘chatty’ language: contractions, slang or colloquialisms
- Avoids overly emotive language
- Uses technical vocabulary where appropriate but avoids jargon
- Language used expresses intended meaning accurately

Conciseness /5

- Avoids repeating ideas
- No redundant expressions or unnecessary words

Paragraph construction /5

- Topic sentences point to main idea of paragraph
- Only one main idea per paragraph, developed logically
- Paragraphs are an appropriate length and separated consistently

Sentence construction / punctuation /5

- No sentence fragments; complete sentences of suitable length used throughout
- Correct punctuation and use of apostrophes
- Grammar errors do not interfere with comprehension

Proofreading /5

- Spelling or typographical errors do not distract reader from the argument

Elements combine to form clear, fluent prose	/5
Reference list	/10

- Items in correct order
- All items follow set style accurately
- All sources cited in the text are in the list
- All items in the list are cited in the text

Appendix 2: Sample Student Report Prepared using Mindtrailâ

Environment and Society Essay: Submission 1

The assessment report that follows has been produced using the software program Mindtrail. Please let us know if you find the report format helpful, and make suggestions about improvements. Email suggestions to margaret.cargill@adelaide.edu.au

The report reflects the criteria sheet provided in your subject handout. Each criterion has a maximum possible score written after it (e.g. Essay introduction /5). Marks are deducted for each aspect needing improvement which has been noted under that criterion - these appear as negative numbers on the right hand side of the page in bold. The report also directs you to learning resources which you can access at a convenient time to help you develop your skills in particular areas. You are directed to particular sections of the resources for particular problems; here are the locations of the main resources.

1. "Written Communication in the Faculty of Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences" (Cargill and Bellotti, revised annually) This booklet is distributed in hard copy to all first year students; if you have not received one, visit the Enquiry Offices at Roseworthy or Waite Campuses, or the ACUE, Schulz Bldg, Nth Tce. The full text is also available at this URL: http://www.waite.adelaide.edu.au/Courses/written.html

2. Effective Communication modules. These are available online at the following URL: http://online.adelaide.edu.au/CommunicationSkills

You log on to the site in the same way as to your university email. Most of the modules are also available as hard copy Self-Access Tutorial booklets from these locations:

· North Terrace: ACUE, level 2, Schulz Building

· Roseworthy: upstairs foyer of the Main Building

· Waite: Room 200, Charles Hawker Building (above the computing suites)

3. Individual consultations. If you would like to discuss your essay further, please make an appointment, either with your tutor or with a lecturer in the Language and Learning Service (LLS) of the ACUE. Tutor contact details are in the subject booklet. For an appointment with an LLS lecturer, phone 8303 5771 or email margaret.cargill@adelaide.edu.au

Identification

Student2

Essay topic

The general public is becoming increasingly mistrustful of science and technology, especially in agriculture and environmental management. Many scientists argue that the blame for this lies with those presenting misinformation for political or monetary gain, and that the scepticism produced will make it difficult to implement beneficial technologies in the future. In the light of the above statements, select one of the issues below (or an alternative that has been the source of recent controversy) and write an essay which:

- investigates the scientific background to the issue;
- evaluates the presentation of the issue to the public; and
- states and justifies your views on the issue.

For each information source you use, consider how the author is a stakeholder in the issue and how this may influence the information presented.

Issue choice: *BSE ('mad cow' disease)*
100

Argument

Elements combine to form convincing essay: /10

6

Overall appraisal comments

Good effort but some improvements needed

0

Understanding of the essay question: /5

'Action' words not fully understood

Your answer does not demonstrate a good understanding of the question point 3 "state and justify you views on the issue". You need to express you point of view and justify it, not merely present scientific facts and assume these are your views.

-3

Essay introduction: /5

Effective introduction

Your introduction does a good job of clarifying your standpoint and indicating how you will develop the rest of the essay.

0

Development of argument in the essay body: /5

Fair attempt at logical argument

Your reader can mostly follow how your argument is developing, but sometimes you have not highlighted enough the connection between points or between evidence and the point it is supporting.

-2

Maintains focus on the question: /5

Some slight digressions

-1

Use of evidence to support argument/10

Some use of evidence but more needed

Not all of the points you make are supported by relevant evidence. When working on your final draft of any assignment, this is one feature you should check thoroughly.

-6

Acknowledgement of sources in text: /10

Some sources not referenced in text

Wherever the information in your essay has been obtained from another source, you are required to identify that source in the relevant sentence in your essay through referencing. If you do not cite all your sources, you are in danger of plagiarising (using other people's words or ideas without acknowledgement, as if they were your own). Please check Chapter 5 in the booklet "Written Communication in the Faculty of Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences".

-5

Critical analysis/original thought: /5

Some evidence of analysis

Try to apply a critical approach to all the evidence you use so that the whole essay presents your reasoned evaluations.

-3

Essay conclusion: /5

Excellent conclusion

Your conclusion successfully reviews the issues raised in the essay and finalises your argument.

0

Presentation

Appropriate language use: /5

Effective and appropriate language chosen

You have used vocabulary and structures that are appropriate for a first year essay in this subject.

0

Conciseness: /5

No wasted words

0

Paragraph construction: /5

Paragraphs too short or long

Although it is difficult to make hard and fast rules about the length of paragraphs, single sentence paragraphs are to be avoided, as they make the essay disjointed and obscure the flow of the argument.

-1

Sentence construction/punctuation: /5

Well constructed and punctuated sentences

0

Proofreading: /5

A few errors observed

Always use the computer Spellcheck, and remember also to read the final draft carefully yourself to pick up mistakes the computer cannot see. These include there/their/they're; its/it's; to/too/two; practice/practise; affect/effect.

-2

Elements combine to form clear, fluent prose: /5

-2

Reference list: /10

Required style not followed: a few errors

You were required to use a minimum of 5 references for this essay!

To correct the few errors you've made, see Chapter 5 in the booklet "Written Communication in the Faculty of Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences". See also Section 8 for an example of a correct reference list. If you are still unsure, send your query to margaret.cargill@adelaide.edu.au, or phone 35771 for an appointment.

-4

Total: 67

Changing Identities

STUDENT IDENTITIES IN TIMES OF CHANGE

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Student identities undergo enormous change on entry into the university system. Many find the change in expectations from high school or TAFE overwhelming and the alienation of a large institution adds to this. Our work as LAS advisers, whether as lecturers/tutors in discipline specific contexts, generalists in workshop situations or one-to-one teachers of tertiary literacy/numeracy, is limited to some extent because we are part of the institution. With the move toward technologising and globalising university study it is increasingly important that new students have access to a non-threatening, informal learning situation that will provide them with non-institutional, student driven support. Such a program exists at UWS and has been found to provide first year students with sufficient encouragement to continue with their courses, and often to develop their understanding of academic expectations, despite the chaos of the ongoing restructuring situation they find themselves in. Much of the peer mentor program at UWS has been co-ordinated by the Learning Centre, and has been a rewarding experience for those involved.

Keywords: restructure; identity; peer mentoring

Background

The University of Western Sydney (UWS) has been undergoing a process of restructure for the past eighteen months, as part of the process of economic rationalism. Concurrently, there has been a steady decrease in staff morale and increase in student grievances, including some media covered incidents, such as students having to wait forty five minutes to sit for exams because papers were not printed on time (Contractor, 2001). In addition to having to acclimatise to this state of confusion, students have to encounter other more expected challenges to their identity, as well as absorb the changes inherent in globalisation and technological advancement.

There are many changes to which students must adapt when entering the university setting, not the least of which is learning how to learn independently. Furthermore, the transfer from high school, or TAFE, can be alienating because of the sheer size of most universities. Many students become “lost” in this new world of “foreign” discourses, higher academic expectations, which are often not clearly defined, and the discomfort of perhaps not knowing anyone (James & Scoufis, 1995). For those from NESB backgrounds, or who are first generation university students, learning the accepted "behaviours" can be quite traumatic. At UWS the numbers of these students is quite high, therefore the availability of a meaningful support system is paramount. While the role of learning advisers is important, they are still part of the institution, the same institution which has been undergoing a restructure and often causing enormous inconvenience and stress to students. Consequently, we can still be seen as integral to the institution and regarded with some caution. From this perspective, a more informal student orientated approach could prove to be more effective in encouraging first year students to adapt to their new tertiary environment. One effective student orientated approach, which has been successful at UWS, is student peer mentoring. This is a strategy that can be useful in enabling the students to cope with their identity changes, eventually enabling them to become independent learners.

A number of universities in Australia, and overseas (Dolan & Castley, 1998), have found that peer student mentoring programs are of benefit to new students

(mentees), as well as to the students who mentor them (Bond, 1999). Student mentoring schemes can be "buddy" programs, for example, the very successful Student Mentor Program at Central Queensland University (see website: http://www.cqu.edu.au/cch/mentor.htm), or those more focussed on the learning process, such as the well researched "Supplemental Instruction" (SI) model from the USA. The latter model has been functioning at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and other institutions throughout the world for over 25 years (see University of Missouri - Kansas City website: http://www.umkc.edu/cad). "SI" has been found to be effective for improving retention and pass rates for mentees. Mentor programs have been found to be of considerable benefit to mentees with regard to "enhancing ....learning strategies and study skills; transforming passive students into questioning and autonomous learners; providing a relaxed and non-threatening environment" (Bond, 1999, p. 11 - 13). Similarly mentors benefit from an increase in confidence, and in developing a greater sense of understanding of the course content and of learning with others (Bond, 1999). Moreover, a number of industries and discipline areas are interested in developing workplace mentoring, for example, education and business, where such skills are highly valued.

Peer Mentoring – a brief history of programs at UWS

In 1995 the then Head of the Learning Centre, Joanne Tiernan, returned from the USA with the interesting Supplemental Instruction package of peer mentoring. This was introduced to UWS, Nepean, in “difficult subjects” to assist students in understanding content and developing learning strategies in their discipline areas, through the guidance of a trained mentor. Mentors were recruited from student records, and were expected to have achieved a credit or better in the subject.

The program remained fairly small, due to limited funds and support, but was quite successful nonetheless. Evaluation and review of the program revealed that mentees (first year participants) in some subjects had increased grades compared to those who did not receive mentoring, furthermore, retention rates were improved (Shores & Tiernan, 1996).

Other mentoring programs existed within the university and included international student and local student orientation programs, a mentoring subject in education and a compulsory program, adapted from Supplemental Instruction (SI), in Engineering. All were found to be successful, particularly the latter (Shrestha, 1999).

In 1999 a steering committee was formed to amalgamate the various mentoring programs within UWS Nepean, and from this a new program was established for first semester called “Acculturation mentoring”. This was largely based on the Engineering model from previous years, with an emphasis on SI techniques for training.

From 2000 to 2001 the program has been streamlined and expanded, mostly on two campuses, and thus has enabled more first year students to take advantage of the opportunity to develop academic understanding and independent learning skills, become more familiar with expectations, and form networks for friendship and study.

How peer mentoring has functioned at UWS

Various mentoring schemes existing at UWS, Nepean, prior to the year 2000, have been amalgamated successfully and each program is conducted independently, with co-ordination of the whole scheme being undertaken by the Learning Centre, Office of the Dean of Students. First year students arriving at the university have been able to participate in one of three orientation mentoring programs. These include Orientation week leaders (OWLs), International orientation mentors and mentors for accelerated high school entrants under the Compacts program. Each set of mentors has been trained by different sections of the university (Student Union, International Centre and, in the latter case, via an accredited subject). The orientation mentoring process is predominantly one to one, with new students able to approach mentors either in person, by phone or by email. In addition to this, in first semester 2000 a group program (Acculturation) was offered in certain discipline areas, and in second semester an SI program, Developmental Learning, was offered in difficult subjects.

Orientation Programs

For Orientation week, the OWLs were trained over a two-day period, by the Students' Union, and by other staff from within the university. Mentors helped extensively at enrolments, handing out Students' Union show bags and answering a variety of questions from new students. The mentors were rewarded with t-shirts, movie vouchers and similar non-monetary rewards. First year students and University staff reported satisfaction with the program, and because of the well established ties with staff in the Division of Student Services and the International Centre the OWLs were able to integrate themselves into university based activities and maximise their interactions with new students.

The aim of the International Student program is to help international students settle into the university and into Sydney generally. The training takes place in November, from a Friday night to Sunday afternoon. The program, which includes cross-cultural issues has a focus on the diversity of mentor backgrounds and team-building, as a foundation for mentoring.

There are three types of mentoring within the International Orientation Mentoring (IOM) program:

(I.) airport mentoring

(II.) transit mentoring (for students in temporary accommodation)

(III.) 'regular' mentoring (carried out on campus re accommodation and settling in).

IOMs were required to attend the International Orientation Program in first semester, where 293 new students registered, and approximately 70 new students attended mentor-led city tours. Mentors were paid $50 per student mentored, $10 per student transit mentored and $50 per airport shift. The program was very successful with over 110 new international students receiving mentoring from 13 mentors. Mentors assisted international students at Orientation, as did OWLS. Eight mentors attended a debriefing focus group in July 2000 where suggestions for streamlining were made and an overwhelmingly positive response to the program was expressed. The

evaluation of this aspect of the program was undertaken by the International Student Adviser.

Another orientation mentoring program is part of the university's Compacts Scheme (CUSP). This scheme allows Year 12 students to accelerate their studies by enrolling in a subject at tertiary level. If they pass the subject it will be accredited to their degree at this university. To assist these students in their adaptation to the requirements at university, trained mentors are provided. In 2000 there were 35 CUSP students enrolled at UWS, Nepean (57 from across UWS) and eight mentors available to them. Most of the mentors were trained in an accredited subject in the Education school of Teaching and Educational Studies, "Student and Workplace Mentoring", and two were trained in the Supplemental Instruction (SI) approach. In 2000, some of the mentors elected to study the postgraduate mentoring subject "Readings in Education." According to the CUSP coordinator, the new students were remarkably independent and competent, and thus required a different form of mentoring. The mentors needed further training in understanding "gifted and talented" students to accommodate the difference between CUSP students and other students they had mentored. They contacted the first year students throughout the entire first semester.

Acculturation Program

While most of the orientation programs were available on an individual basis, it was considered important to offer students an opportunity to make friends, network and form study groups through the mentoring process. The Acculturation mentoring program was a pilot program based on one which had been developed two years previously in the school of Civic Engineering and the Environment, which was very successful, especially in terms of improved retention and pass rates (Shrestha, 1999). The first year students were expected to attend a mentor group, which was allocated space on the weekly timetable. This approach was based on the success of a similar program in previous years. Most of the other schools involved in 2000 preferred a voluntary approach, and for several schools this was their first experience with a mentoring scheme.

Since this was a pilot scheme, it was considered important that the Acculturation Program be evaluated in terms of meeting the main aim, of assisting students entering university study to achieve their personal academic goals with the support of more experienced, trained students (mentors). Questionnaires were used for evaluation of the impact of mentor sessions on the mentee experience, while focus groups and surveys evaluated the mentors' experience.

The schools involved in the pilot program in 2000 were Civic Engineering (CEE), Teaching and Educational Studies (TES), Employment Relations (ER), Law and Nursing & Health. Each of these schools had a contact lecturer, who assisted the student mentors with promotion of the program, helped them find a room, if necessary, and were available for consultation. Mentors were expected to facilitate weekly sessions of one hour each over five weeks, early in the semester. The following were features of the scheme:

Training was conducted over one day, by Learning Centre and Counselling and Health staff, most of whom have attended Supplemental Instruction Train the Trainer workshops, with a debriefing session in week 3 of the program.

The total number of students trained to be mentors was 45. Each mentor was trained in an model adapted from Supplemental Instruction. Certificates for attending training were distributed and book vouchers of $50 for participation in the program were distributed at the conclusion of the five weeks.

Debriefing for the training revealed positive experiences, though indications were that perhaps there was too much emphasis on some aspects, such as"ice breakers", while more time could be spent on useful activities for sessions.

Program:

Most schools, with the exception of CEE, ran voluntary programs. The mentors were available for five weeks early in first semester, with CEE extending its program for the entire semester with the additional expectation that mentors would submit a short weekly report by email.

Debriefing with mentors revealed some problems with attendance of first year students. Questionnaires were distributed to first year students in core subjects in those schools involved in an effort to determine reasons for non attendance and, more importantly, to evaluate the mentoring sessions.

Results:

Reasons for not attending mentoring sessions were based on results from the questionnaires from only three schools: TES (N=51), Law (N=101) and Nursing & Health (N=37), as only one reply was received from ER (a mentee) and CEE had very few who did not attend. The main reasons given for not attending included: not aware of the program (51% in Nursing/Health); lack of time (38% in Law); didn't need help (especially TES- 32%). Responses from those who did attend mentoring sessions were positive, based on a total of 75 questionnaires received from the three programs which ran regular sessions: Engineering (41.3%), Education (28%) and Law (20%).

The majority of mentees found the sessions to be useful (62%), while 65% of the Engineering students and 43% of Law students agreed that the sessions encouraged them to continue with their course. 54% of the Engineering students agreed that the sessions helped them to understand their course, and 76% of the Engineering students felt that the mentor had answered most the their questions relating to adjustment to university. Half the total mentee responses indicated that the sessions provided them with an opportunity to network with peers. Those who had attended five or more sessions appeared to have gained the most benefit. While the overall responses indicate that more students agreed that the sessions were beneficial than disagreed (see appendix), there were some students who were undecided. It would possibly be worthwhile to research those students' responses at a further stage in their studies, to gain the benefit of hindsight. Perhaps they would have different perceptions at the end of second year, than they had at the end of semester one, first year. It would also have been interesting to research the performance of the participating students (GPA) and their attrition rate, compared to the first year cohort for that school. However, as it was a pilot program and mentors were not fully aware of the importance of keeping accurate records of mentee

attendances, this was not possible. The evaluation of the 2001 program will include these aspects.

Questionnaires were also distributed to the mentors by mail. Furthermore, they were invited to attend focus group discussions to evaluate the program. Final analysis of the focus groups and questionnaires has given a clear indication that the process was beneficial for mentors. Of the 45 mentors trained, 16 attended focus groups for discussion and debriefing, and mentor survey responses revealed that mentors enjoyed interacting with new students (50%). Most felt they had benefited (63%) from the experience. For example, they included comments such as “helped me to feel part of the university”. Several mentors felt they gained in self confidence, leadership and interpersonal skills. Both the focus groups and questionnaires brought forth a number of suggestions for improving the program, such as “more advertising to first years”, more possibility of “being able to help with subject related questions”. These suggestions have been incorporated into the program for 2001.

Developmental Learning

The second semester Developmental Learning program in 2000 was small. Difficult subjects, such as Introductory Financial Accounting, were targetted in this Supplemental Instruction based program, and twelve quality mentors were trained, though not all managed to establish groups. One Bioscience group decided to continue to meet without their mentor, after the five weeks were completed, and this was considered to be the mark of a successful group. While this particular semester's program was unable to be evaluated, several other similar programs conducted at this university have shown positive improvements in student results (Shores & Tiernan, 1996). Research into SI programs in other countries has provided evidence of benefits to first year students' retention rates and grades (see University of Missouri - Kansas City website: http://www.umkc.edu/cad).

Current Program

This year, 2001, has seen a growth in the number of mentors training to participate in the university's scheme aimed at supporting first year students. For example, the number of mentors trained for the Acculturation program doubled to 80, as did the

number for the Developmental Learning program, which doubled to 40. All of the above mentioned orientation programs have been conducted, followed by the Acculturation and then the Developmental Learning programs. None have been evaluated yet, though this is seen to be essential to ensure that mentoring continues after the restructure is completed. The co-ordination of mentoring at UWS will no doubt continue to involve those discipline lecturers, learning development staff and administration staff who participate in the programs, in a most satisfying aspect of supporting students in their first year of tertiary learning.

Some of the comments from past mentors provide convincing indicators of the satisfaction they have gained from being involved in the program, and the benefits they perceive for first years adapting to their new learning enviornment:

" …peer mentoring sessions were fun, meeting first years and helping them out in the best possible way…"

"The mentees and I got on well, more like friends that anything else. I felt it was good for them to have a familiar face around the campus who had experienced what they were going through."

"The peer mentoring sessions were a worthwhile experience for the first year students as well as of benefit to the senior students."

(regarding mentees) .."Most of them are still here in second semester, whereas when we were in first year a lot of people dropped off…"

"Some first years were a lot less worried about a subject than they were before."

(Armstrong & Carmichael, 2000)

Conclusion

At a crucial period of time in the history of the University of Western Sydney, where students are coping with the effects of a restructure, rapid loss of staff, increased use of technology and globalisation of tertiary education, it is important that there is an emphasis on providing a "human face" for new students. Student peer mentoring is

not a new approach to providing that human face, however, it is a successful complement to the human faces provided by the institution. The student mentors offer an opportunity for newer students to learn about the expectations at university, without intimidation and in a relaxed situation.

While the sample of first year students participating in the pilot Acculturation mentoring program at UWS in the year 2000 was small, the evaluation of student perceptions indicates that more students agreed that the program was beneficial than disagreed. A smaller group were undecided, but may have different perceptions if surveyed at a later time in their degree studies. Academic performance and attrition rates were unable to be examined, but will be an important aspect of evaluation of the 2001 program. Furthermore, the feedback from mentors was generally positive and it would seem that the programs offered an opportunity for these students to gain increased confidence in group situations, something which will be of benefit in their future professional lives.

Finally, the continuation of a student peer mentoring program at UWS is dependent upon the financial support of the university management, particularly in terms of the provision of book vouchers or some form of reward for the mentors. However, considering the uncertainty surrounding the restructure, perhaps the ultimate aim of the program, whatever shape it takes in the future, should be to involve the students more in the overall organisation of the program, such that it becomes increasingly student driven. There is certainly a willingness on the part of some mentors to become involved as “mentors to the mentors”, perhaps a first step toward co-ordinating the program themselves?

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HALL OF MIRRORS: REFLECTIONS ON A MULTI-CAMPUS LANGUAGE AND LEARNING PROGRAM.

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This paper presents a broad picture of a multi-campus language and learning program which operates across six Australian campuses and one South African campus, with links to still another in Malaysia. The model of delivery which has been adopted is a "mixed model", incorporating aspects of all four models identified as operating in the Australian context (McLean, Surtie, Elphinstone & Devlin, 1995). The paper considers how the program has evolved since its expansion to all campuses in 1996, taking into account theoretical, pedagogical, policy, political and strategic

perspectives. The ways external and internal forces act and interact on the service will be examined. A particular focus of the paper is how these forces might shape a language and academic skills program which echoes the Australian model on an "overseas" campus. A language and academic skills program is clearly affected by changing identities of many kinds, but can also be an agent of change. The question is raised as to how a changing identity might be managed to facilitate maximum opportunity for program growth and development. The paper suggests finally that, with our understanding of the relationship of the generic to the specific (Taylor, 2000), language and learning units are well-placed to adapt to the kinds of change described.

Background

For language and academic skills units in Australian universities, while identities change, the structural model selected often remains the same - or at least until the next review. The history of Learning Centres in Australia (Language and Learning Units or Language and Academic Skills Units) has not yet been written, but would reveal a tale both of great hardship and great endeavour. For the current paper, the first author has seen the development of the Unit at the Monash campuses since the mid-80s, while the other two authors have seen what is in many ways a unique development: the first six months of language and learning at the Monash South Africa campus.

While the term "Learning Centre" would, on the face of it, appear to have connections with the US-style "Writing Centre", such units in Australia, possibly because of their later development, have been from their very early stages based on an understanding of "language as social practice" (Street, 1995), and have insisted on the necessary disciplinary connections irrespective of their structural arrangements within the university. It is surprising to all of us how debate still continues in the United States in some quarters about whether the "writing specialist" can say anything meaningful about the disciplinary assignment.

In Australia, at least four models of delivery have been tried (McLean, Surtie, Elphinstone & Devlin, 1995). These take into account five key areas: location of unit,

nature of support; student population; size of unit and lines of communication between units in the same institution (McLean ***et al***. 1995, p. 79). The majority of units in 1995 were located within faculties or student services, with smaller numbers in academic staff development or "other". The main advantages identified for faculty location were contextualisation of material, academic credibility, a research link and potential for collaboration with faculty staff. Disadvantages were: possibilities of unequal access if not all faculties provided support; possible student unwillingness to use the service if the link with faculty and assessment seemed to be strong; duplication of resources; and insufficient critical mass.

Advantages for units located in student services were listed as: pooling of resources, ongoing professional development; equality of access; independence of faculty, ability to target groups cross-faculty by needs; potential for resource allocation. Disadvantages were possible lack of academic credibility, fewer research opportunities; and that contextualisation and successful operation depended on ability to liaise with faculty staff.

The other two models - within an academic staff development unit, or provision of services, perhaps co-opting faculty staff or providing mentor programs - are models which, arguably can also be ***functions*** of either of the other two more broadly-used models.

Since that paper was published what has happened in a number of universities is that the development of online learning in tertiary education has resulted in configurations changing somewhat. Previously, units under review were faced with the somewhat exasperated question from university management of "where can we put them?" Now with the embracing of workplace "teams", the need to provide quality online learning, and the internationalisation movement, Learning Centres seem to be regarded as equal partners with staff development, educational design, multimedia design, library and other key team players in academic support.

At Monash, for example, since 1998 the Language and Learning Services Unit (LLS), previously in Student Services, has been grouped with staff development, educational design, multimedia design, audiovisual services, production and flexible

learning units which comprise the Centre for Learning and Teaching Support (CeLTS).

Review and expansion

Monash has six Victorian campuses: at Berwick, Clayton, Caulfield, Gippsland, Peninsula, Parkville (the Pharmacy College). Two of these (Caulfield and Parkville) can be considered inner-suburban, one suburban (Clayton), two outer-suburban (Berwick and Peninsula) and one rural (Gippsland). There are more than 44,000 students enrolled at these campuses, including some 9,000 studying by distance. There are two overseas campuses (Malaysia and South Africa), together with a number of sites where Monash students study (eg Hong Kong, Singapore).

Determining an appropriate model for a Learning Centre in such an organisation has never been straightforward. A mixed model, incorporating elements, particularly of the first two models outlined above has been the one selected. An historical perspective is required as background to understand the operation of the present Centre. Education minister Dawkins' amalgamations meant that the smaller campuses of Caulfield and Peninsula brought to their 1990 marriage with the larger Clayton campus a model (let us call it the student services model) which had operated for five and three years respectively. At Clayton campus, Gordon Taylor and Rosemary Viete had provided programs funded by their faculties (Arts and Education), but it was becoming clear that there was inequitable provision: time for a review.

The review took two years, and it was important that we had input. While the final document hedged its bets a little hazy about what should happen at Clayton campus, the detail, essentially the recommendation was that the Unit should be centrally organised (from Clayton), with the smaller campuses continuing as small centrally-located operations. Each campus could have – if not a "local habitation and a name" – at any rate its own identity, coloured by its particular location. As Head, I was able to initiate the Clayton campus operation as faculty-based, but with access to central offices which would be built in the following few years (including a seminar room, lab

and resource centre). Not for the first time, we learnt the lesson that, if you are in on something from the beginning, your capacity to shape your identity is multiplied.

Caulfield campus continued (despite having smaller overall student numbers than Clayton - the major campus), to attract the largest number of international students, with the Business and Economics faculty the major focus. After Clayton campus, the Unit's next largest group of staff was concentrated here. Parkville (with small student numbers) was visited one day per week by a Caulfield staff member. Peninsula campus, with Nursing and Education among other faculties, had one LLS staff member, dealing with lower non-English speaking backgrounds numbers, but higher mature-age. Gippsland, had LLS staff job-sharing one position, and had rural students as well as students studying at a distance. Berwick campus support was initiated as a pilot program (at 0.4) in 2000, and in the following year, was the last Monash campus in Australia to be allocated ongoing funding for language and learning - another example of that institutional rule: the institution abhorreth unequal provision.

The reason for the late provision is interesting. I was offered at the end of 1995 - by my then line manager - the opportunity for a small amount of sessional funding for Berwick, very shortly after we were funded for our expansion. I thanked him, but said no. Given the small number of students at that stage, and because I knew that other areas had to set up full-scale student service-type operations on tight budgets, I said I was prepared to wait. Collegial relations with the other areas, I felt, may already have been strained by the fact that already our budget was being increased, while for their core business, they were managing with less. So, I waited five years. At least now, the students at Berwick, have their own "version", mirroring in its own way the Unit's central principles and values.

Happily, most of the principles put forward by McLean et al were permitted by the above implementation. While the original Monash Clayton campus was not quite "sandstone", it was an old enough university in the Australian context for the academics to be wary of anything "central" and of anything which could be seen as non-academic. The links which needed to be developed on the smaller campuses were those of ***community***: contacts of many kinds were possible with individuals. But at Clayton campus, while faculties became de facto communities for the staff located

there, it was the staff experience (gained working at Caulfield campus), capacity to conduct (and collaborate in) research, and their ability - for all intents and purposes - to ***look like*** faculty members, that gained the Unit acceptance.

Unnervingly, just as it was about to be implemented, the review was intending to withdraw from us the one weapon which we regarded as the key to our ability to be successful - our continuance as academic staff. At the last minute, a petition we arranged to have signed by almost 100 delegates from the language and academic skills conference at La Trobe in 1995 was enough to delay the Academic Board decision; a degree of lobbying was undertaken and the review was handed down stipulating that the staff be academic. We were thus able to maintain a strong research link and be credible colleagues for the key campus where we had to be accepted - Clayton.

So, with centralised funding, and a central leadership, the Unit has located the bulk of its teaching in the faculties at Clayton campus and from central locations at the smaller campuses. With the mixed model, it is able to experience most of the advantages of the faculty and student services models,[1] and minimise the disadvantages. Unavoidably, the Unit's ability to develop programs depends on the interest of faculty staff, but as with other units, we have ways of making staff interested.

Even with the development of online learning, the key to a successful Learning Centre is the calibre of its staff. Both at the Unit's inception and again in 1995, the staffing could be built from the ground up. The mix of skills and experience sought has changed little but, since the mid-80s the expectation has risen so that by 1996, it was that staff would have a Masters - probably in Linguistics, or maybe in TESOL or something else.

[1] From 1996 each year until 1999, the Unit's budget was reduced. In the new arrangement under CeLTS we now have the budget to cover our base (1996) staffing. During those difficult years, due to our good relationships with faculties, we were able to keep afloat with additional faculty funding.

Principles for design and delivery

Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) write that the language problem for universities is not about "declining literacy standards but rather is about meeting changed social, cultural and informational requirements and circumstances"(p.257). Therefore, Learning Centres are at the centre - even the epicentre - of changes in learning. We are in a unique position in that, from our anthropological bird's eye-view, we are able to detect shifts sometimes before those embedded in their disciplines do; and this must mean that we can act to facilitate change where we see the need. Two examples of this are the language of email and special consideration for NESB students in exams. With the former, it is clear to us that the quality of expression in a student's email should not be a cause for vituperation about the sad state of student literacy. We have to use our linguistic expertise to explain this to staff. A number of universities are nervous about taking the step of allowing dictionaries or extra time for certain student groups; here again, we can use our knowledge and experience to explain how this might facilitate more equal outcomes.

What is quite probably a core value for all Learning Centres in Australia is expressed memorably by Street (1990):

> Literacy is a social practice that varies from one context to another and is part of cultural knowledge and behaviour, not simply a technical competence to be added on to people as though they were machines being upgraded (p. 7)

Awareness of literacy as a social practice - and a cross-cultural one at that - is now a commonplace in Australian and overseas research (eg Candlin, 1998); Lea & Street, 2000). There are, undoubtedly, arguments about what that means - and should mean - for universities. Surely, though, an anthropological understanding of academic literacy as embodying "ideological practice" (Becher, 1989 ;Street, 1995) and embedded in specific "cultural meanings and practices" (Street, 1995) is fundamental to our being able to conduct our daily work. And our daily work includes our capacity to influence the ***way*** things are done as well as to our capacity to see

that they are done. This understanding of academic literacy, as we shall see, has different implications for different campuses of the one university.

Kaplan and Baldauf (1998) point to the Scylla and Charybdis which the good ship Learning Centre must negotiate: our "student equity" perspective, and our "institutional discourse" perspective". The first focuses on the needs of individual students, and the second on those things a university requires or has carriage of. These, in a way, mirror each other, and are sometimes cast misleadingly as either a reactive or proactive approach. We need to position ourselves so that ***we*** can be making the decision about which perspective to work with at any given time.

One way of securing our position so that we can move confidently in any fresh negotiation of stakeholders' interests has been the development of a series of key papers so that we have our principles set out for any enquiry. Thus we have a paper justifying our status as academic, a paper outlining the rationale for our staffing distribution to campuses and faculties, a set of staff procedures and guidelines, among others. Some of these need to change; some stand as historical records. With our documenting of the past comes the capacity to move into the future. Our current preoccupation has to be to explore the ways we become "international" or "global", understanding how the two terms may be at odds.

From the moment interviews were conducted for the new Monash South Africa campus which commenced in February, 2001, it became clear that terms used in Australia did not have a simple reflection in a new place. In Australia, we may have problems with the word "support" in case it does not sound sufficiently "integrated" into mainstream teaching; the South African concern over the word (and their oft stated preference for "academic development") has its origins in the thinking that "support" means that the problem lies in the student's coming from a deprived educational background. Academic development is about changing attitudes and structures (Forson & May, 2000), and has been in recent years the valued term.

Here is the story of the two new LLS staff members: Chris Orsmond (a South African) and Anne Wilson (an Australian).

New off-shore campuses: forging new identities

Unlike Monash Australia, Monash South Africa is a private provider of higher education, and as such, the fee structure affects its accessibility for the wider population. However, students can meet the eligibility criteria for Monash entry and, due to their family's financial status, receive a bursary. Because the government requires all higher education providers to submit data indicating the number of Black, White and Asian students (for Asian read Indian), the following information is available: the student population (of under 100 students) is about 50% black and 50 % white with a few "Asian" students.

Who are our current South African students? The data provided by the administrative unit gives us details of these students family names, first names, courses, school attendance, age grouping and race. But if we return to Franks' (1995) and Gee's (1996) explanations of identity, it gives the curriculum designers little insight into how these students use language, think, feel, believe, value or act in order to develop who they are. We have developed our Unit according to the action research spiral of research, implement, reflect, adapt, and act - and view it as a "work in progress". We have had the ongoing support of all academic staff and the time to weave the concerns of each of the participants: lecturers, students, curriculum writers and ourselves into the reflective process. The identity of the unit has seemed in fact to have a "life of its own" as it has slowly evolved into the current model of operation, involving:

Joint Faculty Delivery. Sessions targeted by the academic staff as 'incoming needs' (assignment preparation, presentations, essay writing). These occur on request and during a specific set tutorial, concentrating simultaneously on the development of academic staff and students.

Individual consultations. These 1-hour sessions are student requested. This was our opportunity to consider the individual identity.

Referrals. These are sessions where students have been sent to us for additional help. They usually occur prior to a task.

Workshops on components of assessment relevant across a number of faculties. The focus of these sessions is dependent on the current needs of the overall university community. Again these sessions were driven by assessment and academic discourse. It was difficult to consider the students' identities, as we were never really sure who would attend.

Anecdotal evidence from conversations with lecturers suggests that students from historically disadvantaged schools are likely to find the transition into first year more challenging, due to the severe constraints under which their schools were operating. They cannot – and should not – be separated from their "real identities" in any learning situation. They are products of their social histories expressed through their use of language, symbols, thoughts, emotions, beliefs, values and actions. An understanding and appreciation of our learners' histories and identities in the broadest ***and*** most specific sense would, we believe, provide us with a starting point and the necessary context for teaching and learning, and also ensure that "alienation and miscommunication is avoided" (Delpit, 1995: 24).

In order to enter a disciplinary apprenticeship at university, students have to accept and acknowledge the prescribed and predetermined ways of "being in this world". This highlights the tension between beliefs about the development of our curriculum and the external forces that have impacted on our decisions. We were lulled initially into believing that we could effectively integrate the two without a sense of compromise. This has been and continues to be our struggle. Have we been able to consider the complex issue of identities as the major factor in the development of effective curricula? Or have we been dominated (although unconsciously) by the powerful external pressures of assessment and academic literacy?

It is becoming apparent to us as we look back on the decisions made during the year thus far, that the identity of the institution has carried more weight than that of other participants. Much of our work has been about "fitting in", about "mastering or refining" the academic discourse. We have become "tools for and of" this discourse. We perhaps would like to believe that our particular philosophies and knowledge helped to determine our direction, that our identities as teachers was part of the process of development, but we wonder if this is the case**.**

When we started the unit, we felt that we were being true to our educational philosophies because firstly ***the way*** we delivered the content "fitted" philosophically with our understanding of ***how*** learners learn (based on our previous years of experience, of trial and errors, of success and failures. Secondly, we felt we were "doing the job" because we were meeting the apparent demands of the institutions and assessment practices.

We are now asking whether our role is not to accept, but to question, these demands and practices. We would like to challenge the perspective of "appropriate writing" and begin to explore with the students the "processes of meaning-making and contestation around this meaning" (Lea & Street, 2000, p. 35). We believe that our unit should not develop as a "result of a university reacting to a perceived student need" (McLean et al, 1995, p. 78), but rather as a response to the complex issue of our students' identities.

This reflection has encouraged us to question not only the daily operations of the emergent unit but also the rationale that will ultimately underpin it. We are struggling to reconcile the tensions between the participants' identities, the demands of institution, the pressures of assessment and academic continuum of study skills, academic socialisation and academic literacies.

While Monash South Africa has strong links with Australia, it will develop as an African campus with its own identity, one shaped by its own sense of people and place. Lecturers have shown flexibility in bridging gaps through individual appointments and adapting some material for local use. However, for all staff and students there have been the issues of how to use someone ***else's*** learning materials and lectures, how to make examples from an Australian context relevant to the South African one, and how to infuse a local South African flavour into an internationalised degree.

For staff and students, the campus with its small first-year intake represents an opportunity to shape a unique identity for Monash South Africa.

Managing the changing identity for growth and development

So, while the teaching practice at Monash South Africa may have slipped into the same outward shape as that of the Centre in Australia, to assume that we are seeing our own reflection would be a grave mistake. One of the most powerful insights we gain as Learning Centres resides in our privileged understanding of the ways the generic and the discipline-specific relate to one another. Precisely because we are aware of multiple frames or reflections, our judgement - that key faculty (Taylor, 2000) - enables us to penetrate the discourses which seek sometimes to be-night or enslave. This means that we have the power - not only to adapt to change - but to find our own directions, supporting our students' search for their own identities.

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INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IDENTIFIED AS CUSTOMERS: THEIR EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS

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Currently in Australia, higher education is urged to operate more commercially, and in these times of change students are identified as customers. University marketing promises quality of service and there is vigorous competition for the enrolment of international students. In this paper it is argued that universities are now expected to change to meet students' needs and that international students in their identity as customers will have expectations and perceptions of quality service. While much is written about the needs of international students, little has been written about how international students perceive their experience and there is only limited research on international students as customers. The paper reviews customer concepts in universities and reports on the perceptions of a group of La Trobe University international students. The data were gathered from group discussion, questionnaire and interview. The students had much to say that was insightful about what they value about the Australian university

experience and what they expected of this experience. They wanted to be assured of the quality of the teaching, wanted the University to respond to their educational needs, wanted to improve their English language skills and wanted to experience Australian culture and mix with local students. Not surprisingly, there were gaps between the students' expectations and what they perceived to be the quality of the educational service that they actually received.

Keywords: international students, customers, expectations, perceptions guidelines

Introduction

Current Australian government policy on higher education seems to be largely founded on an acceptance of the role of market forces as germane to a quality university system. Given that public funding has not paralleled the increase in student access to university education, universities need to be alert to all forms of fund raising which include international student dollars. Higher Education Minister Kemp (1998) focuses on university education as a financial investment and identifies students as customers shopping for value for money. Competition for these student 'customers' is claimed to result in better support for students (DETYA 1999).

Students identified as customers

It could be argued that the university student is not the customer. Brennan & Bennington (1999) present a number of reasons why a student is not the same as a customer. Universities can fail students, so that students despite having paid money for service, will not receive the desired credential, and switching to another provider is not an easy option for a dissatisfied student. Furthermore, given that education providers do not operate in a totally free market place (Marginson 1997, p.161) customer concepts have limitations.

Those who work with students could be motivated to identify the student in the role of customer according to an expedient understanding of an audience perception. Ballard (1986) at the conference, ***Education as an International Commodity***, argued that it would be in the universities' interests to alter their 'product' to suit the market in order to be successful. More recently, in a paper presented to the 1999 Australian International Education Conference (Qinglin 1999) it was claimed that 'full-fee paying international students expect to be treated like customers and to receive high quality service.' Qinglin later states that his study shows that 'education has been treated as an industry but students are yet to be treated as customers in some cases.' His examples of student comments reveal a dissatisfaction with the commercial greediness of some university actions.

Earlier Australian and U.S. research also indicates some dissatisfaction. Nesdale & Todd (1993) and Lapidus and Brown (1993) in the U. S. report disappointment with the lack of interaction with local students. Compared with Australian students Gatfield (1997) and Mullins, Quintrell & Hancock (1995) found that international students consistently rated the quality of teaching in Australian universities low. Patterson, Romm & Hill (1998), in marrying the needs of students with market concerns, note that students' satisfaction, or otherwise, will be broadcast to their home country.

The expectations that international students bring may not be based on a thorough knowledge of what is likely to happen at university, although students 'shop around' for a suitable university in Australia (Smart & Ang 1993; Symes & Hopkins 1994). Jayanti (1998, p.59) claims that service users often base their expectations on a 'categorization' approach, which is used as a simplification strategy. When education is categorised it may become more readily understandable but complexity is lost and the information base is incomplete. The very complexity of higher education is an obstacle for consumers trying to make reasoned judgments on which to base expectations, this in turn makes it difficult to analyse how satisfaction can be achieved.

The expectations students bring could be underpinned by such a positive attitude that experience will inevitably be perceived as confirmation. In his research on satisfaction

Oliver (1980, p.467) concluded, ‘It may be argued that one’s attitude somehow captures the totality of the expectation level and that it provides the baseline for other cognitions of an overall nature, particularly satisfaction.’ From this it can be surmised that the prestige reputation of a top ranked university will ensure that its students remain satisfied with their experience. An example of this is research which showed that students were prepared to recommend their university even when they were doubtful about the quality of the teaching and facilities (Mullins et al. 1995, p.209). This ‘halo effect’ is but one customer attitude (Oliver 1997, p.110). The evidence (Oliver 1997; Jayanti 1998) indicates, however, that while pre-purchase evaluative impressions influence received service evaluations, poor service will be judged accordingly.

Evaluative impressions determined prior to consumption (Jayanti 1998) influence customer perceptions of the degree of expected satisfaction with the service provision. If evaluative impressions are disappointed the result is a low service evaluation. This has important implications for those who market to international students, because it indicates that what is promised must be delivered. LeBlanc and Nguyen (1999, p.195) concluded from their research that university marketing should not promise more than the university can deliver, and that ‘management should ensure that students’ expectations with regard to service are closely examined and analysed so as to set quality standards from their perspective’.

If customers have high expectations but these are not met, the negative reaction will be overriding (Jayanti 1998). On the other hand, if customers find that the service outstrips their expectations they will have a strong positive reaction. This relationship is explained by ‘disconfirmation’, in which a customer will be the **least** satisfied by low expectation and service worse than expected, while a customer is the most satisfied if high expectations are exceeded (Oliver 1997, p.104). The implications are that if international students are customers then universities should try to exceed students’ expectations of quality service; mere confirmation of expectations is what is expected and will not carry a message of superior service.

While university marketers could feel disquieted by the prospect of trying to gain a competitive edge by ensuring that the university has positive promotion, yet delivers service better than promised, they can relax a little with the notion of the 'zone of tolerance' (Berry & Parasuraman, 1991, p.58). Customers will tolerate and accept a range of service and so, despite some performance shortfall, will see their needs as being (minimally) fulfilled (Oliver 1997, p.70). The customers' assumptions of a certain expectation being integral to the product/service direct the limits of their tolerance zone. Oliver (1997, p.73) uses the term 'passive expectations' to define these assumptions - considerations which are not actively and cognitively processed. In other words, when customers know what a product/service will or must do, they do not entertain the cognition that performance outcome will be otherwise (Berry & Parasuraman 1991, p.57). If students' passive expectations are not met, university service is taken to be far removed from the 'zone of tolerance'. A further concern for university marketers is that, if international students tolerate a low level of performance they will be unappreciative, up to a certain level, of high service performance. It is a demanding task to exceed the service expectations and uncover the 'passive expectations' of international students.

In marketing to international students it is also necessary to know what these students value. Kotler and Fox (1985, p.7) define marketing as being '…designed to bring about voluntarily exchanges of values with target markets to achieve institutional objectives'. Value can be defined as the return for what the customer pays out, with the strongest determinant of value judgments being quality.

In the commercial world, advocates of improving services have absolute faith in providing superior customer service (Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman 1990, p.9). Universities promote themselves as having identities (Symes & Hopkins 1994) but for many the product is all too similar. Service, however, is claimed to differentiate.

Given these claims for the remarkable value of providing quality customer service in service industries, it would seem reasonable to expect there to be a measure from which to gauge service quality. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, the major proponents of the value of service quality, explain that it is the perception of quality

which is important and define this as 'the consumer's judgment about an entity's overall excellence or superiority. It differs from objective quality…it is a form of attitude, related but not equivalent to satisfaction, and results from a comparison of expectations with perceptions of performance' (Parasuraman et al. 1988, p.15). Customers might perceive quality as a subjective response, yet Parasuraman et al. (1988) found in their research that there are general attitudes which support global evaluations of characteristics of service quality. Using these, they developed a questionnaire, SERVQUAL, devised to 'objectively' measure service quality (Parasuraman et al. 1988). The SERVQUAL questionnaire first asks what a service should do, then it asks if the particular service has met the expectation. Zeithaml et al. (1990, p.19) explain that '… service quality, as perceived by customers, can be defined as the extent of discrepancy between customers' expectations or desires and their perceptions'.

For this research the SERVQUAL was adapted to be appropriate for the university context. The questionnaire was initially trialed and then supported with group discussions and interviews. Using a seven point Likert type scale with designations of 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree', the SERVQUAL questionnaire paired 22 expectations of university service with 22 perceptions of service experienced at La Trobe University. The students were also asked to rank from 1 – 10 five types of service (labelled as 'dimensions'). (Having ascertained which dimension is most valued by its customers, a service provider can focus on improving service on the items within that dimension which have revealed the largest discrepancy between expectations and perceptions.)

The setting for the current study was the Bundoora campus of La Trobe University. La Trobe has a number of campuses of which Bundoora is the largest. In 2000, there were 1,112 international students commencing studies onshore at La Trobe University. The unit at the Bundoora campus provided convenient access to international students. In October, 2000 the Language and Academic Skills (English as a Second Language) unit (commonly known as LAS(ESL)) had enrolled over 350 students, two thirds of whom were international students. Using only students who had enrolled in LAS(ESL) ensured that all the students were aware that support services were available at La

Trobe University. The sample in this research represented a nationality mix, gender mix, spread of faculty and length of stay typical of full-fee paying international students at La Trobe University, Bundoora.

During the period of August - October, 2000, 60 questionnaires were distributed to postgraduate and undergraduate students attending the LAS(ESL) unit. Of these 45 were filled in and one was incomplete. When the data from the 44 completed questionnaires were analysed for co-efficiency using Alpha Correlation in the SPSS program two items were removed in order to ensure correlation. A number of the students who did the questionnaire also participated in the group discussions.

Thirty nine students from 15 countries, enrolled in the subject, ***English as a Second Language 1***, (delivered by LAS(ESL) lecturers) provided the group discussion sample. All undergraduates, the students were evenly distributed across faculties. They discussed problems facing international students studying at an Australian university and differences in some of the elements of academic culture.

Ten students, four postgraduate and six undergraduate, who had completed the questionnaire were also interviewed in depth, having been selected on the criteria that a range of study areas was represented and that there would be a gender balance

Findings

It was clear from the interviews that the students believed that the educational experience of itself was intrinsically valuable, but there was also an understanding that education is an investment and that there is value in having overseas qualifications. The students wanted to receive a quality education and value for money, and having paid money they were prepared to work hard. While some students were adamant that education should not be just a commercial transaction, some noted that having paid money they should get what they wanted. The student who was the least satisfied was keen that students should have customer rights. She had not chosen to come to La Trobe, had had low expectations and was disappointed with what she had experienced. This could be described as a phenomenon of ‘disconfirmation’ in which a customer is

the least satisfied if she has low expectations and service is worse than expected (Oliver 1997). Most of the students wanted an experience that was more than a transaction: they wanted to be responsible for their own learning, but they also wanted assurance, responsiveness and empathy from their teachers; they wanted to interact with local students and they want to be involved in the Australian university learning experience.

The students admitted that their pre-purchase knowledge of La Trobe University was limited. In guiding them to their decision the students talked about the importance of personal contact with La Trobe representatives and the immediate and appropriate responses to study enquiries. From the group discussions, which took place in the first week of a first year subject, it was clear that the students had anticipated that the teaching, learning and assessment roles in Australia would differ from those in other educational cultures.

There was disappointment with the lack of interaction with local students and students reported feeling excluded from class activities. A French student commented 'The contact is not friendly… not helpful…it's 'I'm on my own, you're on your own.' A Korean student perceived that local students 'feel like they could have a lower result if they have a group with [an] international student…they think we haven't got any brain…probably they feel we are not helpful at all' There were two examples of 'successful' interaction with local students. A student who had 'Aussie' friends had rejected his own culture declaring, 'I don't like Japanese culture.' Another student described how local students were more 'open-minded' and wanted to work with her when they realised she could 'easily solve the questions.'

Some students were prepared to blame their study difficulties on lack of English language. Their frustration was threefold: feeling that lack of English had impeded their social interaction and their academic progress, and hoping that studying in Australian would greatly improve their English language skills.

The rankings from the questionnaire indicated that priority should be given to improving the teaching of international students and to developing more concern in teaching staff

for the educational progress of students. This questionnaire finding correlated with the interviews during which a number of points were raised about how the quality of teaching could be improved. These included tutors being better organised, facilitation of more productive discussions and group projects, providing handouts and including all students in teaching and learning activities.

It could be argued that there was a mismatch of expectations here with Australian university lecturers trying to develop in students independent skills of analysis. The students, however, commonly asserted that they expected to take responsibility for their own learning and the need to adapt to the Australian context. Furthermore, they claimed that the notion of independent learning was a positive feature of Australian educational culture. Some of the students also enjoyed the informality of Australian lecturer student relationships, and appreciated those lecturers who showed an interest in their welfare.

The questionnaire results when analysed according to faculty and degree level showed no statistical significance, however, when analysed for language background the Myanmar and Vietnamese students, who interestingly were scholarship holders, tended to hold the most positive perceptions of the quality of educational service delivered at La Trobe.

Conclusion

The concerns that the students raised about the issue of teaching quality indicate that at La Trobe teaching practices should ensure that students from overseas are included in learning activities. Such practices can be appropriate for the Australian culture of learning and as Kalantzis & Cope (2000) conclude, teaching practices which include international students actually help all students. Academic discourse can cause difficulties for many students (Lea & Street 2000), not just for those using English as a second language. Lecturer awareness of such ‘language’ difficulties would be a step towards enhancing all student learning.

The issue of exclusion raises a number of questions about the responsibility of universities towards the changing identities of diverse student populations. Is it solely the (international) student's responsibility to be alert to cultural difference or should the university be aware of cultural difference? Could a university accommodate difference or even value it?

Higher Education Minister Kemp's (1998) identification of students as customers has implications for the treatment of students. A university as service provider needs to uncover students' expectations, then if necessary educate students to have appropriate expectations and then actually deliver even better service than was promised. Furthermore, if a university wants to be a market leader it would need to be perceived of as delivering the best service. This group of international students while ambivalent about the value of being identified as customers, perceived that La Trobe University had not always taken on the responsibility of meeting their expectations. I conclude, that meeting these expectations would mean changes in teaching practice and changes in attitudes towards international students.

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Changing Identities

TRAVELLING UP THE LIFELONG LEARNING CURVE: A REGIONAL ODYSSEY

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Providing language and learning support on a regional campus of a metropolitan-based university over the past twelve years has entailed witnessing and responding to myriad changes: in the support unit structure and nomenclature, the institution, the campus, the student body, the region. There has been a continual rethinking of role and focus for the campus itself and its staff. Changing layers of discourses have included: equity, inclusivity, student-centred learning, flexible delivery, internationalisation and economic rationalism. The paper considers the impact of these changes in emphasis on work in language and academic skills support and the tensions between competing discourses. It highlights the importance for those involved in academic skills development to be lifelong learners, able to respond to new needs in changing circumstances. This is, in an imperative, if they are to continue to assist students to be engaged in a transforming learning experience.

Keywords: Organisational change; Lifelong learning; Regional campuses

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to give an insight into the context of language and academic skills support at a small regional campus of a large metropolitan-based university, from the perspective of someone who has been a participant observer in the many changes of the past decade and more. The characteristics of such a campus are visited, together with the joys and trials of academic staff there. Changes in the campus and its focus, the university, the student support unit, the language and learning support position, and the student body are described briefly. The implications for the teaching and learning environment of changing dominant discourses are sketched, along with the accompanying implications for support. These changes emphasise the need for those who support others in their learning to themselves be committed to a life of continual learning, with new learning requirements coming in increasingly more frequent 'chunks'. Reflections on a personal learning journey are also included.

The last twelve years, the time of my work within a university staff context, have seen changes in that context in all four identity areas of the conference theme: my position in language and learning advising, the unit of which I am a part, the campus student profile and the technologies that are a part of its teaching and learning environment.

Before the establishment of the University of South Australia (UniSA), Whyalla Campus was one of the three campuses of the South Australian Institute of Technology (SAIT), the other two being situated 400 kilometres away in the capital, in the Adelaide city centre and in the northern metropolitan area. These three campuses joined with three campuses (all metropolitan) of the South Australian College of Advanced Education (SACAE) to operate as the new University from the beginning of 1991. The University currently has six campuses (a second campus having been established in the Central Business District, and a suburban campus closed), with over 25000 students. Only 620 of these are enrolled in Whyalla programs, and of this number 245 are now off-campus, mainly in the flexibly delivered Nursing program. The other Whyalla programs are in the Social Work, Computer and Information Science, Business, Engineering, and Communication and

Media Management areas. There is a Bridging Program, which has run in various forms for well over a decade, and a newer PhD program.

The regional campus context

Regional campuses of metropolitan-based universities share some features that distinguish them from metropolitan campuses and from regionally-based universities. For this reason, UniSA's Whyalla Campus has engaged in bench-marking activities with regional campuses of universities such as La Trobe to compare performance and investigate areas of mutual concern and interest. Some collaboration has evolved, for example the journal ***Rural Social Work*** (Whyalla and Albury/Wodonga). A collaborative research project on the working life of rural academics has increased awareness of their situation and also of metropolitan academics' perceptions of their regional counterparts. It has also shown the interrelationship of these academics with their regional communities (Ellis et al. 2000). The vital current and potential role of this community-university partnership in regional development has been explored further in an Evaluations and Investigations Program (Garlick 1998). Garlick summarises the ways in which universities contribute to their local and regional community (and vice versa) and the benefits that could come to both university and community 'through their greater engagement' (Cumpston et al. 2001, p. 13). (See also Harvey 1999; for a glimpse of this connectedness at a regionally-based university, see Moses 2001.)

Working in language and learning support at such a campus has meant that I have had a role not only in that area (and collegial links with metropolitan language and academic skills staff) but also in Campus-wide concerns: I am a member of the Whyalla Campus Board and Academic Committee, was at one time a member of a marketing committee and am involved in two research groups. As commented by several participants in the rural academic study referred to above, in our setting there is a lot of inter-disciplinary conversation and more formal collaboration and cooperation. For me this has meant working with staff and students from a number of different discipline areas. My research has included collaborative work relating to: the Bridging program; flexible delivery of the Nursing program; and international graduates of the Campus. It has also included individual work relating to Indigenous

student participation and to a community service avenue of the Campus, the local branch of the University of the Third Age. Other community involvement connected with my UniSA work has included some presentations to Year 12 students from other towns, and involvement with the Whyalla Reconciliation Network.

Changing times

The increasing frequency of changes over the past twelve years is certainly not confined to Whyalla Campus or UniSA. In particular, government funding cuts have had implications for all Australian universities. Units seen as providing a service, rather than obviously bringing in student fees, have been particularly vulnerable to downsizing or outsourcing proposals. While in some cases Whyalla Campus has been forced to react to influences from outside the Campus and from outside the University, it has also initiated significant changes and developments. This section considers: changes relating specifically to the student support area with regard to location, positions and nomenclature; changes to the student profile of the Campus and program availability, along with surrounding regional issues; the influence of the uptake of new technologies on course delivery and research and other opportunities; and shifts to underlying discourses and philosophies.

Changes in the position, unit and University

At the beginning of 1990, the Whyalla Campus Counsellor and I moved to a suite of offices and tutorial room constituting the Educational Support Centre of the Campus. We were both members of the Institute of Technology's Educational Support Services. During that year, merger preparations were advancing, and these included meetings with our counterparts in the three SACAE campuses that were soon to join us. Their student learning support staff were lecturers called Study Advisers, and belonged to a unit called Student Services, whereas SAIT Language and Learning Advisers held senior tutor positions. It was resolved that there needed to be consistency in the new institution. The former SAIT Language and Learning Advisers were reclassified (mid-1991) as Level B, in a unit called Educational Support Services (ESS) and subsequently also came to be called Study Advisers. In 1994 the Study Advisers were moved to a new unit, the Centre for University

Teaching and Learning (CUTL), which amalgamated the following year with the Distance Education Centre and Visual Productions to form the Flexible Learning Centre (FLC). The Educational Support Centres, where Counsellors and Careers Advisers were collocated with Study Advisers, were renamed Student Support Centres (SSCs) in 1996. In 1997 these various professional groups all became part of the new student support section of the FLC: Student Educational Services. Yet more structural and nomenclature changes included a division in the Study Advisers' ranks, with some becoming part of Faculty and University Learning Services (FULS), the others remaining as the Student Learning Support (SLS) section of Teaching and Learning Advisory Services (TALAS). By 1998 SLS and Counsellors and other advisory staff had become Student Support Services. Meanwhile, in response to budgetary constraints, the Whyalla student support positions were transferred (all but 0.1 of the Study Adviser's fraction) to Whyalla Campus cost centre and a contract Careers/International Adviser 0.4 position was not renewed. Some further FLC restructuring resulted in metropolitan Study Advisers' applying for a lesser number of new positions as Learning Advisers. Metropolitan counsellors became known for a time as Student Advisers. Meanwhile, back at Whyalla, we continued as Study Adviser and Counsellor (the latter also being the disability contact person, and taking on a careers and international students role), reporting directly to the Dean: Whyalla, later having the Deputy Dean (a position since gone) as line manager for an interim period. So, while occupying one office for most of the last twelve years, I have been part of two institutions, had two position levels and job titles, been part of a location with two different names and belonged to four university units (ESS in both SAIT and UniSA, CUTL, FLC and finally Whyalla). During this time the University also moved (early 1999) from a faculty structure to having four divisions (Business and Enterprise; Education, Arts and Social Sciences; Engineering and the Environment; and Health Sciences). Whyalla and the FLC (along with the Library and some other areas) are now part of the portfolio of Access and Learning Support.

Changes in the Campus and its environs

With its much smaller student body, compared with the metropolitan campuses, Whyalla Campus has always been a fairly close-knit community, with students having easy access to most lecturers, and the ability to get to know people in other

disciplines than their own. Once a campus with a focus on providing heavy industry professional needs and with a consequent preponderance of males, the gender balance has improved with an increase in the range of disciplines. Internal students are both full- and part-time, and include school-leavers and people of mature age. They come not only from Whyalla and surrounding areas, but also from farther afield. The opening of on-campus student accommodation in 1994 provided additional opportunities for students from outside Whyalla.

As indicated in the introduction, a large percentage of Whyalla students are now based off-campus. This has been one of the significant changes of the decade. The offering of the Bachelor of Nursing off-campus as well as on has provided new opportunities for many rural and isolated students, including some Indigenous students, and opened up opportunities for the Campus to expand its role in regional South Australia and beyond. However, it has also contributed to changing the Campus character, as have changes in the range of programs offered. Engineering, which catered for some of the human resource needs of the city's largest employer, BHP, was affected by downsizing there (Martin & Petkov 2000); some programs and year levels moved to Adelaide. The hiving off of OneSteel has not resulted in new intakes of Engineering students. Other program changes have included: a generic Whyalla Bridging Program replacing other enabling programs having a more specific focus, the abandonment of the Applied Science degree, and involvement for just a few years with an Early Childhood Education program. Some double degrees are offered (Business combined with either Social Work or Computer and Information Science). A growing postgraduate program has added to Campus research strength. One of the study centres of the University's Aboriginal and Islander Support Unit has been located at the Campus since 1997, providing additional support and resources for internal and external Indigenous students. (In 2001 I have been working there on a temporary basis one day a week). In recent years the establishment of the South Australian Centre for Rural and Remote Health (SACRRH) at the Campus (a UniSA, Adelaide University and the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care collaboration) has opened up more opportunities for Campus staff. SACRRH's recent incorporation into the Spencer Gulf Rural Health School has meant further changes to Campus facilities.

The Campus has, over the years, faced a number of threats to its very survival. The 'savings targets' forced upon higher education in 1997 led to UniSA's ***Changing the budget profile*** document, to which all areas of the University had to respond. Rumours were rife, and the Whyalla community was strongly supportive of the 'Whyalla University' as many called the Campus. The Campus response to the budgetary exigencies was set out in ***Whyalla Campus: Towards the Year 2000*** with proposed changes and developments outlined. The Campus has proved that it has a significant role to play in regional development and provision of higher education, it being the only regional university campus in South Australia. (Current questions about the role and functions of the Campus library mean that complacency is an unwise luxury.) From having very much a focus on teaching activities, the Campus has come to have as well a greater role in research and consultancy activities. In the past, there was great reliance on what the corresponding schools in Adelaide were offering, using in many cases materials prepared there. More recently Whyalla has taken the initiative for preparing new courses and program developments. Some of its initiatives, such as the flexible delivery of Nursing, have subsequently been taken up by metropolitan campuses.

The implications for the Campus of changes in the steel industry have been mentioned. However, new developments have compensated, including increases in tourist enterprises, aquaculture, and experimental work in sustainable energy resources. Whyalla is not parochial, but looks for opportunities outside of its bounds. Apart from involvement in organisations such as the Upper Spencer Gulf Common Purpose Group, it has also formed a sister city relationship with Ezhou a "little" city of a million people in Hubei Province, China. There has been a decline of population: Whyalla once had a population of well over 30000 – it now has about 23500 residents.

However, the Campus students do not come only from Whyalla and the surrounding region. Internal students include some from Adelaide as well as a small number of international students, and off-campus students are situated in most states of Australia. The current number of international students also indicates a change over the years; in the mid-nineties numbers were greater, with numbers of mainly Malaysian and Hong Kong students in Business and Engineering. At the moment

we have a small number from Bhutan completing Certified Practising Accountant requirements, one from Malaysia and one from Hong Kong in Business, and a Computer and Information Science student from Israel. Our links with China led to student exchanges in 1999 and also staff exchanges and are being explored as a conduit for future students. (Other relationships are being developed with institutions in India and Canada.)

Changes in technologies

New technologies have contributed to many Campus changes over the years. The development of videoconferencing facilities meant more opportunities for minimising isolation. The establishment of telelearning centres in a number of South Australian locations in the north and west made access for isolated students much more feasible (Hinter 1996). A telephone tie-line means that Whyalla staff can communicate by telephone with staff at metropolitan campuses just as cheaply as metropolitan staff can with each other. Improved computing resources (e-mail communication and Internet research for both staff and students) have reduced isolation from research colleagues, necessitated staff development and meant that computer literacy has become part of the learning support staff repertoire for teaching as well as a tool of trade. This applies equally, of course, to such staff wherever they may be situated. University moves towards online course delivery only serve to emphasise this.

Changing discourses

Over the period described, different discourses have become dominant, or 'flavour of the month'. These have included: equity; inclusivity; lifelong, student-centred learning; quality; flexible delivery; internationalisation; graduate qualities; and economic rationalism. As new foci have emerged, the old have persisted in their influence on those committed to them. So we have multi-layered higher education discourses – the earlier ideologies are still there underneath or beside the later. Those reflected in institutional policies and official foci are not necessarily reflected in the teaching priorities of institutional staff or the learning goals of students.

Equity

When I set out on an academic pathway, late in 1989, the very rationale for the newly-created Language and Learning Adviser position was to provide for equity of participation for a range of students from non-traditional "equity groups" that had been under-represented in higher education. Groups originally targeted were Indigenous students, students from non-English-speaking backgrounds, socio-economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and women in non-traditional disciplines. (Some learning support had been informally included in the past in the Counsellor's role.) My position, along with another half-time and one full-time position at SAIT metropolitan campuses, was funded under a Higher Education Equity Program (HEEP) allocation for a Language and Learning Skills Project at SAIT. The Project aimed 'to assist disadvantaged students in developing language and learning skills appropriate to tertiary study' (from the Project information sheet). Such provision of support personnel was a response to the Commonwealth Government's 1990 paper, ***A Fair Chance for All*** (DEET). Elsewhere, HEEP provided for a range of equity initiatives (DEET 1993). A 1996 review of progress towards the goals of ***A Fair Chance for All*** found that, while there was evidence of equity in access, there was still considerable room for improvement in the areas of participation and outcomes (NBEET 1996). Ramsay et al. (1996) look particularly at the UniSA's situation with regard to equity group progress and attrition. Equity featured strongly in the mission and goals of the University of South Australia. However, a CUTL-initiated study involving Study Advisers as researchers (Moore et al. 1996) found some mismatch between official University documents and what the study revealed: 'the notion that equity is integral to learning is not widely shared in the University community' (p. xiv); there was a consequent need for staff development in this area so that equity should become truly 'embedded in the learning itself' (p. xiv). In the early days in my job, I spent time learning about the Campus equity group profile, and planning how the needs of these students could be met, advertising my services (to all students), and teaching mainly in one-to-one situations. My work in the early years, similarly to that of my metropolitan colleagues, included orientation/transition activities, workshops and one-to-one appointments, with some informal staff developing concerning the focus of my position and equity issues.

Inclusivity

From a focus that tended to provide support to enable a more diverse range of students to enter and "cope" with higher education, by developing their skills to allow them to fit in, providing various bridging or foundation programs (e.g., Cooper, Ellis & Sawyer 2000, for Whyalla Campus; Beasley 1997, for Flinders University) and targeted orientation programs, the institutional emphasis changed to inclusivity. This involved making changes in language and course content so as to be more inclusive of all students, irrespective of gender, culture, learning styles, disability, and so on and 'turning a view of diversity as an obstacle to seeing it as an asset' (Kaucher 1994, p. 3). From initial concerns to promote the use of gender-inclusive language, the aims broadened to encompass inclusivity of cultural background, students with disabilities and so on. A UniSA inclusive curriculum research project that explored 'pedagogical issues and strategies associated with student diversity' (Barnett 1994, p. 5) was but one institutional response to this endeavour to cater for the needs of an expanded student profile; others were the holding of workshops and the development of guidelines. (See also Hollinsworth & Zakaria 1997). Support staff at all campuses had a role to play in disseminating these emphases, as well as themselves working with the groups and individuals that were the targets of such strategies.

Lifelong, student-centred learning

Student-centred lifelong learning (implied in the University's first goal) shared these aspirations of inclusivity. A range of pedagogies such as problem-based learning and experiential learning shifted the focus of the teaching/learning environment. More emphasis was placed on the need for all to learn throughout life, not only by reason of changing professional requirements but also as part of a fulfilling life, and for university education to prepare students for this (Candy, Crebert & O'Leary 1993). This reinforced the necessity for support practices that developed student autonomy. In some cases this involved "weaning" students from dependence on the Study Adviser, a dependence that may have been a bigger issue at Whyalla with its smaller numbers of students and greater ease of making multiple one-to-one appointments. It also involved encouraging others who had been struggling on their own to seek assistance in developing effective learning skills.

Quality

Emphases on quality assurance and 'customer service' meant that support personnel were perhaps more conscious of a need to evaluate their work and reflect on their practice. Record-keeping to enable this evaluation and the demonstration to others in the University community of the quality of services provided became essential. For some, this also entailed the development of the new IT skills required for entering and collating information on databases. Some learning support staff on various campuses had involvement with activities associated with faculty Quality Improvement Plans for Teaching and Learning. This provided opportunities for encouraging an acceptance of the importance of embedding academic skills development within courses.

Flexible delivery

The increase in flexible modes of delivery brought new challenges for learning support. Support for off-campus students has increasingly involved e-mail and telephone contact. Occasional face-to-face discussions, for example when Nursing students come for residential workshops, are much appreciated by the students, and also by the Study Adviser who thereby gains a better understanding of their concerns. These are often practical matters to do with e-mail access problems, and emotional ones to do with a sense of isolation. Encouraging students to network with others in a similar situation is important, and the basis for this is often arranged at on-campus workshops, including the transition day held for external students early in the academic year in Adelaide and at Whyalla. The increasing need for students to have good online access to communications and course materials raises new equity issues. For an insight into the experiences of staff and students, with widely varying degrees of access to computer faccilities, involved in Whyalla's flexibly delivered Nursing program, see Miller and Ellis (1999). The increasingly online learning environment, along with pressure of numbers in some cases, has led to new strategies to support students: My UniSA Learning Connection colleagues have developed a range of online learning guides and generic and course-specific workshops (and others related to other Learning Connection professional areas such as careers). These have been a valuable resource for both students and staff and

have enabled metropolitan language and learning staff to reach a wider audience than their numbers would otherwise allow.

Internationalisation

Internationalisation has become a University imperative (Luong et al.1996). Whyalla Campus graduates have received exposure to diverse perspectives over the years through the presence of staff and students from many cultural backgrounds. This has been augmented by the lessons learned by those who have been on student exchanges or study tours to China, Canada, the Philippines and Indonesia, lessons that they have been able to share with others on their return. In addition, a group of ten students from our sister city's Ezhou University, brought more inter-cultural learning. Staff exchanges, scholarships, consultancy opportunities and study leave have contributed to further broadening of international perspectives at the Campus, as has the implementation of the seventh graduate quality in courses (see below). This semester, a lecturer has been teaching off-shore students in Hong Kong, with intensive teaching spread over two visits there – further broadening the collective Campus international experience.

Graduate qualities

In 1996 the University adopted a set of generic qualities, the 'Qualities of a University of South Australia Graduate'. The University has also been involved in a project with fellow Australian Technology Network members on 'generic capabilities' of graduates (Australian Technology Network 2000). The seven UniSA graduate qualities relate to: knowledge needed for a profession, lifelong learning skills, problem-solving ability, teamwork and autonomy, ethics and social responsibility, effective communication, and international perspectives. Course outlines indicate the proportion of units (credit points) that are allocated to developing each quality. Students are also guided in recording their achievement of these qualities through their programs, thus developing a useful resource for job applications. Language and learning staff were involved in developing leaflets explaining the qualities, and have an obvious role to play in helping students to become autonomous lifelong learners as well as effective team members and communicators. Currently an information literacy project within the University is focusing on mapping within

courses the ways in which they enable the achievement of the second graduate quality (lifelong learning). At Whyalla this, along with the other graduate qualities, has been mapped through the whole Social Work program (***Mapping Graduate Qualities through the Bachelor of Social Work*** 2001), and the same procedure is being followed with the Nursing program.

Market forces

Since the mid-nineties we have been increasingly confronted by the influence of market forces on the world of higher education. Corporate financial imperatives have called into question the existence of various services and have affected whole campuses. Institutions had to respond to what the government referred to as 'the savings task', if they were not to jeopardise their role in higher education. The Vice-Chancellor referred to 'the first stages of an ideological and economic battle about the shape of education in this country in the future' and warned that this battle could be lost

> ... if institutions like ours which are the outriders for a changed way of viewing both the community's right to tertiary education and the approach and content of that education fail to recognise early enough that they must reshape themselves in every way if they are to continue to carry out their mission. (Bradley 1997)

For language and learning support staff this had implications of downsizing and consequent workload consequences. It also brought to the forefront the need for considering ways of contributing to University revenue, and the frustrations of long waits for up-to-date equipment.

A personal journey

Over the years my teaching and learning philosophy and practice, my attitudes to research, and my skills have evolved. A period of great change has also been a period of considerable growth.

Learning and teaching

Most of my pre-1989 working life was as a school-teacher, in Australia and abroad, mostly but not exclusively in secondary education. I saw myself as a facilitator or scaffolder of learning, but still felt responsible for getting across to students a body of knowledge in a given time. In the tertiary context, I saw myself still in this role in some part-time lecturing within courses, while recognising that students were expected to take more responsibility for their own learning. I saw (and see) the university as a learning community of students and staff who ideally found intrinsic rewards in learning, as well as professional pre-requisites. (I felt great delight once when an Engineering student told me that he was giving up his course to go and study English literature – it showed me that there were still people in the younger generation interested in other than financial rewards for their study.) I still cling to the 'all learners together' notion, disliking the language of 'customers' and 'clients'. In my language and learning support role, I saw myself as working to assist students to learn to adapt to the university culture, and adjust to its expectations regarding assessable work. While my current stance is not opposed to this, it has broadened to a greater awareness of the need to seek opportunities to work with other lecturers, and to not take the institutional culture for granted when there are aspects that need critiquing, if the institution is to meet the needs of its diverse student body and its community. (Some of these issues were explored in research into institutional influences on Indigenous student participation; see Ellis 1998.) The financial climate has also made it apparent that practicalities have to be dealt with, such as ways of earning revenue for the University. (In my case so far this has been confined mainly to whatever published papers have earned for the institution.)

Practice

My practice as a provider of language and learning support has moved from mainly one-to-one appointments at the start to include small group lunch-time workshops, presentations in course classes, orientation and transition activities and computer literacy. I have also become involved in related Campus activities such as the English classes for the Chinese exchange students in 1999. While there is always more to learn, I feel that I have built up some of what the social workers call 'practice wisdom' over the years. The lack of others in the same field at the Campus has

been compensated for by the opportunity to work collaboratively with staff from other discipline areas. The unilearn e-mail list has been a great remover of a sense of isolation from colleagues in other institutions.

Research

Along with probably the majority of staff on the Campus, I did not see myself in the early years as having much involvement with research projects, although I was happy to participate when requested, such as the CUTL project mentioned above (Moore et al. 1996), or helping out in minor ways with others' projects. I saw research not as something that I should be doing as part of the job, but rather as something that should be done when there was a definite need for a particular project – not what often seemed to me then as "research for the sake of research". My return to study motivated me to delve into new areas, and to write again. When I eventually completed my Master of Education, I wanted work that I had done to be of some use to others, and so I had the incentive to aim for conference and journal publications. The fact that my position was still only classified as half-time also meant that I had uncommitted hours that could be spent on other research projects, as well as what was reasonable within my position. This continues. The support of a retired spouse and minimal travel time to work have also given me extra time. The cross-fertilisation of conversation with staff in various disciplines provides inspiration and opportunity for collaborative projects (see above). The research itself is enjoyable, and then there are findings to be disseminated. There is also the pleasure of crafting something (or at least of having done so when it is finished). Research for me now is part of my personal lifelong learning journey.

Identity issues

A continuing issue for me has been academic identity. Lecturers within programs often seem unwilling to regard as fellow academics people who are not course lecturers. My teaching often seems not to be regarded as "real" teaching. When I was involved in other hourly-paid teaching at the Campus in the early 1990s, it tended to be on that basis that I was regarded as a part-time academic, not by reason of the language and learning support; yet the latter was the focus of a position classified as academic since its establishment. Starting to build a research

profile seemed to make me somewhat more visible as part of the academic community. However, as some of my research activities were carried out separately (on an hourly-paid basis) from my Study Adviser work, while others were included in it, it was not always clear to others that some of the research was being done as the expected research component of the Study Adviser position. Such identity matters have been a concern of colleagues in many Australian institutions, as reflected in a position statement compiled in 1999 (Carmichael et al. 1999).

The 'Study Adviser' title of my position proves to be misleading to some students; some seek me out for consultation on their proposed course or program changes and related administrative matters, belonging rather to Campus Central (the central student administrative unit on each campus) or their program directors and course coordinators. The 'Student Support Centre' title for the location also attracts some enquiries more appropriately directed to the Student Association, but this happens less frequently than when there was an incorrect 'Student Services' sign over the door (finally changed only this year).

Identity issues have also accompanied the structural changes. I felt part of the Student Learning Support team when I belonged to the same unit, despite the distance. It was hoped that collegial links would continue when I was attached to Whyalla instead of the FLC, and they do to some extent; however, there is not the same close association as previously, when we shared a computer folder and regular meetings. In 2000, the metropolitan SSCs launched a new identity as Learning Connection. This change underlined the separation. Before that all the campus units had been called Student Support Centres, even though Whyalla's was separately funded. We often feel 'othered' when we see references to Learning Connection offices 'on each campus' – there seems to be a constant need in this as in many areas of Campus life to put the question, 'What about Whyalla?' The University community does not seem to have sorted out the matter, as mail items are frequently addressed to Learning Adviser or Learning Connection, Whyalla.

Areas of my growth

There has been considerable skills and knowledge development in my time in the position. The last twelve years have seen me change from someone who had barely

used a computer – and I still wrote in pen my early coursework assignments in my master's – to being unable to face the process of writing anything of reasonable length without a word processor. I have also added to my experience in teaching students of other language backgrounds, a highlight being the opportunity to be on a brief exchange to Ezhou University in China in 2000. There have also been many opportunities for my own development in research skills areas and other areas related to the University's goals. This semester, with other Whyalla colleagues from various areas, I have been engaged in a series of Creating a Collaborative Learning Environment workshops; these have provided great opportunities for discussing learning and teaching in the university context.

Conclusion

I have endeavoured in this paper to give an overview of how a regional campus provider of language and learning support has been involved in the total life of the Campus community, extending beyond the core business of the position. This has been against the background of the changes in higher education that have affected all of us over the same period. I have given, albeit at a fairly shallow level because of the twelve-year timeframe involved, my perspective of the way these changes have affected learning support, particularly at a regional campus. What is most important with regard to our lives as language and academic skills advisers is that we ourselves recognise our need to be lifelong learners along with our students, as we develop "practice wisdom" and respond to the never-ceasing changes in our environment. One thing I am sure that we have learned is the need for flexibility, not only in order simply to stay working in the situation we have chosen, but also to be able to rise to new challenges and take advantage of opportunities to implement strategies to improve the learning/teaching environment for all students. Just as students who engage whole-heartedly in their university education find it to be a life-changing experience, so we often experience transformative learning as we perform our professional activities (Mezirow 1991). Just as students experiencing change in their 'meaning perspectives' need support through that process (Cranton 1994), so we need support from our colleagues and institution.

The University of South Australia's positioning statement is: 'educating professionals; creating and applying knowledge; serving the community'. Language and learning support staff have an important role to play in all of these aspects of university life.

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MAKING CONNECTIONS: THE CHANGING IDENTITY OF LEARNING SUPPORT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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As universities move into the 21st century they are experiencing many changes including globalisation, corporatisation, internationalisation, the introduction of new technologies and increased accountability. This has led to a more diverse student population, an increase in technology facilitated delivery, more corporate styles of institutional management, higher staff/student ratios and closer links to industry-based needs. These changes have had an impact on all university staff and students and have required staff who work in learning support and professional development units to reconfigure their work in ways which are more strategic.

In response to these changes, the student support area at the University of South Australia underwent a significant change at the beginning of 2000. This not only involved a renaming of the centres but a change in the practices of all professional staff within this group (learning advisers, counsellors, careers staff, international student advisers and professional developers). This paper will outline the reasons that led to this move and how Senge's notion of the 'learning organisation' has been used as a theoretical framework to develop the change. A description of the changes that have taken place will be given and in particular the work of learning advisers will be highlighted.

Keywords: learning centres, learning advisers, changes in higher education

Introduction

As universities move into the 21st century they are facing rapid changes and significant challenges. It is well documented that globalisation, corporatisation, internationalism, the introduction of new technologies, increased accountability and an emphasis on quality are having an impact on every aspect of university life (Marginson, 1996; Coaldrake and Stedman, 1999). The diversity of the student population has also increased, not only in age, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background but also in values, attitudes and expectations (McInnes, James and Hartley, 2000). Universities are facing major challenges on a number of fronts including the increase in technology facilitated delivery, more corporate styles of management, higher staff/student ratios and closer links with industry. Changes are being instigated at the managerial and policy level and are having an effect on all staff and students in universities (Coaldrake and Stedman, 1999).

Over the last couple of decades the student population has changed significantly and expanded under the mass higher education system. Universities are now teaching a diverse range of students with different language and socio-economic backgrounds and academic preparedness (McInnes, 1998). As teaching practices move to more

student centred pedagogies there are increasing demands on both students and staff.

One of the most significant challenges that all universities are experiencing is the impact of the new information and communication technologies in teaching and learning. These changes are pervasive and ongoing, affecting every aspect of university life for all staff including those involved in learning support and professional development.

In May 2000 the student support area at the University of South Australia underwent a significant identity change in response to the new directions of the University. ***Learning Connection*** was launched on each metropolitan campus. This has brought together activities and resources both physical and virtual to complement learning for all students of the University within a strategic framework. This paper outlines the development of Learning Connection and the reasons for these changes. The changes have been conceptualised in terms of Senge's framework of organisational learning and different models of student learning support. Although the changes affect all professional groups in the student services area a particular focus of this paper is on learning advisers and the changes they have undertaken to meet these challenges.

Context of University of South Australia

The University of South Australia is a multi-campus post-Dawkins institution and is the result of the 1991 amalgamation of a number of campuses from the former South Australian Institute of Technology and the South Australian College of Advanced Education. There are currently five metropolitan campuses and one rural campus with approximately 27,000 students enrolled (this includes 4,000 external students and 5,700 offshore students). The University has a particular brief in its founding act for the education of Indigenous people and frames all of its activity within a more general commitment to equity. Most of the educational programs offered are applied with a strong focus on the education of professionals.

In its teaching and learning framework (see Diagram 1 below), the University has three interlinked key concepts which shape the teaching and learning environment:

student centred learning, graduate qualities and flexible delivery. The first two are organising concepts. Student-centred learning signals the intention to provide students with greater access to learning opportunities and more control over their learning. The graduate qualities focus the teaching and learning activity on the achievement of seven kinds of student outcomes. The third concept, flexible delivery, is seen as the enabler of the first two through the application of technologies in teaching and learning. This has some manifestation in the provision of courses through traditional forms of distance education, but is increasingly focused on online forms of delivery for all students of the University. Each year the University articulates five to six teaching and learning priorities which encompass these concepts.

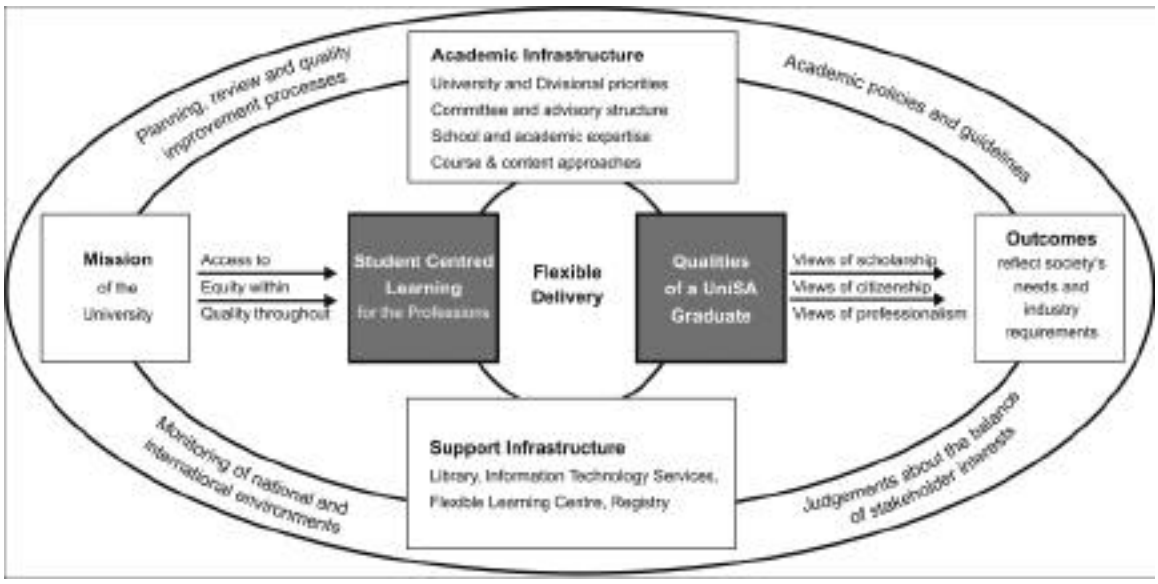

Diagram 1: Teaching and Learning Framework, University of South Australia, 2001

This broad framework is the basis of all teaching and learning activity of the University, including the practices of support services such as student services. Further, these services are not seen as peripheral to teaching and learning activities but as complementary and integrated components of a total learning environment. Learning services are central to the way that all professional practices are shaped and they have a significant influence on teaching and learning arrangements.

Learning Connection

Prior to 2000, student support services at the University of South Australia consisted of counselling, study skills, welfare support, international student support and careers, located in Student Support Centres on all campuses. Services were delivered through individual consultations and face-to-face workshops. Students from the designated equity groups were the predominant users of these services (non-English speaking background students, students with disabilities, mature-age students). Of the professional areas located in Student Support Centres, learning advisers were the first group of staff to change these practices and this had been evolving over the last five years. They were working much closer with teaching staff and were integrating services for students into the curriculum.

Towards the end of 1999, as part of an evaluation of student services, focus groups were organised throughout the University of South Australia's community. Extremely useful feedback was gained from these groups. The three most common responses that were received included a lack of understanding (and confusion) about services offered, a deficit view of services (both by staff and students), and problems with access to the services (students often had to wait two to three weeks to get an appointment with a professional staff member).

As a result of these consultations several recommendations were made including the following:

- there would be a name change for the centres (taking out the word support and emphasising the developmental nature of these services)
- a strategy would be developed to promote services and resources for all students and staff
- more resources and services would be available online to increase access for all students and staff
- increased access to all professional areas would be provided through the introduction of 'dropins' - one hour per day was made available to see students (by each professional staff member), and through a central number that could be dialled on any campus.

In May 2000, Learning Connection was officially launched and separate events on each of the metropolitan campuses were held for staff and students. Bright, distinctive posters were circulated throughout the University, and information about Learning Connection was widely distributed using a range of mediums − for example an email message was sent to all students and a screen saver with the new name was put on all computers in the University's computing pools. All promotional material has been distinctively branded using a particular look and colours so that there is ready visual identification.

Learning Connection offices are located on each metropolitan campus of the University of South Australia. Learning Connection staff provide services for all students and staff within the University. For students this covers learning advice, personal counselling, careers counselling, disability support, and services for International students. For staff, professional development and services related to online delivery are provided.

The teaching and learning framework (Diagram 1) provides an overarching conceptual framework for all of the activities in Learning Connection. The specific services provided by staff in Learning Connection are now more directly focussed on the strategic directions of the University and on achieving the key performance indicators as expressed in the University's corporate plan. This has been a significant change for staff in Learning Connection and is one of the main differences between our practices and other universities. For each professional area there has been a range of service changes and these continue to develop as staff work through the implications of the emerging corporate directions. In order to specify the particular services offered by each professional group, a document (a Portfolio of Services document available at: http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/learningconnection/servcon/LCportfolio2_1_.doc) outlining the specific services for staff and students was developed.

The following table summarises some of the changes that have taken place and the shifts in practice that have occurred to support them.

From	⇨	To
mainly equity based client group	⇨	universal student population
few (NESB) International students	⇨	significant NESB numbers, particularly on some campuses
face to face delivery	⇨	technology facilitated delivery
working directly with students to address individual responses to learning	⇨	working in systemic ways with both staff and students within subjects and courses
student services structure a free-standing entity within the University	⇨	student services delivered from a group whose activities are directed by the strategic directions of the Divisions/University
service based in individual professional performance (range of services, standards)	⇨	service based in performance of multidisciplinary teams against services and standards directed by Divisions/university
relatively low staff/student ratios	⇨	relatively high staff/student ratios
academic professional development indirectly related to student learning	⇨	academic professional development directly related to student learning

Table 1:Shifts in Practices (George and Hicks, 2000)

The above changes are concerned with the University's capacity to meet the rapid social and economic changes. The literature of learning organisations (Senge 1990; Field and Ford, 1995) has been used to frame the changes that have taken place. Senge has identified five disciplines which must work in an interrelated way to contribute to the development of a learning organisation. These include systems thinking, personal mastery, mental models, building a shared vision and team learning. In relation to the changes which occurred at the University of South Australia, the first, third and fifth disciplines have the most focus. A detailed analysis of the changes within Learning Connection and how they relate to Senge's five disciplines has been dealt with in another paper (George and Hicks, 2000).

Learning Advisers – changes

Within Australian universities, student support has been conceptualised in a variety of ways over time. Originally it developed out of counselling models which involved individual consultations. In more recent times there have been moves to provide a more integrated approach by working in the primary delivery of particular courses (Hicks and George, 1998; Skillen, Merten, Trivett and Percy, 1998).

At the University of South Australia this integrated model has been taken one step further. It focuses on the whole curriculum, and learning support staff work with academic staff to embed tertiary literacy skills into the curriculum. In this approach a team of staff, which could include one or more of the following – professional developers, learning advisers, counsellors, librarians, work closely with the academic teaching staff to ensure that the skills and support that are necessary for students to successfully complete the courses that they are enrolled in are embedded within the curriculum. For this to occur quite a detailed curriculum development process is undertaken (Hicks and George, 1998; George and O'Regan, 1998).

In early 1999 it was decided to reconceptualise the role of learning advisers to accommodate the changes which were occurring in the University. Learning adviser positions were reframed and re-advertised based on the approach to learning support that was developing in this University. A generic position description was written and each learning adviser has an area of specialisation which is developed for leadership and research purposes (online learning, NESB and International students; equity groups, research and postgraduate education). It was also expected that all learning advisers would be involved in the development of online resources. Learning advisers began working on some of these changed practices early in 2000. These changes included the way that resources were written and delivered, and the nature of face-to-face services to students

Resources

In order to ensure that services could be accessed by all and to respond to the increasing use of technology in teaching, web based resources were identified as a

major form of delivery. Two main forms have been introduced: learning guides and online workshops. These can be accessed at: http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/learningconnection/learnres/index.htm

Learning Guides

Currently learning advisers and other University staff have written 25 learning guides and 18 guides that relate to the University of South Australia's online teaching and learning environment. Each learning guide is a short word document (2-6 pages) about topics that relate specifically to learning at University. Some examples include getting the most from your academic reading; writing article reviews and making use of feedback on assessment. Many of the guides have been written collaboratively and all have gone through a rigorous internal peer review process (O'Regan, 2001). These guides are downloadable documents that students can either read online or print. Teaching staff can hyper-link to a guide within their teaching materials - or cut and paste relevant material into their own resources. It is intended that they be used as flexibly and as seamlessly as possible. These guides have been very successful with positive responses from both staff and students.

Online Workshops

Face-to-face workshops on assessment tasks and learning issues have always been popular activities for students. In order to make these services available to all students, learning advisers have developed online resources which replicate the learning processes explored in face-to-face workshops. These online workshops were developed for both generic topics and specific courses. They allow students access anytime and anywhere and in addition these workshops have made available the dynamic use of links to other resources and the interactivity of online discussions. Teaching staff can make reference and direct links to the workshops in teaching materials that they have produced (Hicks, Reid and George, 1999). Once again these have been received very positively. A workshop that was developed for a law course (Introduction to Law: Writing the Problem-based exercise: http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/06454exercise/) in the School of International Business has received 4595 hits over 2 semesters. While this is only an indicative figure (measuring hits and not the number of students), use of this workshop by

students has been high.

Face-to-face services

Several face-to-face services are still offered to students to complement the resources that are available online. These included dropin sessions, individual appointments and workshops. One of the concerns from the focus groups held at the end of 1999, was that students had to often wait a long time to access an individual appointment. In order to decrease the time, a one hour dropin time per day for each professional staff member in Learning Connection was introduced. These times are advertised widely. Generally, students can see a staff member within 24 hours of making and inquiry and either have a short query answered, be referred to appropriate resources, workshops or to another person or be given a longer appointment. To a significant extent the dropins depend on the availability of suitable resources and the learning guides and online workshops have been used in this way. Individual contacts (both dropins and appointments) have informed the need and development of many of these resources.

Working with teaching staff

The mechanism for implementing all services provided by Learning Connection for staff is through an annual service agreement with each Division (there are four main Divisions at the University of South Australia – Business and Enterprise; Education, Arts and Social Sciences; Health Sciences; and Information Technology and the Environment). These provide blueprints for work between the different service areas of Learning Connection and Divisional staff, ensuring the strategic value of services provided in terms of the University's direction. For example, a School may identify the development of a particular online resource for one of their offshore teaching programs. A professional development staff member, a learning adviser and an online adviser will work with the nominated staff from the school to develop this resource so that it is student friendly and meets the needs of the students. All work outlined in the service agreement is reported on a regular basis and formal reports to the Divisions are made at the end of each year.

Multiple services for students

As noted by McInnes et al (2000) there are increasing demands to provide flexible forms of delivery because of the increase in the number of hours that students are employed. At Learning Connection a range of services as outlined above has been developed to ensure that students have access, choice and flexibility within their learning environment. As an example the following table illustrates the different services and resources that are available to support a first year assignment.

Access • Choice • Flexibility ***A sample of Learning Connection services and resources for one aspect of teaching and learning***			
Services to integrate student support in the course—curriculum design	LC professional development staff work with a course team to develop understanding of the policy frameworks that govern assessment and what these mean in practice	LC Teaching guide developed and made available on LC website to support workshops or as a stand alone resource	LC learning advisers work with staff to put in place resources to assist students to understand expectations regarding assessment tasks
for students—in person High touch—when interaction with staff and with peers is essential, or to build confidence for students to seek out own resources	Student attends a LC learning advisers face to face workshop on writing essays—students use LC online facility to book in online and print off a record of attendance	Example —Learning Connection resources supporting a first major undergraduate assignment	Student attends an after hours drop in session to discuss with LC disability officer the possibility of modification to assessment requirements
for students—resource based/online High tech—asynchronous, independent of campus, can be revisited again and again as needed	Student undertakes a LC online course-specific workshop about the particular piece of assessment or a generic one on the form of the assignment	Student prints off learning guides on how to approach essay writing, on referencing, and on avoiding plagiarism	Student prints off a computer user guide to researching using Netscape

Table 2: A sample of Learning Connection services and resources for one aspect of teaching and learning (developed by H McCausland for the University of South Australia nomination for the 2001 Australian Awards for University Teaching).

Current directions

Over the last 18 months all of the learning advisers and other Learning Connection staff have been involved in the development of these resources and we currently have 43 learning guides and 37 online workshops (generic and course specific) on the web. Many more are at various stages of development. Now that a base of resources has been developed we are concentrating on more course specific requests and resources for targeted groups of students.

Currently the developments that are being worked on include:

- improved service for NESB students - both through individual appointments and web resources
- targeted services for Research students
- expansion of our services for issues concerning referencing and plagiarism
- learning services for students who are learning online
- learning development for offshore International students.

Student and staff satisfaction with the service

An evaluation framework for the multiple services offered through Learning Connection has been developed. Different components of practices are evaluated in different ways and this is being mapped and reviewed continually. At the end of 2000 two specific evaluations were conducted. The first focussed on the awareness of the new services in Learning Connection. Five hundred students across the five metropolitan campuses were interviewed at random to ascertain whether they were aware of Learning Connection and its services. The following table summarises the main responses to these questions (these responses were made six months after the launch).

Question	Indicative response (n=500)	
	Yes	**No**
Are you aware of Learning Connection services?	68.1%	30.3%
If yes – which services Counselling Learning advising Careers International student services Disability services	Out of 500 responses 50% 57% 37% 29% 28%	
Would you recommend services to other students?	70.9%	8.2%

Table 3: Awareness of Learning Connection services (November, 2000)

For the month of November 2000, all students who attended a dropin or short appointment at Learning Connection were asked about the effectiveness of these services. The main responses have been summarised below:

Question (students attending a drop in session only)	Indicative response
The information I received was very helpful.	96% of the 164 students responding agreed or strongly agreed
Overall I was satisfied with the service I received.	93% of the 164 students responding agreed or strongly agreed
Would you recommend Learning Connection to other students?	163 of the 164 students responded yes
Question (students attending a drop in or appointment in relation to overall Learning Connection services)	**Indicative response (not all students responded to all questions)**
The information/assistance I received was very helpful.	92% of the 249 students responding agreed or strongly agreed
Overall I was satisfied with the service I received.	94% of the 340 students responding agreed or strongly agreed
Would you recommend Learning Connection to other students?	282 of the 284 students responded yes

Table 4: Satisfaction with individual contacts (dropins and appointments) November 2000

An evaluation of University staff is planned at the end of this year. While we have no formal feedback from staff on the services, anecdotal responses have all been positive. Demands for course specific online workshops by teaching staff are increasing each semester and is another indicator of the success of this type of resource.

Conclusion

Staff of the University of South Australia have taken a unique approach to learning services in the development of Learning Connection. The nature of services and the professional practices of staff have shifted significantly. Services now are:

- linked explicitly to the strategic directions of the University
- provide a coherent and systematic service for the various student client groups
- transparent to all staff and students
- available electronically and face-to-face, and access has been increased
- initiated by individual staff and students within the Divisions and at the wider University level and developed collaboratively
- group based and specific to courses and disciplines
- focussed on achieving student outcomes for all students (George and Hicks, 2000)

The University of South Australia has a blueprint for 2005. Some of the predicted changes include a significant increase in the number of International students offshore and expansion of the online environment. While these changes will present new challenges for staff in Learning Connection we believe we are well placed to meet these challenges.

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Changing Identities

MOVING FROM FACE-TO-FACE TO ONLINE WORKSHOPS TO SUPPORT NESB STUDENTS IN THE CLINICAL PRACTICUM: INTRODUCING A MORE CRITICAL APPROACH

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Students in the clinical practicum need to engage with the multiliteracies and multi-layered identities of the workplace, the community and the academic institution. Here multiliteracies are framed as, 'social practices that are complex, multifaceted and ideologically loaded' (Baynham 1995, p. 8).The focus of this paper is the support work done by a Learning Adviser with non-English Speaking Background students in the Health Sciences to help develop oral communication and workplace literacy for the clinical placement. The paper describes the face-to-face workshops which use 'orders of discourse' (Fairclough 1995) in their design and which focus on the development of 'communication strategies' in spoken interactions (Faerch & Kasper 1983; Tarone 1983). The paper then identifies some of the features of the online versions which, while

encouraging interactivity and responding to a cohort of students who increasingly require flexibly delivered modes of support, present particular challenges. The paper draws on the writing of critical literacy researchers to address the question: How can 'critical literacy' approaches be incorporated into online student support work? In particular, the paper uses the New London Group's Pedagogy of Multiliteracies (2000) to analyse two online workshops, finding examples of the first and second stages of this pedagogy, 'situated practice' and 'overt instruction' but further opportunities for the development of the important third and fourth stages of 'critical framing' and 'transformed practice'.

Keywords: NESB students, clinical practicum, online workshops, critical approach

Introduction

Within their placements, non-English speaking background (NESB) university students in the Health Sciences are expected to learn and perform new clinical skills and corresponding communication tasks in the target or 'real-world' situation where the safety of human life is paramount. These students need to develop an understanding of the culture of the workplace and of how language is used in interactions with patients and their families, hospital staff and visiting supervisors from the university. They need to be able to use a range of different language registers with these groups as they enter a new discourse community. In this context then, literacy is interpreted as 'mastery of a new Discourse' (Gee 1996, p.145) where a Discourse refers to :

> … a socially accepted association among ways of using language, other symbolic expressions, and 'artifacts' , of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting that can be used

> to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network', or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful 'role'. (Gee 1996, p. 130)

The mastery of a new discourse is closely allied to forming a new identity, that is, a positive sense of self within a new role. In the clinical practicum students are laying the groundwork for their new identities as health professionals who will need to negotiate their own working conditions and to advocate on behalf of their patients. To do this the NESB students need a critical awareness of language and how it is used. For this reason, this paper accepts the framing of multiliteracies in the clinical practicum as "social practices that are complex, multifaceted and ideologically loaded" (Baynham 1995, p. 8).

In the process of incorporating new identities as novice health professionals, students need to develop a critical awareness of language and the paper draws on the writing of critical literacy researchers to explore some of the ways that a 'critical literacy' approach could be incorporated into online student support work. Critical literacy has a number of origins including anthropology, sociology, socio-linguistics, critical discourse theory, genre theory and Systemic Functional Linguistics, empowerment ideology and feminist theory. Many critical literacy theorists write about the application of theory to reading and writing but this paper will attempt to apply some aspects of the critical literacy theory to spoken language where speakers also make important choices in relation to language and content.

The focus of this paper is the support work done by a Learning Adviser with non-English Speaking Background students in the Health Sciences to help develop oral communication and workplace literacy for the clinical placement. The paper describes the face-to-face workshops which use 'orders of discourse' (Fairclough 1995) in their design and which focus on the development of 'communication strategies' in spoken interactions (Faerch & Kasper 1983; Tarone 1983). The paper then traces the development from face-to-face to online workshops and identifies some of the features of the online versions.

The online versions represent a major direction of learning support at the university and because of their static nature, they can be more easily examined than face to

face teaching processes. To analyse the online workshops, the paper uses The New London Group's Pedagogy of Multiliteracies (2000, pp. 33-35) which has four-stages:

Stage 1 'Situated Practice', is described as, 'immersion in meaningful practices within a community of learners who are capable of playing multiple and different roles' and these practices would include workplace-based simulations.

Stage 2 'Overt Instruction' is defined as: 'interventions on behalf of the teacher…that scaffold learning activities'. In these interventions, students are given explicit information that they can apply to practice. One of the characteristics of 'overt instruction' is the use of metalanguage that describes 'the form, content and function of the discourses of practice'.

Stage 3 Critical Framing 'involves the students standing back from what they are studying and viewing it critically in relation to its context'. Through critical framing, students can be made aware of where power is located in language and how it shifts. For example, when communicating with patients, in their identities of novice health professionals, students can often find themselves in dominant positions of power. However in communicating with staff and visiting lecturers from the university, that is in their student identities, they are more likely to be positioned as less powerful.

Stage 4 'Transformed Practice' refers to 'a re-practice, where theory becomes reflective practice' and this involves the application of the 'transformed meaning' to other contexts

An analysis of the workshops finds examples of the first and second stages of the pedagogy of multiliteracies, 'situated practice' and 'overt instruction' but further opportunities for the development of the important third and fourth stages of 'critical framing' and 'transformed practice'. It is important to recognise that changes to the workshops suggested through the analysis do not be purport to be 'critical literacy programs' but rather represent the developmental stage of a more critical approach.

The face-to-face and online workshops for Nursing students

Ladyshewsky (1997) conducted a research project in 1996 with International NESB Physiotherapy students and their clinical supervisors, concluding that culturally-based concepts of authority and respect as well as English language proficiency directly influenced clinical placement outcomes. These findings were supported in a study by Stewart et al (1996), who asked students to identify difficulties faced in the clinical placement and to suggest strategies to overcome them. The majority of students favoured the introduction of 'cross-cultural communication workshops for themselves and their supervisors' (Stewart et al 1996, p.1). The need for teaching strategies which focus on clinical communication for NESB Nursing students is reinforced in work done by Brown (1997) and Hussin (1997).

This need came to the foreground at the University of South Australia in 1998 and 1999 when the School of Nursing asked a Learning Adviser to provide face-to–face workshops for NESB students who were experiencing difficulty, or failing to meet the requirements of the clinical placement. The two main areas of concern were that students were not spending enough time communicating with patients while performing nursing tasks and that hospital staff were not always sure if students were understanding instructions. The workshops were designed to build a safe environment where students could learn and practise communication skills before having to perform them on their placements and then to debrief the experience afterwards. The workshops were then to be developed as one online version.

The three-hour face-to-face workshop for first year Nursing students, 'Communication Skills for the Clinical Placement' was held in the week prior to their first clinical placement in a hospital. The session was divided into two parts: communicating with patients and communicating with staff and each part included role-plays to simulate the clinical environment. Gee (1996 p. 33) stresses that if we are trying to help our students achieve mastery of a secondary Discourse then we need to engage them in realistic learning situations that employ authentic texts, that is, in what the New London Group calls, 'situated practice'. The elements of situated practice such as simulation of the interactions found in clinical placements were used in the face-to-face workshop, most of which have been replicated in the online

version (Appendix A).

The workshops were designed with Fairclough's concept of 'orders of discourse' in mind (Fairclough 1995). These orders of discourse can be seen as a 'structured set of conventions associated with a semiotic activity' (New London Group 2000, p. 20) in a given place. These conventions relate not only to language use and non-verbal behaviour but also to visual signs and systems for example, a thermometer used by the nurse to take a patient's temperature or a vase of flowers on a patient's bedside table.

Within these orders of discourse are conventions associated with language use in particular activities that can be identified as oral genres, for example, the way that nurses talk to patients while taking their blood pressure or that doctors talk to nurses during a ward round**.** Halliday (1985) observes that spoken language is process-oriented and that the grammar is characterised by complex arrangements of clauses and verbal processes. In the first section of the face-to-face workshop the students were introduced to the stages of the oral genre, 'Taking Vital Signs' which was divided into the following speech functions:

- giving information to patients
- explaining procedure to patients
- seeking cooperation from patients
- offering encouragement to patients
- offering reassurance to patients
- giving feedback to patients

The students were encouraged to establish rapport with patients through engaging in social conversation. They identified topics of conversation they could discuss with patients and also how to use cues such as patients' cards, photos, flowers and books to initiate conversation. This was followed by extensive paired role-plays where half the group of students role-playing the 'patients' were given prepared questions to ask and concerns to express. The students role-playing 'nurses' were

required to take vital signs using the staged speech functions while initiating a social conversation by responding to visual cues (props) placed at the ‘bedside’ by the Learning Adviser. The ‘nurses’ then needed to respond spontaneously to a ‘patient’s’ question and then to a complaint or problem while also taking their blood pressure. This aspect of the workshop was built into the online version as an exercise but it did lose the interactivity, immediacy and the unpredictable features which made it a more realistic language exercise.

The second section of the face-to-face workshop was held after the clinical placement. It started with an overview of the students’ concerns about communicating with supervisors in clinical placements. The Learning Adviser presented information on communication strategies drawing on the work of Faerch & Kasper (1983) and Tarone (1983). These covered ways to clarify meaning such as asking for repetition and asking clarification questions eg. ‘***What*** did you say we need to order from the pharmacy?’ as well as a range of ways to demonstrate understanding such as:

- repetition of key words
- confirmation statements which paraphrase information
- expansion statements which add information
- elaboration questions which ask for more information

The students were then presented with four case studies of patients where the Learning Adviser took the role of the Clinical Instructor, issued instructions and asked questions which required students to use these communication strategies to clarify meaning, check understanding and demonstrate understanding. The students then reflected on their performance and received feedback. This was successfully built into the online version as exercises which students were invited to submit to the Learning Adviser or the lecturer in charge of their clinical supervision, in order to receive some feedback. While many students have taken up this option, most have chosen to submit the exercises to clinical lecturer and only a few have sent them to the Learning Adviser. This may be due to the fact that the students are often referred

to the workshop by the their lecturers and so need to demonstrate improved readiness for the clinical placement to them directly.

After delivering the workshops 'live' over three semesters, the face-to-face version was replaced by the online version, incorporating as many of the original features as possible. An analysis of the online workshop reveals many examples of 'overt instruction' (New London Group 2000). In these interventions, students are given explicit information that they can apply to practice. Examples of metalanguage used in the workshop are the naming of speech functions such as, 'explaining procedure to patients' and communication strategies such as, 'confirmation statements which paraphrase information' (Appendix A).

The face-to-face module and online workshop for Health Sciences students

The next level of identified need was for Year 2 and 3 NESB Nursing students to develop improved interview skills in order to take a Nursing History from patients. At the same time the School of Physiotherapy was asking for help with a cohort of Masters students from India in relation to interview skills. The staff were concerned that students often needed to establish rapport with patients in a clinic, assess their injury and pain and respond to their questions all in a relatively short period of time. The lecturer reported that the students sometimes became fazed by the complexity and interactive nature of the task, that is, it was not a simple question-answer process but involved a range of registers and 'code switching'. Students reported that patients in Australia were more demanding in terms of spoken interaction and that they sometimes found it difficult to make the shift from talking to the patient, using ***interpersonal*** language, to explaining their decisions to their clinical supervisor, using more ***technical*** language.

Another group of NESB Pharmacy students self-referred for learning support following their placements. Some of these students had been in country towns where the pharmacists were often consulted on complex issues in the absence of a doctor. In interviewing clients, these students found that they needed to be able to ask well-framed questions in order to accurately assess the client's condition. The students

were particularly surprised at the openess with which clients in Australia sought advice in areas like contraception and the treatment of ***Candida*** , including practices to prevent the spread of the condition.

The needs of these cohorts of students lead to two face-to-face sessions, 'Interview Techniques for Taking a Health History,' currently held as one of the modules of a Language Development Program for NESB students during semester breaks. These sessions are held on two consecutive days for three hours of each day. The first day is spent developing techniques of asking open and closed questions; asking focussed and probing questions; paraphrasing, clarifying and summarising information. The students then break into their professional groups. The Nursing students are given Health History forms, the Physiotherapy students, Clinical Assessment forms and the Pharmacy students, Shared Patient Summary forms. The students use designated sections of these authentic texts in paired practice where they need to use all the different question forms covered earlier in the session. Students then return to the whole group to discuss the paired practice. The first session ends with a viewing of a video, 'Taking a Health History' where students are asked to identify the interview techniques that have already been presented and practised but to particularly focus on body language and non-verbal cues.

The next session on the following day starts with a review of interview techniques and then time is spent building vocabulary that can be used when asking questions about more personal issues such as pain and elimination. The rest of the session is spent in extended role-plays. Within their professional groups, students divide into pairs, one taking the role of patient/client and the other of health professional. The two role groups are then separated and prepared for the role-plays. The 'clients' are given 'Client Profile' sheets which give details of their names, diagnoses, medical histories, prescribed drugs etc as well as unpredictable questions to ask their 'health professional'. The 'health professionals' are given only the names, ages and diagnoses of their clients and spend some time reviewing the history and assessment forms. The role-play then begins. This is essentially an information gap activity where the 'client' stays in role and the 'professional' takes a health history using as many of the practised interview techniques as possible. There is de-briefing time at the end of the role-plays where students reflect on their performance and are

given some feedback. The pairs of students then reverse roles and using a different 'Client Profile' sheet, the second set of role-plays begins.

Like the Nursing workshop, this module uses situated practice and overt instruction as part of the pedagogy and students have their attention drawn to the differences between the spoken and written modes of language. Opportunities to discuss these differences arise when the students are completing health assessment documentation and need to decide how to communicate a patient's ***spoken*** expression in ***written*** form, in such a way that accurate information is available to other health professionals. This movement between spoken and written language forms is known as ' intertextuality' (Joyce & Burns 1992) and is a feature of the health interview. Here the student is also moving between informal and formal registers and interpersonal and informational modes. These moves often require an identity shift to incorporate various roles such as the professional, the confidante, the colleague or friend.

The first session of this module is currently being developed as an online workshop (Appendix B). Again metalanguage is used to name stages of the interview such as 'establishing rapport' and techniques used within stages, such as 'clarifying questions'. This emergent online workshop demonstrates that interviews have a particular generic structure, however, the structure is not always clearly defined. The New London Group (2000 p. 24) discuss the 'mixing of genres' in some language activities and note that the interview in a health context is an example of the mix between the medical examination, the counselling session or even the informal conversation.

Features of the online workshops

One of the positive features of the online versions is that lessons learnt from the face-to-face workshops can be incorporated into on-line versions. For example, the experience in running the face-to-face workshop highlighted the need for an additional section on 'Responding to implicit instructions'. The online workshops provide a form of professional development for the lecturers in charge of clinical supervision who refer students to the workshop and sometimes give them feedback

on the written exercises. This knowledge gained by staff can then be embedded into the teaching processes of the practicum-based courses. The Nursing workshop has also been linked electronically to the first and second year practicum-based courses where staff encourage NESB students to access it before their first placement.

These online alternatives have incorporated a range of literacies and encourage interactivity by including practical language exercises that can be submitted for feedback. On-line workshops provide an accessible and enduring form of support for students' learning which give the students control over the development and management of their communication skills. The informal feedback from students is that using the online workshops made them feel less anxious about undertaking the clinical placement.

The online alternatives are also a timely response to the university context of increased numbers of NESB students but reduced resources for student support. The provision of online support also meets the needs of various cohorts of students across faculties and year levels who enter their study programs and undertake their practicum at different times of the academic year and so increasingly require flexibly delivered modes of support. These include International students and working students who may be doing intensive programs such as Summer schools.

Obvious short-comings of the online versions are the problems inherent in using a ***written*** medium to develop ***oracy*** in students. For example, in the online Nursing workshop there is no possibility for role-plays and for the immediate checking of students' responses to tasks or cues, including feedback on body language and paralinguistic features, that is available in the face-to-face version. If the students submit exercises, then they are a written form of how they ***think*** they might respond verbally, rather than the spoken response itself. Another challenge is the difficulty in using linear online navigation to represent an activity which is in essence, non-linear. The navigation bar for the interview module could give the impression of a strictly linear model of the interview genre when in fact many interviews move back and forth between some of the stages, for example, between 'using open-ended questions' and 'paraphrasing information'. Finally, although the online workshops include an 'Online Discussion' facility, a more comprehensive evaluation of the

workshops by students is needed in order to assess their real effectiveness in preparing students for their clinical practicum.

Introducing a more critical approach

In discussing learning principles underlying literacy as mastery of a secondary discourse, Gee differentiates between the master-apprentice model of teaching for ***acquisition*** with that of teaching for ***learning***. The latter, he says: 'uses explanations and analyses that break down material into analytic bits and juxtaposes diverse Discourses and their practices to each other' and this process develops metaknowledge that empowers the student (Gee 1996, p. 145). In the face-to-face and online workshops discussed in this paper, a genre approach is used to try and break oral tasks down into stages that can be described, analysed and taught.

However, Threadgold (1993), Kamler (1997) and Lee (1997) have criticised the genre approach as being overly concerned with induction and apprenticeship that serve to reproduce and inculcate power. Central to their criticism is the interpretation of genre theory that suggests that students must first master the genre before they can critique it. According to Kamler (1997, p. 389) the problem with this approach is that, 'Once disciplined, it may be difficult or impossible for students or their teachers to see or name that which needs critiquing'.

In the area of learning and academic skills, support staff can often find themselves in a dilemma as to how to assist students to operate within discipline-based genres while still developing a critical approach to them. It is interesting to note, that although many language and learning advisers contributed to the ***First National Conference on Tertiary Literacy*** in Melbourne in 1996, when Stevenson (2000) analysed the proceedings of the conference, she found that very few papers placed tertiary literacy within the framework of ***critical*** literacy theory.

As online learning support has been identified as one of the main strategic directions at the University of South Australia, it is relevant to analyse the online workshops in terms of developing a more critical approach. The online versions are also easier to analyse than face-to-face workshops because they are more static and accessible. In addition, the ability to learn through electronic forms, represents yet another

crucial literacy: ‘Becoming fully literate in today’s society means gaining competent control of representational forms in a variety of media and learning how those forms best combine in a variety of genres and discourses’ (Warschauer 1999, p. 177).

A useful approach to use in analysing the online workshops is the New London Group’s four-staged pedagogy of multiliteracies. As has been shown so far in this paper, the workshops contain many examples of the first two stages ‘situated practice‘ and ‘overt instruction’ however these two stages alone can often mean that learners stay uncritical of practices and their meanings (New London Group, p.32). The question that remains is: how could the phases of ‘critical framing’ and ‘transformed practice’ be incorporated into the online workshops?

A more critical approach for online workshop 1

In the context of oral communication in the clinical placement, ‘critical framing’ would entail designing reflective elements whereby students can examine how particular language choices demonstrate values and establish power relations among the speakers. An analysis of the online workshop, ‘Communication Skills for the Clinical Placement’ reveals changes that could be made to introduce critical framing, some of which are described here:

1. The ‘Welcome’ page of the workshop (Appendix A) refers to the conventions and expectations of student nurses but does not explain the origins of the workshop. The content of much of the workshop is based on observational data from literacy tasks and interactional patterns collected by the Learning Adviser over a ten-year period. As this data was collected while working alongside NESB overseas-qualified nurses in their clinical practicum, particular ‘insider knowledge’ was gained and this positioning of the author needs to be included in the ‘Welcome’ page.

2. The tone of the ‘Communicating with patients’ page clearly positions the Learning Adviser as authority without recognising the assets and strengths of the students. Here instead, students could be encouraged to begin their own skills inventory, detailing strategies that they have already used to successfully communicate across cultures and in a second language. In this

way, the subjectivities of each student can be brought with them to the learning task and their past and current identities validated. The New London Group (2000, p. 124) express this idea eloquently:

> Learning is not a matter of 'development' in which you leave your old selves behind; leaving behind lifeworlds which would otherwise be framed by education as more or less inadequate to the task of modern life. Rather, learning is a matter of repertoire; starting with a recognition of lifeworld experience and using that experience as a basis for extending what one knows and what one can do.

3. The 'Social Conversation' pages cover common interactional patterns between nurses and patients yet could still discuss the disparity of power that patients often feel in interactions with health professionals. Here the student could be encouraged to reflect on their own experiences as well as to try and see the interaction from the patient's perspective in terms of, '…who has the right to speak, to open and close exchanges, to nominate topics and to expect co-participants to respond to nominated topics' (Baynham 1995, p. 87). A critical approach might be to suggest the use of silence which would give patients more space to ask questions or make comments and therefore, give them more power within the interaction.

4. The next set of pages, 'Using speech functions while performing nursing tasks' focuses on six student-nurse initiated speech functions. In a later page, 'Responding to Patients', students are reminded that communication is two-way and that patients will often ask questions and initiate conversation while they are being cared for. At this point, critical framing could involve leaving students with some reflective questions to consider such as:

   -what purposes might the patient have in this interaction?

   -how might their purposes be different to yours?

   -what assumptions could the patient have about the interaction?

   -how will you know if their assumptions are different to yours?

5. The section on ‘Communicating with staff’ begins with a quote of a real student reflecting on her clinical experience. This would be improved with the embedding of an interactive component where students using the online workshop could add their own ‘voices’.

6. On the page, ‘Dealing with implicit instructions’ students are presented with some useful examples of implicit instructions that hospital staff give to students. The students are advised to ‘read between the lines’ to ‘fill in the gaps’ in order to interpret the real meaning of the staff member. A critical framing of implicit instructions would be to point out the way that grammatical features such as the use of modals and the passive voice serve to hide agency, (eg who is to do what to whom), and then to ask questions such as :

   -what is the purpose of hiding agency?

   -in whose interests is this practice?

   -how does this practice maintain power relations?

7. One of the last pages, ‘Hot tips for your clinical placement’ has some useful strategies for students to use to build success in their practicum but these strategies need to be prefaced by a sentence acknowledging that they were, in part, collected from students who were reflecting on their experiences. A ‘critical’ addition would be a corresponding list of ‘Strategies to Promote Positive Clinical Experiences’ that would be targeted at staff and that the students could down-load and give to their clinical supervisors. This would be a clear recognition that the onus for success in communication on practicum does not lie solely with the student, rather, it is a joint responsibility.

A more critical approach for online workshop 2

The online workshop, ‘Interview Techniques for Health Sciences Students’ (Appendix B) is currently being developed but even at the draft stage it is possible to see some initial changes that could be made to introduce critical framing. For example, on the page, ‘Asking open-ended questions’ it is suggested that these question forms are useful at the beginning of an interview or when a new topic is

being introduced and that they avoid the problem of concentrating too quickly on one aspect of the client's health. However, many texts used in the Health Sciences advocate that health professionals need not only to ask questions in order to accurately assess the client's condition but also to involve clients in the decisions about their own treatment. (Tindall et al 1994, p. 10). Therefore, in the online workshop, more prominence needs to be given to the way that open-ended questions give clients a choice as to how to respond, give them more control over the direction of the interview and therefore more power in relation to the health professional. Baynham (1995 p. 259) observes that: 'interviews and conversations are jointly constructed by participants.. there is a kind of intersubjectivity at work'. This intersubjectivity needs to be reflected in the online workshop.

In discussing questioning techniques, students need to be made aware of how their own values influence the framing of questions. In the face-to-face workshop this is done by watching the video, 'Taking a Health History' and discussing it afterwards. The video demonstrates very clearly the way that a nurse's values about a patient's sexually transmitted disease influence her questioning techniques, her responses and her non-verbal behaviors which then shape the direction and outcome of the interview. In the online version, an awareness of how values influence communication could be promoted through the inclusion of some samples of open-ended scenarios that require students to go beneath the surface of the interactions to uncover possible assumptions and values of the participants. In this way students are able to connect with their own values and identities while at the same time being encouraged to recognise individual differences among speakers.

What of 'transformed practice'?

The fourth and final stage of the New London Group's Pedagogy of Multiliteracies is 'transformed practice'. Transformed practice is where theory becomes reflective practice and where students, having renegotiated and incorporated changing identities as novice health professionals, have the opportunity to act in their new roles. Transformed practice is also a model of learning and action advocated and practised by many writers in health discipline areas, such as the defining works of Nursing theorists Street (1991) and Taylor (2000). At the University of South

Australia there are core courses in ‘Reflective Practice’, particularly in the latter years of study in the Health Sciences, and it is with the lecturers of these courses that the responsibility for facilitating transformed practice belongs.

While a Learning Adviser can encourage students to apply new insights gained from learning support activities into other contexts and in particular, into their next clinical practicum, the Learning Adviser is not able to facilitate this unless it is done as part of a joint project with course lecturers. Lee proposes a ‘co-production’ model of action research into literacy that could be developed within universities, where academic literacy specialists and subject specialists could: ‘work together on producing actionable knowledge about curriculum and pedagogy in specific locations’ (Lee 1997, p. 80). For example, this kind of cooperative activity could involve team-teaching in face-to face or online workshops and then joint-tracking of the workshop participants through their clinical practicum. Using Reflective Journals, students would be asked to critically reflect on their literacy practices and outline their action plans for re-practice.

Conclusion

Course lecturers often find it difficult to identify, articulate or teach the implicit literacy skills that their discipline-based knowledge is built upon, which leads to the situation where students are simply expected to pick up necessary clues (San Miguel, 1996). It is one of the roles of the Learning Adviser to make these expectations explicit to students. At the University of South Australia, a Learning Adviser has been working with NESB students in the Health Sciences to help develop oral communication and workplace literacy for the clinical placement through the provision of face-to-face and online workshops. However, to engage with the multiliteracies of the workplace, the community and the academic institution, students in the clinical practicum need a critical awareness of language and how it is used in this setting.

The online workshops described in this paper are enduring and accessible forms of support which provide students with useful instruction and practice. The use of meta-language enables students to understand what is appropriate for different contexts and what needs to be mastered. However, an analysis of the online workshops

reveals that more critical approaches to language and learning support, such as critical framing, are needed in order to give students insights into the ways in which values influence communication and the ways in which power is encoded in language (Baynham 1995, p. 117). Learning Advisers and course lecturers would need to join together in co-operative teaching and research activities to facilitate the transformation of such student insights into practice. This cooperative activity would reinforce the notion that the capacity to engage with a range of literacies is fundamental if NESB students are to incorporate the complex and multi-layered identities of the workplace, community and academic institution and that learning involves a constant renegotiation of emerging identities.

Appendix A

Hussin, V. (1991) 'Communication Skills for the Clinical Placement', Online Workshop, University of South Australia, viewed 12 November 2001, http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/clinical

Navigation Page

Welcome

Communicating with patients

- Social conversation
- Sample dialogue
- Using speech functions while performing nursing tasks
- Language exercise 1
- Responding to patients

Communicating with staff

- Clarifying meaning
- Demonstrating understanding
- Language exercise 2
- Dealing with implicit instructions

Hot tips for your placement

What do students want?
Online discussion

Appendix B

Hussin, V. (2001) 'Interview Techniques to Take a Health History', Online Workshop, University of South Australia, viewed 12 November 2001, http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/technique

Navigation Page

Welcome

Opening the interview

Establishing rapport

Open and closed questions

- Exercises in asking open-ended questions

Focussed and probing questions

- Exercise in identifying focussed and probing questions

Paraphrasing responses

- Exercise in paraphrasing

Clarifying information

Summarising the interview

- Exercise in summarising

Closing the interview

Building vocabulary

- Discussing pain
- Discussing elimination
- Discussing sexual matters

Online discussion

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FROM THE INSIDE OUT: CHANGING OUR IDENTITY

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The post-compulsory education and training (PCET) sector in Australasia is in a state of flux. This fluidity is often seen as threatening, sweeping student support services aside in its wake. There is, however, another way to view the new environment. The more fluid an environment is, the more likely it is that opportunities will present themselves and that worthwhile changes can be made provided an appropriate analytical tool is used. This paper begins with a brief overview of the changes in the PCET sector in Aotearoa/New Zealand and describes some of the implications for academic support services. In the second section the paper will describe how to use Johnson and Scholes' (1997) cultural web analysis as a tool to document an organisation's culture. The final section will discuss how the team at the Learning Centre at Manukau Institute of Technology in South Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand used this tool to examine and change the centre's identity to become an academic partner rather than an institutional casualty.

Keywords: Polytechnic, Learning Centre, cultural web analysis, academic partner

The Tertiary Education Environment

Changes, challenges and competition

There have been a number of key changes in the post compulsory education sector (PCET) in Aotearoa/New Zealand which have led to increased competition among institutions and to an increased need for institutions to demonstrate a real commitment to students. The first of these changes was the deregulation of the sector which began in the late 80s and the eventual ratification of the White Paper at the turn of the century. The second change was the introduction of bulk funding of the sector which was facilitated by the Education Amendment Bill of 1990. This particular bill also made it possible for polytechnics to offer degrees. As the sector became increasingly undifferentiated, students were offered a much greater choice of institution. The third change was the introduction of student loans. Students were required to go into debt to gain an education. Naturally, students became more discerning in their choice of institution. It is at this point that the terminology began to change and students were viewed as consumers and institutions as providers. Tertiary education entered the marketplace.

At the same time there were signals from government that increased participation in tertiary education was "… to increase as a matter of public policy" (Fitzsimons in Olssen & Matthews, 1997, p. 117) from 1993 onwards. This duly occurred in universities where participation increased "…from (less than five per cent of the population) to a mass clientele (approximately one-third of the population)" (Meade, 1997, p.7). Dr Lockwood Smith, the Minister for Education at that time, made it clear that the sector was well provided for as it received one third of the education budget. Moreover he implied that with the desired increase in numbers, funding per tertiary student would diminish "…if we are not to neglect other areas of education" (Smith, cited in Fitzsimons in Olssen & Matthews, 1997, p.107). The implication was that tertiary education providers would have to do more with less in the future.

In current practice, institutions lose funding in the same year if the number of EFTS (equivalent full time students) drops. Consequently, retention rather than recruitment

of students has become a major organisational challenge. As one tertiary CEO put it "We used to select students, then we recruited them, now we have to retain them" (McGrath, 1998, pers. comm., September).

As the awareness of this challenge grew, institutions such as Manukau Institute of Technology invited overseas educators to come to Aotearoa/New Zealand to explain their approach to the retention of students (Spann, 1996; McInnis, 1997). Their comments informed institutional practice with a renewed focus on meeting students' needs.

Manukau Institute of Technology

MIT is located in Manukau City (population 300,000) and is one of the fastest growing areas in new Zealand/Aotearoa. The ethnic breakdown of the region is around 20 per cent Maori, 20 per cent pacific Nations people, 10 per cent Asian and the remaining 50 per cent New Zealand Pakeha and other ethnic groups. The institute draws students from both affluent suburbs and from some of the most deprived areas in New Zealand/Aotearoa.

Many, in fact 80 per cent of our students, study part time and the institute has a student population of around 20,000. This translates into 5,000 equivalent full time students (EFTS). We have a much higher than usual cohort of mature students – only 20 per cent of our students enrol direct from school. Many are 'second chance' learners and others are retraining or adding to their knowledge base. A large range of qualifications is offered from certificates and diplomas through to undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. The diversity of our learners and their often lack of experience in a formal academic environment indicated that robust learning support was needed to prepare them to study successfully at tertiary level.

The Learning Centre

The mission statement of the Learning Centre at MIT is "To make quality learning support available to every student at Manukau Institute of Technology". In order to achieve this, some key principles were established. These included; free provision of services to students, limited numbers of hourly tutoring sessions provided for each student, no 'drop in' services offered, all tutoring to take place at the centre and the

payment of students to peer tutor. The overall goal was to foster student independence and to avoid queues of students waiting to access the service. In addition, lecturing staff were advised when their students accessed the service for content assistance. The team at the centre when I arrived in 1996 was small; only myself and my administrator were full time, and we were augmented by two 0.5 lecturers in mathematics and in communication, six casual lecturers and 17 peer tutors.

As the tertiary environment became increasingly complex, competitive and tightly funded, centres like our own became vulnerable as we did not generate EFTS funding. There was a possibility that a departmentally based learning support model may be preferred in the future. If we were to survive we needed to develop strategically.

Developing a strategy

The most suitable tool

The first major decision involved selecting a tool, model or framework that looked towards the future. A traditional business model like a SWOT analysis identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats offered more of a snapshot approach firmly located in the present. This model also did not seem appropriate to our educational environment nor to provide enough focus on the future. Hamel and Prahalad (1994, p.1) certainly focussed on the future and talked about the need to "…ponder your company's ability to shape that future and regenerate success again and again in the years and decades to come." On closer examination their focus on core competencies and strategic architecture rather than strategic planning while useful, did not seem right for our purposes. Work by Senge (1994) on building a learning organisation provided more helpful. The centre needed to develop a flexible strategy to adapt to the rapidly changing environment. The team at the centre needed to develop a shared vision for the strategic direction of the centre. Any strategy to be considered would need to maintain the culture of the centre, yet position it at the forefront of everyone in the wider institution's mind as critical to the success of the organisation. After further pondering we adopted Johnson and Scholes' (1997) cultural web as our analytical tool.

The cultural web

This model comprises a central circle, the organisational paradigm, surrounded by six further circles. These other elements are the stories, the symbols, the power structures, the organisational structures, the control systems and the rituals and routines of the organisation (Appendix 1). Careful analysis using the cultural web is a way to explore overt and underlying assumptions of an organisation's culture. Developing strategy following a cultural web analysis enables strategic alignment between all elements and produces a clear direction forward.

From the inside out

Our identity

The cultural web for the Learning Centre in 1997 (Appendix 2) demonstrates the way we were then. The centre was located in a purpose built area but with problematic access. The team was very small, very dedicated and often shared roles. This led to a close, almost intuitive, way of operating. Within the microcosm of the Learning Centre, both the team and students indicated that the centre provided a valuable service to students who sought them out. Reporting to the Executive Director (Academic) firmly located us in the academic side of the house and the Advisory Committee was made up of 'champions' who were instrumental in setting up the centre in the early 90s. A peer tutor ceremony was held every year to celebrate the work of our peer tutors and to showcase the centre. There were however, four areas which needed immediate attention if we were to survive in the changing tertiary education environment.

Hours

The centre opened at 8am and few students booked the first appointment slot of the day from 8-9am. Being closed at lunchtimes created an obstacle for students who wanted to visit the centre and to arrange tutoring. As the centre closed at 5pm the last appointment was scheduled from 4-5pm and students who were employed could seldom access the centre.

Working out in faculty

The centre had developed a study skills package which required two hours to deliver and which included time management, note taking and academic writing. Previously the decision had been made to charge departments for delivery of this package, preferably during the initial weeks of the semester. Departments were averse to paying twice as they reasoned that as the centre was an operational overhead to which they were already contributing from the EFTS generated revenue. It was also difficult to maintain the momentum over the two hours of presentation without creating information overload. As for academic writing, often students had little idea of what academic writing would be required of them over the coming semester. As the semester progressed Learning Centre staff were then in constant demand to work with individual students to develop academic writing skills. While individual consultations were effective, they were not a particularly cost effective use of human resources.

Database

Although there was effective processes for enrolling students with the centre and recording the outcomes of each session, there were few statistics apart from a rudimentary record of how many students came into the centre. It was difficult to talk to heads of department about how their students used the centre without developing a database which had the capacity to extract useful information. It was also difficult to put up a case for any increase in resources without robust information.

Staffing

While there were benefits in having such a small team there was little flexibility. The impact on the rest of the team when anyone was away from the centre was increased workload and while there was a lot of goodwill and multi-tasking (answering the phone, enrolling a student and teaching another) it was a situation which could not continue for long. This increased workload could occur when staff were on annual or professional development leave, sick, or more frequently out in the wider academic community promoting the centre's services. While there were two staff who were New Zealand born Samoan, there was no Maori staff member.

Towards a new identity

Using the cultural web, the team at the Learning Centre created a 'desired' web (Appendix 3). While this longer range planning was going on we were making adjustments to hours, resources and developing the database. The quest for the desirable involved a lot of discussion about what aspects of the centre were important to retain and what new things we wanted to bring in. At the same time there was an understanding that change would not happen overnight and that we needed to be realistic. Our planning often consisted of mindmapping sessions and informal discussions over coffee of the "Wouldn't it be great if…." and " I was working with a student/talking with a lecturer when I thought we could…" variety. The small team environment encouraged risk taking and innovative approaches to problems – we couldn't wait for things to happen. Another positive factor was the full support of the Executive Director (Academic) who encouraged us to reflect on what we were doing and to make strategic changes.

The key changes were to make the centre more visible, to develop our reputation as learning specialists, and to become more integrated with the wider MIT community. An organisation is much less vulnerable when it has become an integral part of the wider organisation. Most important of all was that our service to students would be more effective, timely and developmental.

The paradigm

The Learning Centre would continue to operate transparently with tutoring occurring in a large, welcoming space at the centre. Staff would be seen as non threatening learning specialists who other academic staff would consult on academic issues. They would also ask for feedback on why their students were using the centre to determine if there were any implications for their own practice. The team would maintain their commitment to a shared vision.

Symbols

The Learning Centre would ideally be located elsewhere perhaps as part of a projected 'Heart of MIT' building project. New resources would be developed and made available to students and perhaps sold to other learning support centres. Staff

would engage in academic conversations with their fellow lecturers. Through the development of an interactive website, the centre could move into the Information Age and better serve part time students who were still unable to get to the centre because of their many commitments.

Power structures

The centre would explore forming a cluster with other academic support areas in the institute and embark on a joint branding campaign. There was to be a concerted effort to develop informal relationships with all members of the wider institute (Wheatley, 1994).

Organisational structures

Staff at the centre would continue to be employed on individual contracts where some annual leave was bought back so staff were paid more but did not have the traditional academic holidays of nine weeks. They would however have 20 days annual leave and 10 days professional development leave each year. This enabled the centre to function more flexibly by staff being available in student vacation times. This time could be spent tutoring, developing resources, research and discussion.

Control systems

The composition of the advisory committee would be changed to create more of an outward focus with more student input. The database would be set up to give information about when a student accessed centre services, what department they were enrolled with and what kind of help they wanted. The database would also record age, gender and ethnic status so that if required, statistics could be produced to demonstrate what we were doing and with whom we were doing it. The database would be another analytical tool and one which would be essential to enable the centre to demonstrate the impact of any change in service. Any partnerships with departments were to be recorded on a separate database and a report written at the end of each workshop series.

Rituals and routines

Hourly appointments for tutoring were to remain. Opening hours were to change; we needed to be open when students were able to get to the centre. The formal peer tutor award ceremony was to be replaced by a dinner for peer tutors and staff well before any study leave was scheduled. Tutors would be sent a certificate signed by the CEO. If we were to gain more staff we wanted to maintain the close supportive family atmosphere.

Stories

We wanted staff and students to talk about our commitment and our expertise. Ideally, we wanted them to say that the Learning Centre was an essential part of our institution.

Making the changes

In many ways the development of the database became critical to document the success of a number of key changes. After redesigning our study skills package into two one hour presentations offered four to six weeks apart and offering them free of charge to departments, our services were in demand. Students and staff saw us modelling a highly interactive delivery which resulted in greater takeup of our services by individual students. We established a Mathematics Assistance Centre in another block close by and were able to demonstrate that there was a growing need in that area. So much so that we gained additional staffing. With the team growing we were more able to teach out in faculty and to offer customised workshops. The Academic Support Group comprising the library, the centre for educational development, the language assistance centre and learning technology pooled resources to produce a series of high quality glossy brochures. The group was launched at an Executive and Managers meeting and a Head of Departments meeting on the same day.

We promoted our services constantly with a new tagline “Your partner for academic success”. This partnership was with students, staff and administrative departments. Annual reports demonstrated growth in class presentations and in individual

assistance for tertiary level learning, academic writing, mathematics and in content areas. Increasingly, we were invited to talk about our services at departmental staff meetings and to programme leaders. All publications included material about members of the academic support group and their services. Through our contact with the Quality Adviser we were included in programme development processes and in audit processes.

Staff engaged in research, which lifted our profile institute wide. The Executive Director (Academic) brokered our services to departments as well. In one innovative partnership with departmental staff teaching a paper where students traditionally struggled, centre staff were able to model a different, more interactive delivery involving a mixture of teaching and workshops. This partnership had an impact on pass rates and enhanced the centre's reputation. Now that we were so clearly working with departments we were able to increase our staffing.

Not everything can be planned however. The projected building plan did not eventuate but the centre was relocated inside the library building when the lease for the campus bookshop expired. Students found it easier to access the Learning Centre and traffic increased further. Although we had a number of Maori peer tutors we still did not have a Maori learning specialist.

Our new identity

The following table demonstrates how the staffing at the centre has grown which is quite a feat in a constrained fiscal environment. This growth is attributed to the ability of the centre to demonstrate, using our database, the work being undertaken with departments and with individual students.

1997	**1998**	**1999**	**2000**	**2001**
Manager	Manager	Manager	Manager	Manager
Administrator	Administrator	Assistant to the manager	Assistant to the manager	Assistant to the manager
		0.5 lecturer (generics)	1.50 lecturers (generics)	1.50 lecturers (generics)
		1 x fulltime mathematics lecturer	1 x fulltime mathematics lecturer	2 x fulltime mathematics lecturers
				Kaiwhakahaere Tikanga Ako (Appointed 5 September, 2001)
6 casual lecturers	3 casual lecturers	3 casual lecturers	1 casual lecturer	4 casual lecturers
17 peer tutors	11 peer tutors	14 peer tutors	16 peer tutors	29 peer tutors

Table1: changes in staffing from 1997 to 2001

The appointment of a Kaiwhakahaere Tikanga Ako (Maori learning specialist), in September this year, was facilitated by supplementary student funding provided by the Ministry of Education. This funding was to encourage the development of targeted initiatives to foster Maori and Pacific Nations students' success at tertiary level. The cultural web in Appendix 4 shows our current identity.

Conclusion

The key to the survival of the Learning Centre at Manukau Institute of Technology is continued integration with departments, student services and the academic support group. The growth in staffing was not something which was actively sought after but a consequence of a changed approach. Our new identity has been firmly established across the institute due to thorough analysis, planning and implementation. The Learning Centre took up the opportunities offered by the changes in the tertiary education environment to change its identity – from the inside out.

Moving into the future

All academic support services need to spend time looking outside their immediate environment and at a bigger organisational picture. The big picture is critical so that there is always an overarching shared vision, which is both strategic and dynamic. It is crucial that your centre demonstrates an integrated approach where each aspect of the centre reinforces the others. Using an analytical tool such as Johnson& Scholes' (1997) cultural web can be a useful way to clarify where your centre is right now and where you might want to be in the future. How you get there will be determined by your team.

Acknowledgements

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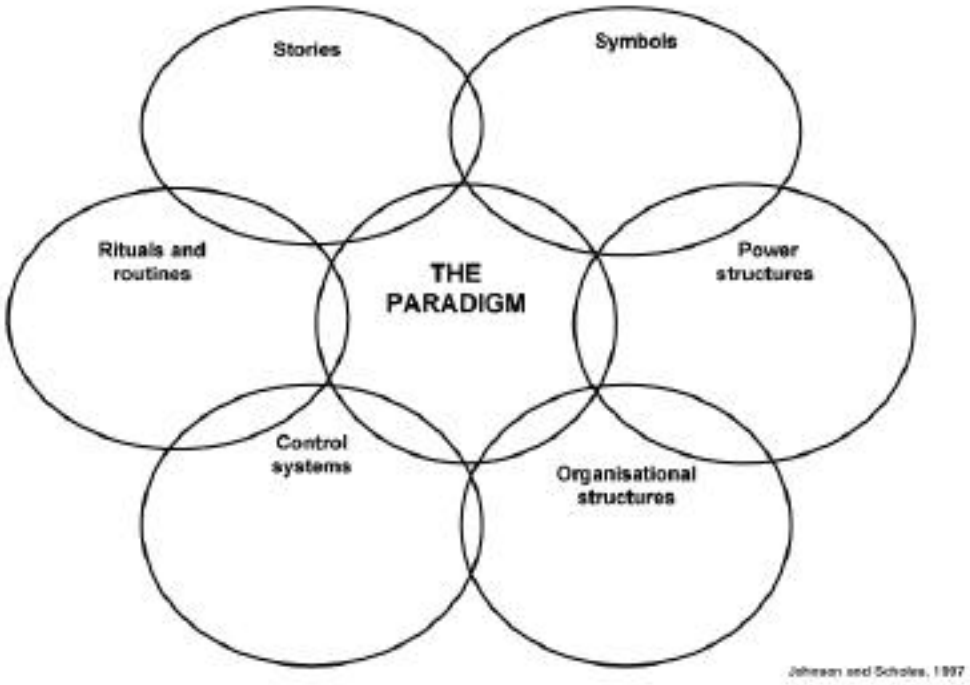
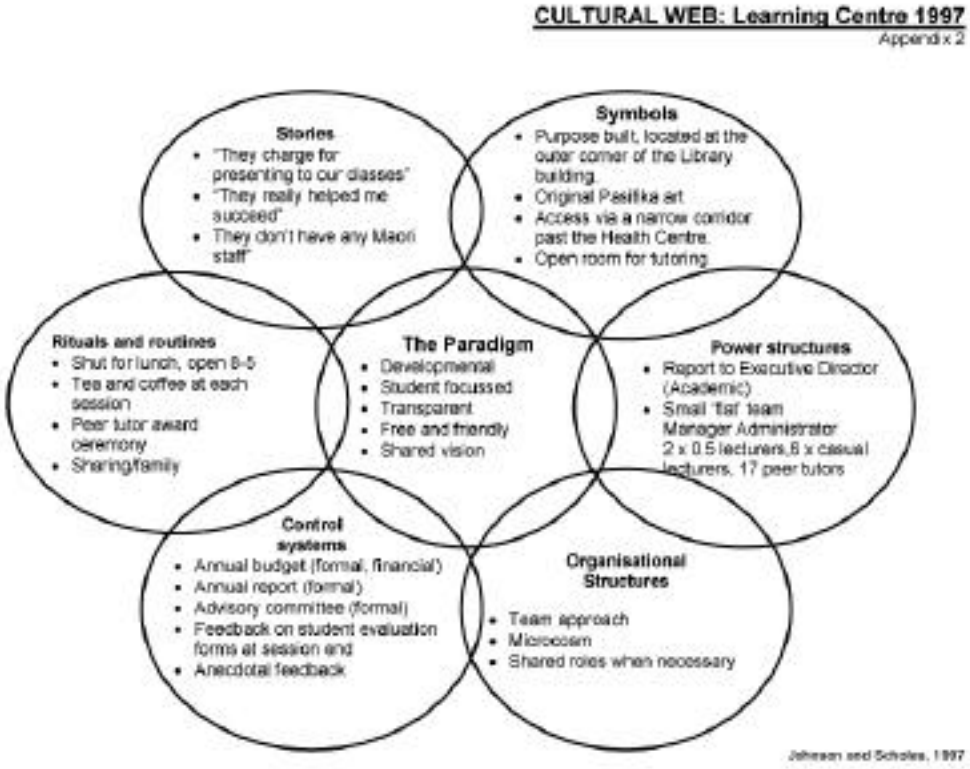
Appendix 1

CULTURAL WEB
Appendix 1

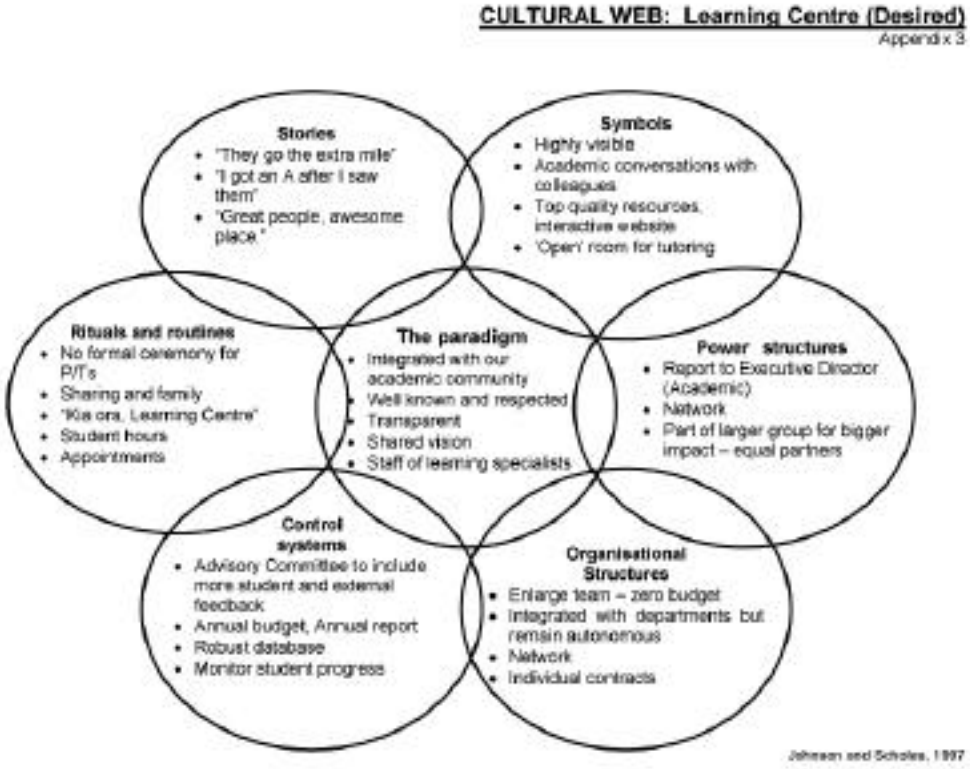


Johnson and Scholes, 1997

Appendix 2

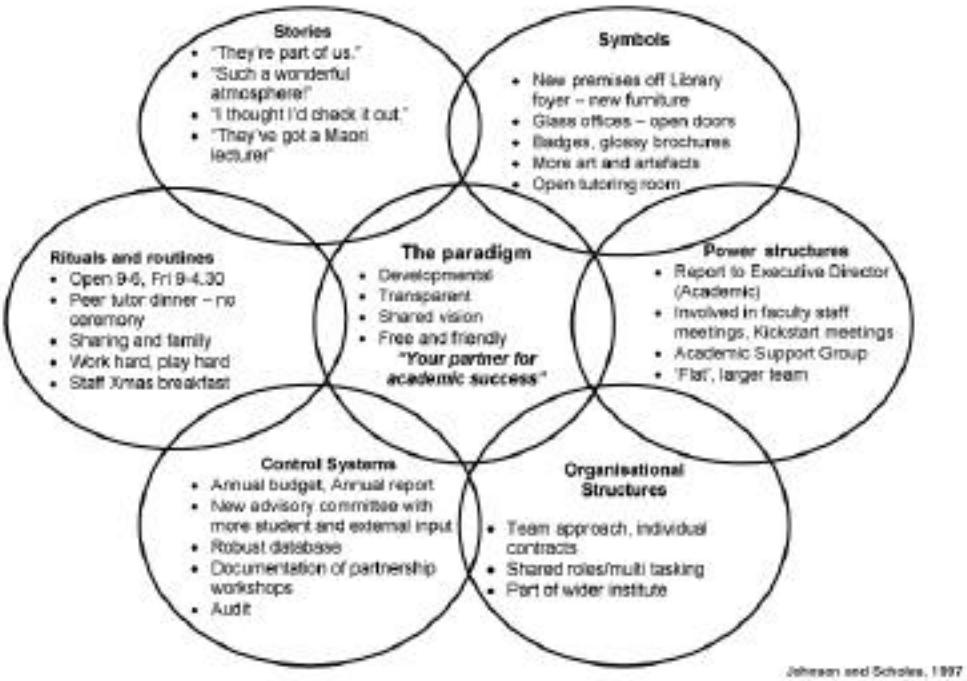

CULTURAL WEB: Learning Centre 1997
Appendix 2
Stories
"They charge for presenting to our classes"
"They really helped me succeed"
They don't have any Maori staff
Symbols
Purpose built, located at the outer corner of the Library building
Original Pasifika art
Access via a narrow corridor past the Health Centre.
Open room for tutoring
Rituals and routines
Shut for lunch, open 8-5
Tea and coffee at each session
Peer tutor award ceremony
Sharing/family
The Paradigm
Developmental
Student focussed
Transparent
Free and friendly
Shared vision
Power structures
Report to Executive Director (Academic)
Small 'flat' team
Manager Administrator
2 x 0.5 lecturers,6 x casual lecturers, 17 peer tutors
Control systems
Annual budget (formal, financial)
Annual report (formal)
Advisory committee (formal)
Feedback on student evaluation forms at session end
Anecdotal feedback
Organisational Structures
Team approach
Microcosm
Shared roles when necessary
Johnson and Scholes, 1997

Appendix 3


CULTURAL WEB: Learning Centre (Desired)
Appendix 3
Stories
"They go the extra mile"
"I got an A after I saw them"
"Great people, awesome place."
Symbols
Highly visible
Academic conversations with colleagues
Top quality resources, interactive website
'Open' room for tutoring
Rituals and routines
No formal ceremony for P/T's
Sharing and family
"Kia ora, Learning Centre"
Student hours
Appointments
The paradigm
Integrated with our academic community
Well known and respected
Transparent
Shared vision
Staff of learning specialists
Power structures
Report to Executive Director (Academic)
Network
Part of larger group for bigger impact – equal partners
Control systems
Advisory Committee to include more student and external feedback
Annual budget, Annual report
Robust database
Monitor student progress
Organisational Structures
Enlarge team – zero budget
Integrated with departments but remain autonomous
Network
Individual contracts
Johnson and Scholes, 1997

Appendix 4

CULTURAL WEB :Learning Centre 2001
Appendix 4



Johnson and Scholes, 1997

STUDENT IDENTITIES IN TIMES OF CHANGE

Bernadette McGowan, Ann-Marie Parkes, Robyn Lance, Beverley McVilley, Jan Manners, Michelle Frank (Academic & Learning Skills Advisers); Stewart McKinney (Learning & Teaching Coordinator); Roz Dunn (International Student Adviser).

Charles Sturt University, a multi-campus, regional university, comprises diverse student cohorts. It is the role of the Learning Skills Advisers (LSAs) to meet the learning needs of the student body. In order to address these needs effectively, student identities need to be recognised and acknowledged. Internationalisation, globalisation, increased accountability and online services require different responses from universities in the way they foster and encourage lifelong learning within learning communities. This paper will be co-written by team players from the Wagga Wagga, Goulburn, Albury, Bathurst, and Dubbo Campuses. Each member will contribute information and anecdotal evidence regarding respective student cohorts and, due to the knowledge obsolescence of five years, will reflect upon past, current and predicted programs in relation to acknowledging changing student identities and, hence, meeting changing student needs. Student cohorts to be discussed will be restricted to include Distance Education students and International students. External contexts, in combination with developments in related fields, have an impact on our identities as LSAs within our institutions.

Learning Skills Advisers are now further challenged by the inconstant identities of learners during this time of continuous change.

Higher Education environments in Australia and abroad are facing a period of unprecedented transformation and rate of change (CSU 2001). Today education is increasingly demand driven. Traditional boundaries between disciplines are less appropriate. University education has moved from elitist to essentially being universal and continuous, national and international. It is more accessible as the offering of universities have broadened and taken on a vital role within lifelong learning. The more obvious links with workplace learning and more flexible delivery modes are worth noting.

From its platform of young, but highly successful university, Charles Sturt University's (CSU's) strategic planning process and new initiatives will provide the basis for ***'thrival'*** within these times of uncertainty and instability.

"Education is not just about transferring 'chunks of knowledge' but about establishing meaningful relationships between teachers and learners…The challenges of supporting, valuing and affirming learning and teaching…are set within this relational context" (Green & Battersby 2001). Students coming to CSU 'reflect a greater diversity of experience, ethnicity, expectations and preparedness than ever before' (Shapiro & Lavine 1999, p.2). This paper will raise awareness of the diverse learner identities present on CSU campuses. It will focus on Distance Education (DE) students and International students.

The Chinese Buddhist Monks of the Temple of ShaoLin have a traditional greeting. Upon meeting a person, they most respectfully bow to the left, bow to the middle, and bow to the right. This custom signifies respect and value for the past, the present and the future of that individual. As reflective practitioners, it behoves us to embrace this concept. Hence, a brief retrospective student profile will be offered along with evidence indicating past (early 1980s to 1990s for DE students and, 1950s to 1980s for International students), present and future shifts in student identities. Our role as LSAs is challenged by these changes; insight will be given regarding initiatives to meet these changing identities of learners.

Distance Education Students

Student Profile

A large proportion of students have returned to study as mature aged students, approaching their study with little or no recent experience in academic literacy, research skills and, for some, particularly rural and isolated students, minimal technological skills and limited access to online material and services.

A synopsis of characteristics of DE students in the past will be presented in Table 1; Table 2 presents identities of DE students at the present; and, Table 3 projects student identities of the future. These tables enable us to note the impact that student identities have and will have on LSAs and staff endeavouring to meet their needs. These demands will only increase in the future.

In the past five years we have advanced from snail mail to instant articles. The wonderful technological system has bridged the isolation of numerous students, but paradoxically perhaps, has isolated the accessibility of staff. That is, can staff keep up with students' demands? We need to develop strategies to bridge the gap between what is on offer and what needs to be delivered.

Increased diversity raises the need to know our DE students better: their educational preparation, their perspective regarding higher education, work commitments, financial needs, family responsibilities, vocational and community experiences. There is a need to connect more effectively with the range of DE students and their needs.

AN AUTHORITATIVE CURRICULUM IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

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Ironically, employers perceive that university graduates are deficient in independent and critical thought, the very skills that many universities abandoned in their attempt to vocationalise themselves. While vocationalising, universities have also shifted to a consumer-based model of educational delivery. These changes have been occurring within a complex of events and discourses, such as globalisation, reduced government expenditure on education, changed patterns of labour formation, technological development, and neo-liberal individualism. Unfortunately, anti-intellectual managerialism, credentialism, and inappropriate neo-liberal ideology have forced upon academics quite inappropriate models of what a university should be. Nevertheless, this current "universities crisis" has forced a reconsideration what it is that universities are supposed to do. Historically, they have been centres of learning, research sites, and credentialing authorities. This paper

suggests that universities must re-consider their role in the credentialing process in terms of their fundamental roles of contributing to an intelligent and informed citizenry; providing intellectual and artistic development, engagement and reflection; and developing versatile intellects. A liberal education can fulfil these roles because it is committed to democratic processes, rational procedures of inquiry, and reason, tolerance and humanity. More specifically, the paper identifies higher order cognitive skills of synthesis and evaluation, as well as a coherent program of moral awareness that should be built into a university curriculum.

Keywords: graduate skills, critical thinking, role of a university, credentialing, neo-liberalism, liberal education, informed citizenry, vocational universities, Enlightenment Project, cognitive development, moral development

Introduction

The AC Nielsen 1999 survey of Employer Satisfaction with Graduate Skills reports that the skills in which recent recruits were perceived to be most deficient are problem solving skills, oral business communication skills, and interpersonal skills with other staff (AC Nielsen, 1999, p.22). Specific academic skills that employers perceived university graduates to lack are creativity and flair, capacity for independent and critical thinking, problem solving skills, and the ability to think logically and orderly (AC Nielsen, 1999, pp.36-37). Certainly, these results broadly conform to the results of other surveys overseas; for example, Borin and Watkins's survey of United States employers in various marketing fields (such as advertising, public relations, market research) shows that employers rank 'verbal communication skills' (by which the survey presumably means oral communication skills), decision making, and problem solving within the top ten critical skills employers seek when hiring recent graduates (1998, p.1). Floyd & Gordon's review of the literature on this topic reinforces this pattern. They report that communication skills ' have been found to be important in most studies' (1998, p.2). Floyd & Gordon's own survey of New

Zealand employers found again that problem-solving skills were most important to employers when selecting management graduates, followed by communication skills (particularly written communication), work experience, and interpersonal skills (Floyd & Gordon, 1998, p.5). This study concludes that the 'challenge for educators is to develop problem-solving skills in students and provide them with the means to demonstrate these in a hiring situation (Floyd & Gordon, 1998, p.6).

To return to the Australian research, while the Nielsen report does raise questions of demarcation between putative 'academic' skills and those deemed 'personal' skills (which in the report includes aspects such as grooming and personal presentation), the overall thrust of the findings is both illuminating and suggestive. The illuminating element is that there is a perception among employers that university graduates are deficient in their capacity for independent thought in one or more of its guises, be it problem-solving, critical thought, or logical and orderly thinking. This conclusion accords with the results of similar surveys in the United States and New Zealand. Clearly, there emerges a question here as to how to develop these problem-solving skills in students, which itself becomes a challenge to the university curriculum.

We would at this point introduce a ***caveat***, namely that this paper in no way argues that employers should be the determining force that lays out university curricula, as a university that slavishly conforms to the dictates of the employer would, logically, not fulfil the functions of a university at all, but rather become a training area for whatever employer group has the greatest power (or loudest voice, or ear of the Vice-Chancellor).[1] We do argue, though, that the evidence of graduates' lack of problem solving skills, critical thinking, and independent thought that emerges from these studies demonstrates that universities are failing to deliver to their students the attributes necessary both to gain employment and, more generally, to function as effective members of the civil society.

We should also make explicit what we consider the functions of a university should be.

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[1] This could also lead to farcical situations whereby surveys of employs may well find that personal hygiene or coffee making might well be desirable attributes of new graduates, which, if the employer is treated as the arbiter of university curricula, would ultimately lead to courses in such areas.

Multiple Roles of a University

One of the few benefits of the current "universities crisis" is that it has forced us to reconsider what it is that universities are supposed to do. We contend that universities have performed three activities as:

- detached centres of learning
- research sites
- credentialing authorities.

Over 150 years ago, Newman (1959) understood the difference between the first two. Quoting the French Cardinal Gerdil, he identified the difference between the academy and the university in these terms:

> There is no real opposition between the spirit of the academies and that of the universities: they are only different points of view. Universities are established to teach sciences to students who want to train [in sciences]; the academies intend to do new research in the field of sciences.[2]

Today, most academics keenly feel the dual need to research and to teach, recognising that really seriously pursuing one is always to the great detriment of the other. The modern day equivalents of, say, the Royal Society might be the Co-operative Research Centres and institutions such as the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research. Many beleaguered academics would surely agree with Cardinal Newman's assertion that there should be an 'intellectual division of intellectual labour between academies and universities. To discover and to teach are different functions' (p. 10).

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[2] This is our translation of:

> 'Ce n'est pas qu'il y ait aucune véritable opposition entre l'esprit des Académies et celui des universités; ce sont seulement des vues différéntes. Les Universités sont établies pour enseigner les sciences aux élèves qui veulent s'y former; les Académies se proposent de nouvelles recherches à faire dans la carrière des sciences.' (quoted in Newman, 1959, p. 10)

French translators may offer a better translation.

What should be taught in a university was also quite clearly stated by Newman:

> The view taken of a university in these discourses is the following: that it is a place of teaching universal knowledge. This implies that its object is, on the one hand, intellectual, not moral; and on the other, that it is the diffusion and extension of knowledge rather than the advancement (Newman, 1959, p. 7).

The content of a university curriculum will be developed later in the paper.

The third activity of a university is its credentialing authority. Over time, universities took up the responsibility for credentialing the traditional professions of medicine, law, and engineering. Even Newman, as Rector of the Catholic University of Ireland, established a School of Medicine (Newman, 1959, p. 21). Harvard University, set up "To advance Learning and perpetuate it to Posterity; dreading to leave an illiterate Ministry to the Churches," between 1869 and 1909, re-developed the Law and Medical schools and opened the graduate schools of Business and Dental Medicine to supplement its Arts and Sciences schools, considerably enhancing its enrolment, staff size, and endowments. Yet, it is not true, as Bauman (1997) claims, that universities' 'last rampart of authority may be, perhaps, the exclusive entitlements of the credentials-certifying agency'. In Australia, technical colleges (now TAFEs) have certified people in areas ranging from construction management, surveying, industrial design, industrial chemistry, and cartography, to optometry and engineering. Commercial pilots have been credentialed by CASA and its various previous incarnations. Even the Australian College of Surgeons and the Certified Practising Accountants, though mostly training in university teaching hospitals and universities, have acted like guilds to credential as they see fit. This was changed with the Dawkinisation of universities, as professional and para-professional occupations were lumped together under the institutional arrangement of a university. Since then, greater school retention rates, government policy aimed at increasing tertiary education, a diminished job market, and rampant credentialism has led to university credentialing all manner of things. Now that university credentialism incorporates Bachelor of Business degrees that include majors in Club Management, Hotel Management, and Sport Management one has to wonder

whether this will lead to a debasing of the university degree. The last of these includes the option of enrolling concurrently in the PGA Certificate in Golf Management Practice, the course of study for which includes courses in Golf Techniques and Skills, and Golf Resort Management (Griffith University); see also University of Queensland's degree in Business majoring in Hospitality, Tourism and Property management including subjects such as Food and Beverage Studies. (University of Queensland, 2000, p. 415).

So what went wrong?

We trace the developments of this situation primarily to the shift within universities to a consumer-based model. We see, however, such a shift also occurring within a broader complex of events and their accompanying discourses; these include globalisation (Marginson & Considine, 2000, pp. 40-53; Readings, 1996, pp. 49-50, 190-191); reduced government expenditure on education (Marginson & Considine, 2000, pp. 54-60; Smith & Webster, 1997, p. 2), changed patterns of labour formation (Martin & Schumann, 1996)[3], technological development (Marginson & Considine, 2000, pp. 246-249; Coaldrake & Stedman, 1998, pp. 79-81; 100-114), and neo-liberal individualism (duGay, 1996).

These factors have led to an anti-intellectual managerialism in universities that have forced upon academics quite inappropriate models of what a university should be. The core academic ethos involves commitment to truth, reason, untrammelled inquiry, free speech and collegiality, but this is increasingly being turned on its head by rampant anti-intellectual managerialism. (Polya, 2001; see also Marginson & Considine, 2000, p. 52). So complete has been the colonisation of academic discourse by corporate / economistic discourse that not only are artifacts and processes re-named (eg, student as client; educational product; potential student market), but also the university administrators badly mimic the dispositions and patterns of corporate capital:

[3] See also Chouliaraki & Fairclough (1999; Harvey, 1990) for an elaboration of the notion of 'Flexibility' as a key concept and practice concerning intensive technological innovation and the disposable use of labour.

> while remodelling themselves ever vigorously after the pattern of corporate capital, universities are all too eager, and if not eager then obliged, to cede the right to set the norms, and perhaps most seminally the ethical norms, to its newly embraced prototype and spiritual inspiration. (Bauman, 1997, p. 20)

Such patterns of behaviour betray the valuable and worthwhile traditions of universities, and impose incommensurate values, procedures, and aspirations. We will consider here only the effects of neo-liberal discourses that re-articulate our world in economistic terms and assert the primacy of the individual over other concerns.

The rhetoric of university management and student administration is increasingly proclaiming that students are now 'clients' or 'customers', a body whose needs must be satisfied. As Coaldrake approvingly notes, American for-profit and corporate universities 'have no qualms about referring to their students as customers, or to employers as clients' (2000, p.7). He adds that in the for-profit university, the 'focus on "student-as-customer" underlies their selling points of service provision, timeliness and convenience' (2000, p.8). Certainly it is now common for universities to consider carefully their market position and to develop often highly sophisticated campaigns that feature the university as a brand name.[4] Some of the reasons for this situation are, of course, external. For instance, the gradual decline of government funding over the past twenty years coupled with occasional bursts of savage cuts to operating grants has left many Australian universities reeling. Concomitant with that, the introduction of the HECS payment system, followed by full-fee regimes for both internal and international students, has led to a perception that universities must be 'sold' to potential students to persuade such students to part with their money. More generally, the discourses of management that infect many other service providers within the community at large, such as hospitals, nursing homes, and social security

[4] Two Queensland examples are our home institution, QUT, which markets itself as 'a university for the real world', and QUT's major competitor, the University of Queensland, which promotes its sandstone tradition with the slogan, 'World class'.

offices, have repositioned the role of these institutions: patients in hospitals and social security claimants, for example, are now increasingly referred to as 'clients'. These shifts within terminology are not ideology-free; rather, they represent the triumph of neo-liberal thought that privileges the individual over the community. People are no longer members of 'the public', but instead are individual clients who, in one form or another, are expected to bear the cost of whatever they receive, be it health care or social security. As Paul du Gay argues, 'from the hospital to the railway station, and from the classroom to the museum, the public sector has found itself translated. Patients, parents, pupils and passengers have all been re-imagined as " 'customers" ' (du Gay, 1996, p.77). Clearly, education is not exempt from these changes within the discourses that shape the relationship of the late-capitalist subject to the State.

Students in Australia and overseas have readily adopted the consumer subject position. Schneider (1998) reports that 'students are paying money – often big money – for a degree, and in the minds of many students, that puts them in the driver's seat' (p. A12). This approach to education is reflected in the increasing incidence of classroom disruption and incivility; such incidents range from the merely annoying ('arriving late and leaving early, napping in the back of the room, carrying on running conversations, reading the newspaper, even bringing portable televisions into class' [Schneider, 1998, p. A12]) to the downright intimidating (students challenging staff to a fight in a dispute over a grade, and verbal abuse[5]). These instances are at the more extreme end of a behavioural spectrum, but they do tally with anecdotal evidence from Australian classrooms. A perception has evolved that the university and its staff are to serve the wants (often presented as needs or demands) of students; the educational experience now includes a focus on convenience and flexibility for the student population. Polya makes the same point in his observation that universities 'are now shifting to being corporate, money-making organisations driven by a bottom line imperative to sell research to private industry and education to fee-paying student clients: 'The problem with this transformation is

[5] 'When a scholar at Utah State University refused to change a grade, a student screamed at her, "Well, you goddamned bitch, I'm going to the department head, and he'll straighten you out!" ' (Schneider, 1998, p.A12).

that the customer is always right, leading to dollar-driven perversion of the academic ethos and academic standards to keep industrial or student clients happy' (Polya 2001).

Some of the complaints that are made about universities are not without justification. Byzantine administration and enrolment procedures, poor teaching, and uneven provision of services (those subject to most frequent complaints would have to be food outlets, libraries, and bookshops, probably in that order) all contribute to a sense of student dissatisfaction with the university experience. Yet as Luizzi argues, when 'we draw on the business model of treating people like customers, we obscure a primary goal of fostering the development of mature, moral agents' (2000, p.2). Part of this process of fostering the development of students is the guidance offered by university staff. The academic teacher, Silber says, should have 'the knowledge and character to merit' their position because they are competent to know what the students need. The academic teacher 'guides and aids the students, but he [***sic***] does not try to please the students by giving them what they want' (Silber cited in Luizzi, 2000, pp.2-3). In other words, Silber identifies what is effectively a relationship between academic staff and students based on a covenant. This is a situation where, 'in order for teaching to function well, the student must become the agent of learning, one who acts not only in response to the guidance and stimulation of mentors, but who basically takes full responsibility for accomplishing what is desired' (Long, cited in Luizzi, 2000, p.3). This assumes, of course, that academic staff are concerned with the development of their students, and not simply providing a good or service for the student to consume. We argue further that teaching has an ethical component: in this context, that ethic is to prepare students to participate fully in the civil society.

Re-establishing the equilibrium

The equilibrium of the university has been massively disturbed by the credentialing role and the inappropriateness of neo-liberalism, and further that, in doing this, universities have devalued themselves. In looking for a proper role in the postmodern world, Kumar (1997), almost paradoxically looks backward: 'perhaps Newman, Arnold and the others had the right instinct in urging universities not to bow

to contemporary demands but to follow their own path. In the end, as they also believed, society will come to see that in this way it too is best served' (p. 34).

In essence, what the good traditional university developed with its classical liberal education was the notion of self-formation (***bildung***), or "inner virtue" (Kumar, 1997, p. 35) that was both intellectual and moral. Universities' privileged position, Kumar argues, had come about because of their demonstrated capacity to select and develop 'the right kinds of people, in the sense of people who possess a certain moral character and mental outlook' (p.27). In saying this, we know that we leave ourselves open to claims of being patriarchal and imperialist in our assumptions, but we reject this completely. Notwithstanding the patriarchal and imperialist temper of nineteenth century Britain, universities produced outstanding people who filled the mandarin class of the public service and the arts (eg, the BBC).[6]

We agree with Kumar's exhortation that we must defend universities 'in terms of what they alone can do, or do best, rather than in terms of what other institutions can do as well or better' (p. 29). He argues that universities should be seen as 'breathing spaces in life's course ... [that] enable their members ... to do things and to reflect on things for which for the rest of their lives they will have neither the time nor the opportunity'. They should be communities that 'allow for a cross-fertilization of minds on a scale and in a manner not possible anywhere else in society' (p. 29); should be sites of cultural exploration and engagement' (p. 31). What we are proposing, then, is that universities might well re-consider their role in the credentialing process in terms of how that can impact its more fundamental roles of

- substantially contributing to an intelligent and informed citizenry
- providing a site of intellectual and artistic development, engagement and reflection; and
- developing versatile intellects.

[6] Even its colonial administration of the colonies was, in many ways enlightened and empowering within the possibilities of its time (eg Australia, Canada, New Zealand; see also V.S. Naipaul's views on Britain's administration of India: *The spirit of things,* ABC Radio National, 9 Sept 2001). However, this is a hugely contentious topic that would take a conference in itself.

1. *Intelligent and Informed Citizenry*

A democratic and free society needs an intelligent and informed citizenry capable of acquiring information, and of making judgments based on agreed principles of a rational, tolerant, open, flexible, generous, and compassionate society. Postmodern critics are quick to point to the great civilization producing Dachau or Auschwitz as one of the "grand narratives". Yet this conveniently glosses over the reality that the intellectual class was one of the great victims (vide: the Frankfurt School), along with Jews, unionists, socialists, and homosexuals of Nazi oppression which was characterised by ignorance; inhumane usees of technology; and bureaucratic efficiency.

2. *Site of Intellectual and Artistic Development, Engagement, and Reflection*

We argue that universities must strongly defend their independent institutional status as critical incubators for intellectual life. Professor John Scott, a former vice-chancellor of La Trobe University, asserts that 'It is time that governments recognised that universities are not just an expensive luxury, but a highly important part of our national activity.' (cited in Polya, 2001). This supports Kumar's proposition that universities allow us to reflect on things in a similar fashion to religious retreats.

3. *Versatility of Intellect*

We are constantly told by employers that the desired workforce is multi-skilled and flexible. We might well ask, as Bauman (1997) does, whether the skill preparation 'required to practise flexible occupations does not, on the whole, demand long-term and systematic learning'. In fact, he suggests, often on-the-job training, short courses and weekend seminars can do as well (p. 23). By contrast, a liberal education might, in the words of Newman (1959) be 'the force, the steadiness, the comprehensiveness, and the versatility of intellect, the command over our own powers, the instinctive just estimate of things as they pass before us' (p. 12). As Newman goes on to point out, such attributes are 'commonly ... not gained without much effort and the exercise of years'. This is another reason for rejecting the student as client-student "needs" approach to university education, for rigour often

meets understandable resistance by the neophytes of any new order. We are not arguing for a Gradgrindian, bleak, and remorseless learning; rather we see the joy of true achievement, articulated by Kumar: 'I want to see universities as bright and energetic students of all ages have experienced them at all times: as places to explore themselves with others, in speaking, writing, performing, playing, imagining, stretching themselves in mind and body' (1997, p. 32-33). These crucial roles of the university, we contend, contribute significantly to the development of the civil society.

The civil society is one defined by trust, mutuality, and reciprocity (Cox, 1995, p.29). Its characteristics are, then, that social relationships constitute society, rather than individuality (Cox, 1995, p.70). Education needs to prepare students for their roles within this society because it is a mistake to assume that students will leave university to become workers and nothing more. Students, both before and after they graduate are social beings: workers certainly, but also family members and citizens. Educational experience must prepare students to participate in the wider aspects of social interaction. In terms of the civil society, this means that, as Cox argues, individuals carry links with multiple communities within society through which 'breeds civic confidence and civic virtue' (Cox, 1995, p.30). Underpinning this is the notion of the '***viva activa***, or public life, in which we collectively create civil spheres' (Cox, 1995, p.7). The upshot of this collective focus is that the individual has both rights and responsibilities within a community. If education treats students as sovereign consumers whose rights are paramount, then it has failed to communicate that these same students also have responsibilities to both the scholarly community that imparts their education, and to the wider community.

Putting the case for a liberal education

Liberal Education

Liberal education, with its roots in Aristotle's notions of education, could be represented as an elitist activity available only to the leisured (male) classes such as those in Ancient Greece. However, if we adopt R.M. Hutchins' notion, then we can see the extension of liberal education as a vital element of the growth of democracy:

> Democracy makes every man a ruler, for the heart of democracy is universal suffrage. If liberal education is the education that rulers ought to have, and this I say has never been denied, then every ruler, that is every citizen, should have a liberal education.
>
> R.M. Hutchins, 1953, ***The conflicts in education in a democratic society,*** Harper, News York quoted in Eisner (1979) p. 56.

Indeed, this is politically emancipatory, aimed at empowering all men and women to reject tyrannies that impose ignorance and oppression on people. Yet it is also conservative in the sense that a liberal draws heavily on traditions and canons. For example, the conservative, Oakeshott (1971), who advocates liberal education, has described it as 'a specific transaction, which may go on between the generations of human beings in which the newcomers to the scene are initiated into the world they are to inhabit' (p. 43). The reward, he says, is emancipation 'from the immediate contingencies of place and time of birth, from the tyranny of the moment' (p. 74) – from the ephemera that so distract postmodernists and progressives.

Liberal education distinguishes itself from those pedagogies that provide skills aimed at satisfying current wants and satisfactions. Hirst's (1972) notion of a liberal education is that it is purveyed ideally through forms of knowledge organised into 'distinct disciplines' (mathematics, history, physical sciences, etc.). A liberal education is concerned with the 'comprehensive development of the mind'. According to Hirst, 'whatever else a liberal education is, it is not a vocational education... not a specialist education in any sense' (p. 1). A liberal education 'quite deliberately' excluded specialist concerns.

Vocational Universities

Universities have become vocationalized (Symes, 1999). That is, ' "working knowledge" is more than ever being academized through competency approaches to learning ... and are now offering more occupationally specific credentials' (Symes &

McIntyre, 2000 p. 4). Although, as was argued above, universities have always been to some degree vocational institutions (eg, law and medicine), more recently the growth in knowledge-based employment, particularly service and financial sectors, has led to a greater need for vocational education (Boud & Symes, 2000, p. 17). This is a matter of conjecture, but not in this paper.[7]

There have been serious attempts to bridge this liberal-vocational divide. In the UK, there has been a substantial attempt to bridge this division (Lewis, 1994). He suggests that Hodkinson's (1991) notion that academic and vocational learning lies on a continuum, not a binary, is a useful starting point. However, his proposed set of generic skills (example: self-awareness, self-confidence, problem-solving, communication, co-operation with others) is still infused with progressivist notions of selfhood being primary goals of education instead of cognitive and moral formation within a wider civic and academic purpose. Coffey (1989) argues that the new vocationalism in schools be understood far more liberally, by incorporating Dewey's social reconstructionist principles. According to Lewis, American vocationalists are far more radical. Shor (1988) asserts that schools should 'devocationalise' the thinking of students, and Rehm (1989) talks of an education that empowers students to 'transform themselves and the world with meaningful work' (p. 121).

Charles Bailey (1984) concurs that a liberal education 'stands in contrast to all kinds of vocational education'. It is not directed to any particular utility, but rather at 'liberation', 'fundamentality', 'generality' and 'intrinsically valued ends'. Perhaps the best-known U.S. example of a liberal university is The University of Chicago. One of its leading chancellors, Robert Maynard Hutchins, described liberal education as 'training in the liberal arts and of understanding the leading ideas that have animated mankind. It aims to help the human being learn to think for himself, to develop his highest human powers' (quoted in Eisner, p. 56). In contrast, the long-term usefulness of vocational education is less predictable. Kumar (1997) sums up by

[7] It could be argued that, as a capital-importing nation, large sections of the Australian workforce are being dumbed-down. This is because many of the cognitive features of work are contained in the machine. Thus, the labour value of production is actually largely comprised by its overseas capital component that has used up the cognitive labour of overseas workers. If this is so, then perhaps one function of universities and higher school retention rates is to delay the increase in the industrial reserve army.

saying that ‘the cognitive and thinking skills involved, such as critical reasoning, were transferable across a variety of disparate fields, occupations and professions’ and that ‘the values epitomized in a liberal education formed the bedrock of Western civilization, outlasting more transient and ephemeral expressions of culture’ (p. 35).

The authors understand full well that this is squarely at odds with postmodernist pedagogy, and are happy to state our philosophical opposition to a paradigm that fails to produce an ethic capable of withstanding the massive inequalities and injustices that beset our contemporary times, that provides the logic of late capitalism (Jameson, 1989, 1991), and whose de-canonising and anti-rationalist zeal provides no sensible basis for evaluating information or aesthetics.[8]

Anti-Progressivist

By liberal education we most certainly do not mean progressivist education. At the heart of progressivist education is the primacy of the individual and of personal meaning, manifested in notions of “personal relevance” and “personal needs”, and where firmly-held personal beliefs are considered equally valid as those that have institutional or historical support (cf. Neill, 1960; Holt, 1970). Such educational methods infused the curriculum of British, American, and Australian schools in the 1970s and 1980s with adverse consequences:

> The attitude of superstitious reverence for childhood is still with us. The insistence that we must stick like a leech at all times to the “needs” of childhood has bred a spirit of anti-intellectualism, which is reflected in the reliance on improvising instead of long range organization, in the over-emphasis of the here and now ... and in the lack of continuity in the educational program Boyd H. Bode (1938) in Eisner (1979), p. 60

[8] Many postmodernists characterise canons as static bodies of knowledge or aesthetic selections. This is clearly not so. A liberal canon is an expanding, inclusive, and responsive one (vide Harold Bloom’s Western Canon). Furthermore, the humanities have generally never been resistant to indigenous, postcolonial, and feminist literature. The criticisms of many postmodernists, then, about the exclusivity of ‘high culture’ are weak indeed.

This criticism (see also McKenna, 1995) could be equally well directed at universities seeking to establish these centres of learning as client-oriented educational products. What we assert is that, while it is certainly sound educational practice to draw on the experiences of students (and this is increasingly hard to do when many of the students in the lectures and tutorials come from very different cultures and life experiences), it is inappropriate to base a curriculum around what students claim to be their “needs”. Indeed, this is entirely inappropriate for the reason that universities’ very role is to induct people into experiences that are not possible or likely elsewhere. Universities are repositories – not the sole repositories – of traditions of knowledge and thinking whose “quality control” is the academic process. These processes are the “portals” that should separate the dross from the worthwhile ore, and that have mechanisms that allow new phenomena to be analysed dispassionately, logically, and thoughtfully so that we can understand ourselves and our society better.

In fact, the respect should be coming from the student, not the university. By this we mean that when one enters a university, one enters a site that carries within its sandstone, red-brick, or prefab-concrete walls people who are ethically and collegially committed to their disciplines so that they can help to explain life and society, and thereby enhance our lives. They are also committed to passing on the very best a society has to offer for those who genuinely seek to know. Thus, paradoxically, while much of a university’s practice is with the here and now (whether it be collecting samples of river water, testing motor car engines, evaluating the lives of working mothers, or trying to understand the Eminem phenomenon), this practice is informed by an unfolding knowledge base, changing theories, and appropriate academic inquiry processes. These knowledges and processes are not easily acquired (which makes the notion of a one-year MBA ludicrous). Because the practices also involve reflection, they take considerable time for ideas to be worked over, critiqued, and refined. In this sense, we are saying that the university still has a legitimate age-old purpose of intellectual and subjective formation that takes time, discipline, and respect.

Our position also opposes what might be labelled instrumental progressivism, ‘which stresses a “student-centred style of education that is individualized and flexible, and

is designed to enhance the individual's opportunities for employment' (Symes & McIntyre, 2000, p. 2). It is progressivist in the sense that it is meant to respond to student 'needs' by concentrating on the ephemera by learning how to 'do' public relations or advertising or hospitality management, for example. In other words, students learn how to write advertising copy, or how to be customer-friendly at the very lowest levels of cognition (possession of information, comprehension, and application). It is instrumental in the sense that the outcomes are 'tethered to the goals of performativity' (p. 2).

The Enlightenment Project

In this sense, then, we unashamedly place ourselves in the line of the Enlightenment Project. We argue that the university, more than ever in an age of barbarism, has a vital and steadfast role in the civilising processes of a society worth living in and to be proud of. In particular, we identify three characteristics as vital elements of the Enlightenment Project. The role of the university in the enlightenment project means that we are committed to democratic processes, rational procedures of inquiry, and reason, tolerance and humanity.

1. Democratic processes

This notion of democracy is an affirmative egalitarian and optimistic one with a lineage stretching to Helvetius and Condorcet. Both these revolutionary philosophers see inequality as primarily resting in educational difference (Russell, 1961, pp. 693-696). Popularised also by Thomas Paine's notion of 'common sense', the belief is that access to learning would democratize society by releasing it from the yoke of ignorance and disguised ideology.

2. Rational procedures of inquiry to establish knowledge

Although initially the concern of science, the use of reasoning processes to establish shared knowledge also has a strong democratic element. Modern science is built upon a traditional method founded in empiricism and reason. The works of Locke, Newton, Boyle, Bacon, and the Royal Society was truly revolutionary because they established methods of free inquiry that unleashed 'the powers of human cognitive

activity from its domination and constraint by forms of arbitrary political authority' (Spragens, 2001, p. 56). Despite postmodernist attempts to denigrate this scientific tradition as being linear and exclusionary, over time it has built into its evolving processes an 'institutionalization of ... cognitive powers within the system of mutually corrective cooperative endeavor'. These remarkably adaptive processes allow for change in the processes themselves (eg, Popper, 1963, 1972; see also O'Hear, 1980 for critique of Popper; Lakatos and Musgrave, 1970; Lakatos, 1963-64) and even in the paradigms of knowledge (Kuhn, 1970)

This scientific process has been important in itself in releasing us from the burdens of ignorance and arbitrary authority. But, as Stephen Toulmin points out, 'Nothing in [the conception of rational human enterprise] limits the scope of disciplined enquiry to the natural sciences ... nor need the agreed goals or ideals ... be an explanatory one'[i9] (quoted in Spragens, 2001, p. 56)**.** In other words, human enterprises (especially in rules of law and governance) and scientific enterprises benefit from 'a disciplined process of reasoning together'. Spragens argues that 'This large and pervasive insight is the single most important thing for us to salvage from the Enlightenment project and to carry with us into the twenty-first century'.

3. Reason, tolerance, and humanity

Again this draws on Condorcetian notions (Spragens, 2001), and, in the light of anti-imperialising theories (whose incorporation is made possible by Enlightenment principles) is reflexively sensitive to such smug binaries as "civilization / savagery". We argue that postmodern relativism has been a natural, but unbalanced outcome of the enlightenment project. However, extreme relativism needs to be corrected because it fails to produce worthwhile knowledge or codes of behaviour. Because liberal thought assumes that knowledge is tentative and evolving, and because it acknowledges that it is often culture specific, it has encouraged a sort of democracy of ideas. Unchecked, and inflected by postmodern relativism, this can lead to the notion that one idea is as good as any other, that there is no hierarchy of knowledge,

[9] S. Toulmin (1972). *Human understanding*. Princeton, p. 359.

ideas, or aesthetics. This should be seen a dangerous and stupid approach. One wonders how such postmodernists rationalise the fact that they write this on a word processor built as a result of organised and predictable knowledge; or whether they would willingly accept 1901 dentistry when they visit their dentist in 2001; or whether they really believe that phrenology provides useful insights into anthropology. Far from taking a triumphalist, technocratic stance (indeed we are too well aware of our potential to create germ warfare, nuclear missiles, to salinate our rivers, and to destroy rainforests), we agree with Spragens (2001) in asserting that 'We need to work at sorting out in particular cases what are generalizable norms applicable to a whole range of peoples and societies and what are instead culturally specific patterns of aesthetic taste or adaptations to particular circumstances-in everything from religious affirmations to medical practices to gender relations to political institutions' (p. 57). Such a position is not new. Indeed Habermas's (1962/1989; see also Calhoun, 1992) 'public sphere' visualises such a democratic space and disposition.

A Proposed Curriculum

This returns this paper to the point at which we opened, the deficiencies exhibited by recent graduates. We have argued that students are not clients or customers, and that one ethic of education is to enable graduates to participate as members of the civil society. The final issue to address, then, is the means by which students can be inculcated with the problem-solving and critical thinking skills that will fulfil the twin aims of meeting employer requirements and broader, ethical concerns.

In determining a university curriculum, one should begin by asking, as Tyler's seminal ***Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*** suggests: (1) what are the educational purposes that one seeks to attain?; (2) what educational experiences will be most likely to achieve those purposes; (3) how do educators best arrange educational experiences; and (4) how does one determine that these purposes are being attained? Our approach is unashamedly normative in that we espouse the creation of a particular type of graduate on the basis that we believe that the manifestation of certain values in graduate dispositions, knowledge, and skills are intrinsically good. Thus, we find ourselves immediately at odds with some major

features of postmodernism, namely the relativism of knowledge and ethics. We argue here that curriculum development could be usefully guided by Bloom et.al.'s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (1956) and Kohlberg's schema of Cognitive Moral Development. We understand that using such traditional and relatively crusty concepts will help to cement us in some people's minds as unreconstructed old fogeys; however, although we are aware of the extensive critique of these approaches[10], we believe that they are still useful mechanisms to describe curriculum objectives.

Bloom's Taxonomy

Bloom's taxonomy categorises learning into six different levels, from the most straightforward (knowledge) to the most sophisticated (evaluation). The taxonomy is represented visually below

[10] For example, the notion of Post-Conventional Moral Reasoning in Adulthood is widely discussed (Kohlberg, Levine & Hewer, 1983; Kohlberg & Armon, 1984; Alexander & Langer, 1990; Colby Kohlberg, Gibbs, & Lieberman, 1983; Bakken & Ellsworth, 1990).

LAS CENTRE IDENTITIES AND PRACTICES WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION: FRAGMENTS FOR NEGOTIATION

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The teaching of language and academic skills is diffused across higher education institutions and is not uniquely located in LAS. This means that a discussion about identities and futures of 'LAS' in times of change is itself problematic. Likewise, the discourses around centre identities within faculties, the role of technology and the web, and responses to an increasingly diverse student body float across institutions with no privileged convergence on LAS. So it is necessary first to acknowledge that 'our' identity is still very much open to negotiation and contestation and that the institutional fragmentation of LAS practices has consequences for a workable identity and a coherent response to times of change. I use a recent shift from New Zealand to Australia, some post-structural scaffolding, and current representations of practices and

discourses to try to locate some responses to these questions and their implications for professional identities, practices, and organisation within institutions.

Language and Academic Skills: an abstract reading

> "As we enter the 21st century, universities are experiencing a period of unprecedented transformation: globalisation, corporatisation, internationalisation, increased accountability, restructuring and new technologies are among the forces reshaping our institutions. The one constant is change and inherent in this is our changing identities as we grapple with the new demands we encounter daily. These external forces, in combination with developments in our field and related disciplines, cannot fail to impact on our identities as LAS staff within our institutions, on the identities of our students and on the identities of our academic colleagues.
>
> "The point is that it is you that is doing the identifying, and the identity you confer has more to do with your purposes than the 'nature' of the thing itself...masculinity / femininity, hetero- / homosexual, sane/insane...these may be seen as socially bestowed identities rather than essences of the person" (Burr, 1995, p.30)

It seems to me that one of the functions of conferences is to reinforce professional 'solidarity' and recognize disciplinary boundaries through mutual display and conversation. As many of the papers at the abstracts and papers at this conference indicate there is a wide variety of professional positions available to conference participants in situating their response to the question of identities. In the spirit of

'mutual' display and conversation, I would like you to think of my discussion as a continuation of the conversation Carolyn Webb initiated at her plenary. In particular, I am interested in developing the question of research approaches to LAS, appropriate pedagogical philosophies for practitioners, and, in general, a questioning of the language and practices assumed to structure this field. A 'workable' description of LAS staff, our field, our students, is assumed by the conference abstract. I suggest that the 'our' community is far from well-defined.

The conference abstract and title works against efforts to stabilize or describe new identities for language and academic skills practitioners. Just as students do (Bartlett 2000), we come to teaching with diverse backgrounds but unlike them there is no single 'Australian (LAS) identity' to which we can or must conform (Yew & Farrell, 2000). I think if we move beyond the 'LAS' acronym we can begin to see that this question of identities is one that links to the work of a broad group of people mediating a new higher education curriculum. Like Clarke (2000), I see myself involved in advising students on issues that go beyond the mechanics of writing into content and research methodologies. I think the fact that this happens shows that 'we' are no longer involved in fix-it remediation or support but substantially involved in the process of re-defining the tertiary currciulum (Tapper 1999; Aitchison 2000).

I see my own role as a lecturer in ESL within a communication skills and ESL centre at Melbourne University, along with my colleagues, as intersecting with and subsuming, in some instances, the teaching activities of those who identify themselves as LAS staff. The work of staff in transition programmes, foundation studies programmes, and other units across the campus are all concerned with researching and teaching staff and students what is required for academic acculturation. I think that rather than providing help with 'supporting' skills we need to think about what we do as work in academic literacies; a professional research and teaching space with its own content and purposes. And we need to widen linkages and contacts with those concerned with these issues. This implies leaving behind the peripheral 'support' tag used to define what LAS is and grasping at academic literacies as a professional research and teaching field; one which requires a social and professional attention to the consequences of what we teach and who we are.

As Vivien Burr points out in the quote above, the identities we confer on others and those that are conferred on us serve social (and institutional) purposes. We are often designated into binaries such as: academic/general staff, adviser/lecturer, external/internal, language/academic skills, skills/literacy; some of these binaries are implied in the conference description. The designations correspond to historical and political constructions within education and society but are not particularly useful to categorise people whose practices are concerned with academic literacy. One way 'us' (LAS) and 'them' (academic colleagues) breaks down is when one looks at those involved in teaching the literacies required by the academy (Dobson 2000). As this conference attendance list, profesional associations such as HERSA, AARE, and professional forums like UNILEARN attest such simplifications bear little resemblance to the designations, locations and concerns of practitioners in the field who talk about interpreting academic cultures for students.

I must admit to never having worked in a so-called language and academic skills centre. I have worked in high schools, ESL units, language departments, continuing education departments and latterly communication skills centres where instruction in note-taking skills, referencing, time management, and other discretely identified academic behaviours (the standard agendas for LAS centres I have known) have formed part of a broader curriculum. Latterly, I have been working with postgraduate first and second language students on research skills and writing in parallel with undergraduate ESL 'credit' teaching. This teaching is conducted in on-line, face-to-face, workshop, individual and group situations. Students 'skills' in assignment writing, thesis structuring, referencing, self-management, all form part of 'bigger pictures'. Overall, then, the skills focus that continues to define some work on language and academic skills is a somewhat artificial isolation of the mechanics of curriculum processes.

Situating identities in our past and present

Feminist approaches, I believe, have particular relevance for a field such as teaching academic literacies which has a strong female representation and works within largely andro-centric institutional frameworks (Asmar, 1999a; Blackmore & Sachs, 1998; Jackson, 2000) and academic perspectives (Beasley, 1985). Feminist

methodology puts gender, reflexivity, and purposes of research and writing on at the centre (Harding, 1987). As critical feminist writers like Jones (Jones, 1992), Lather (Lather, 1991) and Smith (Smith, 1990) suggest texts - research and other - about experience are ideological by nature. This is true for the discourses of conferences as it is for research articles on or about practice. When we visit or revisit texts about teaching, we are not obliged to read them in ways that sustain the illusion they mirror the Truth (Fraser, 1989). We can and should interrogate pragmatically (Cherryholmes 1993) them as setting up a picture of the world (ontology), of knowledge (epistemology) and consequences for educational practice (methodology) that we find ignores personal, gender, and political blind spots and blank spots (Wagner 1993) we view as critical to what we do.

How we practice teaching is tied up with our sense of awareness of its role and purpose in education in general. This understanding is both personal and social: it is a product of our own past practices in institutional contexts. A 'workable' identity for us as individuals needs to be built on integrating our current understandings of this as mediated by our own teaching experiences. Increasingly I find that the best kinds of conversations about teaching practice are those that begin by acknowledging our personal investment, gender, and other positions we take in the changing climate of institutional politics we work in. These are conversations we often have in staffrooms with those we know and who know us. It is worth unpacking in writing, I suggest, the representations of the institution, ourselves, and others that surface in the close work we do with students. These 'tales from the field' have something of the power of a critical tale (Barone 1992). Critical tales use autobiographical strategies to situate educational understanding and practice and allow political and ethical considerations to come to the fore. They have a central place in feminist educational research, which acknowledge that "our accounts of the world can only be constructions, made up from the language, meanings and ideas historically available to us, the 'I'" (Jones 1992).

Literacy as a socio-historical construction and practice written through critical feminist approaches invites a 'contextualising' of teaching and a challenge to taken-for granted binaries. It involves writing about our practices from particular positions of power with regard to students and other academics. The issues we are increasingly

asked to deal with - research methodologies, plagiarism, advising faculty on teaching practice, are reflections of institutional change. The androcentrics of university management, the gendered nature of 'support' teaching (more females than males), the assumptions about student accommodation to anglo-centric models of the academy, need description in writing as we experience them from our situated teaching perspectives. One of my views is that the language of 'skills' and 'support' contributes to the (already) marginal status some of us have in the institution. Writing 'up' the extent to which our interventions are increasingly important for student success and emphasising literacies as our field are two ways of combatting this.

Why literacies not skills?

Along with others, I am dissatisfied with the term 'skills' as sufficiently well defined and sufficiently broad to cover the functions assigned to academic acculturation (Candlin et al. 1998; Richards 1998). 'Academic literacy', is a term that is sometimes used synonymously with 'measurable' skill levels (Barthel, 1994; Hanrahan, 1997; Holder, Jones, Robinson, & Krass, 1999; Nevile, 1996; see also Willis, 1990). But the sense I want to stress here is successful communication in socio-cultural context. I agree with Percy and Skillen (2000) that the role of learning adviser, or better the support role in universities is in a period of transition and that this translates, on the one hand, into moving from outside to inside the curriculum (Percy & Skillen 2000). For example, faculty construct particular relationships with students through feedback and increasingly, the role of interpretation or even mediation between student and university cultures is being played by teachers like myself and those in LAS and other centres (Jessup 2000). In one sense this is bridging the gap between faculty and student expectations (Killen 1994). In another, it indicates how the burden of academic acculturation as a social process is falling to those outside discipline specific content teachers.

Literacies in plural helps keep the focus on the multiple ways language in context is represented across campus by faculty and students. In its current use it also keeps the focus on the social import of literacies for an increasingly diverse student population (McKay 1993). As such it subsumes 'skills', which often implies a neutral designation for the 'mechanics' of tertiary success. It is a term which applies in a

cross-disciplinary way to academic literacies across campus and beyond 'support' roles (Pearce & Borland, 1997; Reid & Mulligan, 1997). Because it has purchase in all levels of education - primary through tertiary - literacy also helps create a bridge across cultural and historical circumstances for individual students (and teachers). It reminds us that academic literacy is only the tip of an individual and group socio-historical process that begins in early childhood.

Literacies brings into focus the issue of discourse and the academic genres that students must manage. New undergraduates, coursework Masters students, PhD students from different backgrounds are all learning to manage the conventions, sometimes very idiosyncratic, demanded of them by discipline specific faculty. Gone are the days (the golden 'halcion' past) when they could magically be expected to have reached academic maturity through a process of osmosis through their many years in the education system. Internationalisation and accountability have both played a part in ensuring that the taken for granted simply will not do. The discourses and practices of the academy need transparent interpretation (if not modification) for a diverse student body.

Our mainstream 'colleagues' are still grappling with this issue but to a far less extent than we who have moved into the interpreter and mediator role. I increasingly find myself explaining the odd somewhat cryptic questions of my academic 'colleagues' to students. Cryptic because culturally different and sometimes undisclosed. Skills will not do either as a job designation to explain the role I and others find ourselves in explaining research methodologies to students in ethnomusicology, critical and post-modern approaches to law, and educational linguistics. As Percy and Skillen (2000) noted the shift to learner-centred practices in the modern university is a serious challenge for some staff and can only be effectively achieved through 'equal' partnerships between those of us who discipline staff and literacy specialists like ourselves.

The politics of common sense notions of external/internal forces

Corporatisation, technologisation, internationalisation, globalisation, accountability, and restructuring can be seen as a constellation of 'common sense' meta-narratives[1] (Lyotard, 1984) or 'myths' (Holton, 1997) in education which lecturers, students, and' advisers never intentionally wrote. As common sense realities they can be positioned as anonymous[2] forces moulding higher education and 'our' community into new 'shapes'. Gramsci's notion of hegemony[3] is important here because it helps explain how we as educators come to accept as common sense notions that serve political, commercial and industrial ends. They are patently words that those practicing language and skills training do not own nor coin.

These common sense nominalisations are, in fact, extremely politicized notions which connect to other issues such as the commodification of higher education (Roberts, 1998). Curriculum change from an 'international' ***policy*** perspective means, for example, modifying the curriculum to meet global training objectives. From an ***equity*** standpoint it is not clear whether curriculum change is actually working and whether, therefore the rhetoric of multiculturalism and internationalised curriculum is having more than financial effects (Dawson, 1998). Language and academic skills connects to the changing needs of international students (Bostock, 1998). Their financial input has been good for business and for multiculturalism on campus (Pittaway, Ferguson, & Breen, 1998). Or at least there is a positive response from management and administration to internationalisation as a 'given' of corporate university life with the added attraction of benefits for campus multiculturalism

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[1] For more on this now standard postmodern term attributed to Jacques Lyotard see 'Introduction to Basic Lyotardian Concepts' at http://www.california.com/~rathbone/lyo3.htm and 'Notes on Jean-Francois Lyotard' at http://www.california.com/~rathbone/lyotard2.htm.

[2] The linguistic tactic of creating a nominalized form such as 'internationalisation' is one of the strategies used in academic discourse to conceal agency and responsibility. Here, we can ask by whom?

[3] Follow it up in the Penguin Dictionary of Sociology, © Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill and Bryan S.Turner (1994) or on-line at http://xrefer.com/entry/105141

(Hampson, 1996). But the multicultural benefits of internationalisation from a management perspective need to move from rhetorical (Barrie, 1997) to grounded statements about what is happening in classrooms and departments (Asmar, 1999b).

The effects on curriculum practice are particularly relevant to what we do. Internationalisation, beyond a management strategy and achievement, is challenging university staff to respond adequately (Mills, 1997; Rizvi & Walsh, 1998; Tootell, 1999; Welch & Denman, 1997) and, in fact, change their teaching strategies (Baker & Panko, 1998). Academic skills like the ability to work in groups (Volet & Ang, 1998) and manage postgraduate study (Stacy, 1999) have taken on special meaning where they are filtered through different linguistic and cultural expectations. Dialogue between faculty and students is one way of closing the gap and moving to the incorporation of different beliefs and behaviours in the classroom (Dawson, 1998).

Internationalisation shows up in threads of conversation on the UNILEARN list. The unilearn list a Special Interest Group forum of the Higher Education Research and Development Society Association which canvasses Australasian[4] comment and discussion on language and learning in higher education. I have been talking and listening to contributors for the last four years. The contributions to the forum emanate from advisers, support officers, lecturers, and others (with unidentified positions) within academic skills units, university programs, polytechnics, support centres, centres and schools of language or ESL and communication within faculties of Arts, Business, Computing and Mathematics, and centres. In my view, this group is an important part of the community whose practices are addressed by this conference.

What is particularly interesting from the point of view of internationalisation as a common sense 'given' is how it surfaces in the list conversations as a political cum rhetorical axis dictating organisation, discourse, and practices of 'our' community. I list below some of the threads

[4] Occasional contributions also come from the UK, Australia, the US, etc.

- the participation of international students in group work
- IELTS/TOEFL entry requirements and their credibility for postgraduates and undergraduates
- advising academic staff on working with international students
- teaching academic skills to offshore students
- plagiarism: how to teach (NESB especially) students not to do it

These ways in which 'internationalised' teaching situations for support staff are linked to institutional politics is clear in a recent thread on individual tutorials on the list. In the course of this (asynchronous) conversation talk on individual tutorials is linked to the following themes: individual tutorials are …

- used as measures of staff performance and promotion
- limited by university funding and cost-effectiveness
- usefully framed by Vygotskian or Rogerian approaches
- difficult to validate the effectiveness of with faculty management
- less effective (cost and results) than group work
- the best kind of teaching and a source of insights and input into group teaching and research
- can be achieved through use of senior students as peer teachers/mentors
- definitive of the separate (non-academic) profile of learning centre staff
- increasing in number
- not considered university teaching (for award purposes)
- needed because faculty don’t do their job properly (and linked to the disappearance of learning adviser if this situation is remedied)

Textual fundamentalism and naivity in teaching and learning

> "Textual fundamentalism is the belief that texts always say just what they mean, so that any honest or decent person ought to be able to understand this perfectly clear meaning without making any fuss about it ". (Scholes, 1989, p.52)

Following Scholes, Richard Rorty, Cleo Cherryholmes and ultimately John Dewey I have taken a pragmatic rather than a fundamentalist approach to reading the conference descriptor and abstracts. In doing so I have tried to highlight some of the assumptions built into the language employed to describe the aims and purposes of the conference. It is the same approach that Cleo Cherryholmes suggests for avoiding naïve approaches to reading research in the social sciences and education (Cherryholmes, 1993). That is, against a 'fundamentalist' or empiricist approach to reading research that stresses its transparent relationship to Reality and Truth[5], we need to attend to subtexts of gender and politics and read pragmatically,

> "Pragmatic readers emphatically deny that facts or narrative plots or theories or metaphors or statistical explanations or formal models ever speak for themselves . . . Pragmatists suggest we clarify the meaning of research by looking to the ***consequences*** of our findings . . . The point is that the paradoxes, ambiguities and contradictions that readers encounter in their attempts to clarify meanings require that choices be made. Where rational, these choices are pragmatic." (Cherryholmes, 1993, p.3-4).

It is possible to use a similar fundamentalism in the teaching of language and academic skills, and construct a view of 'LAS' as essentially a transparent field. That

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[5] The capitals are used to indicate reference to reified historical notions which operate in certain disciplines; they are not equivalent to 'reality' and 'truth' as debatable labels for untheorized notions.

is, as an identifiable body of practitioners in higher education concerned with supporting students to succeed in content areas by teaching the mechanics of essay writing, etc., on the assumption that our academic colleagues define the content for us.

If like other educationists we want a professional identity (Carr & Kemmis, 1986) then this approach will not do because it defers the question of what field we own preferring to leave it to 'content' faculty and our institution to determine this. Talk about academic 'support' is only possible by viewing (who?) the teaching of language and academic skills as a practice without a field or as a set of practices in search of an identity. Since, as I suggest in this paper, there is no generic geographic location for academic literacies on campuses and since higher education – adult, vocational, academic, professional -itself is a work in progress, this contributes to a dispersal of what we do. Our teaching practices as interpreters, mediators, researchers, and academics in the field of academic literacies take place as 'micro' instances of power/knowledge representations or discourses (Foucault, 1988) that define institutionalised education. The higher education curriculum is changing and increasingly 'we' stand at the crossroads of this change. Negotiating the changes will mean broadening our networks as we move from outside to inside the higher education curriculum.

Appendix: table of designations of 'support' staff from UNILEARN by-lines

Director, Learning Centre	Lecturer in English as a second language, Teaching & Learning Centre	Head, Academic Skills Program
Teaching and Learning Services	Business Communication Skills (NESB)	Staff chair: campus gender policies and practices forum, Department of Academic Development (AD)
Lecturer, Learning Centre	Learning & Language Adviser, The Learning Centre	Teaching and Learning Support Officer

Senior Lecturer School of Languages	Co-ordinator, Intercultural Communication 141/142 units	Lecturer in English Communication, Academic Skills Program, School of Language, Literature and Communication
Coordinator: Teaching and Learning Services, Learning Connection - Flexible Learning Centre	Coordinator, Academic Support Unit, Teaching and Learning Centre	Lecturer, Learning Development
Associate Professor, Head, Student Learning section, Teaching and Learning Centre	Learning Adviser, Learning Assistance Unit	Lecurer in Tertiary Teaching and Learning, Teaching and Learning Development Unit
Lecturer & Subject Convenor. English for International Business, School of Languages and Linguistics	Learning Support, Maia - Maori Development Centre	Director and Senior Lecturer, English Language & Study Skills Assistance (ELSSA) Centre, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Academic Coordinator, English Language Centre	Head, The Learning Centre	Lecturer, Learning Development
Lecturer in Literacy, Office of the Dean of Students	Head, Student Welfare Services	Academic Skills Program
Academic Skills Coordinator	Learning Skills Lecturer, Learning Skills Unit, Student Services	ESL Lecturer, Centre for Communication Skills and ESL
School of Computing and Mathematics	Lecturer, Academic Skills Humanities Academic Skills Unit	Effective Learning Adviser, Student and Staff Support Division

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Changing Identities

CHASING THE LEARNING CURVE: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT STAFF WHO WORK WITH INDIGENOUS TERTIARY STUDENTS IN OFF CAMPUS STUDY CENTRES IN REGIONAL SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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Off campus study centres have played a crucial role in providing supportive learning environments for Indigenous students in regional centres throughout South Australia for over two decades. Many of these students have achieved university access via special entry procedures; they are of mature age and have cultural, community and family commitments that make moving to city campuses difficult. While the students undertake their programs via flexible learning, each study centre is to some extent a microcosm of the distant metropolitan university.

Support staff work with students enrolled in an expanding range of programs to facilitate the development of academic and linguistic skills that pave the way towards independent learning. However, the learning environment itself is undergoing rapid and continuous change with increasing reliance on new technologies in teaching and access to learning resources. The challenges faced by off campus academic staff in keeping abreast of the new technologies while at the same time continuing to foster the development of students' academic skills in these dynamic circumstances are outlined. Strategies developed by staff are considered in terms of their intercultural context.

Key words: Off campus study centres; Indigenous students; Learning challenges and strategies

Preamble

Challenges and strategies are significant themes of education. In the context of this paper, their implications for the practices of academic staff who provide support services for Indigenous students in off campus study centres are considered in the light of the external study experiences of the students. In a rapidly changing learning environment such scrutiny is all the more necessary to ensure that practice keeps pace with student needs in order to maximise educational opportunities. The challenges for the students are undoubtedly greater and, where staff are non Indigenous, they can never presume to have 'walked in the shoes' of Indigenous students. However the journey alongside provides shared insights as we chase the learning curve.

Introduction

Increasing participation in tertiary education by Indigenous Australians has been statistically demonstrated since the late 1980s (Encel 2000) although recent figures point to a 15.2% national downturn (cited in AV-CC Media Release, 2001). For Indigenous students in regional South Australia, a significant tertiary study mode over the past two decades has been via flexible or distance delivery with support

provided in local off campus study centres. Approximately 20% of the Indigenous enrolment of the University of South Australia (UniSA) undertakes this form of external study (Lane 1998), the effectiveness of which is dependent on 'the quality of the learning environment and the level of support afforded to the students' (Clark nd, p. 1).

Multifaceted historical disadvantage in education has been incurred by Indigenous people and, it could be argued, continues to be perpetrated even when access is improved (Bourke 2000). However, the Aboriginal and Islander Support Unit (AISU, 1996), now a component of the College of Indigenous Education and Research, in accordance with the University of South Australia's Act of Establishment (1991) and Statement of Reconciliation aims to provide Indigenous access and equity in higher education. The AISU has a vital role in ensuring that Indigenous people firstly gain entry to UniSA programs and secondly, that they receive appropriate academic, social and cultural support via learning assistance and provision of resources. Such intervention strategies are intended to maximise successful outcomes, contributing to the improvement of Indigenous students' tertiary participation, retention and success rates. They complement other initiatives such as promotion of Indigenous research and more inclusive curricula (http://www.unisa.edu.au/aisu/, 2001). To some extent AISU support is both additional to and articulated with the wider learning support environment of the University (Hicks, Reid & George, 1999).

Factors Contributing to Academic Success

Indicators of academic success can include affective, cognitive, environmental and behavioural factors such as: prior knowledge including 'educational attitudes'; a range of relevant skills such as verbal aptitude leading to ability to function within the tertiary discourse; confidence; adaptability; resourcefulness; feelings of familiarity and comfort; commitment; engagement with learning and a determination to succeed (Ramsey Barker & Jones 1999; Archer, Cantwell & Bourke 1999). These factors influence individuals' abilities to 'construct knowledge and understanding' within the learning environment' (Latchem 1996, p. 3).

Indigenous students bring a wealth of skills, knowledge, life experience and determination to the learning environment (DiGregorio, Farrington & Page 2000).

However, it seems that 'cognitive, linguistic, cultural, social and economic barriers', exacerbated in the tertiary environment, compromise success for Indigenous students undertaking any form of higher education (McConnochie nd). Observed characteristics of the profile of Indigenous students and some associated tertiary study implications may include the following: (Encel 2000; Mills unpub; Tearle 2000).

- Indigenous students are more likely to gain admission through special entry and may not have attended secondary school or undertaken post secondary studies such as TAF.

- Many are of mature-age and are the first in their families to undertake higher education. At one study centre the ages of the 30 or so students range from 18 to 64 years with the majority aged over 30.

- The priority that can be placed on studies is often dependent on other life factors including family, community and cultural responsibilities sometimes requiring prolonged absences; significant chronic health problems and/or disability; financial difficulties, and employment commitments.

- Students may be unfamiliar with conventions and expectations of the tertiary discourse where Indigenous perspectives may be absent or under-represented in views of learning and knowledge. 'Discourses are partial and partitional and social difference is manifest in the diversity of discourses within particular social practices' (Fairclough unpub, np).

- Students whose home languages are non standard may have difficulty with skills such as academic reading, extrapolating meaning, critical literacy; interpreting assignment requirements, analysing concepts, and applying these in relevant ways to demonstrate knowledge using the standard language of the tertiary institution. Students' own language styles may not be valued, instead regarded as of low status, inadequate and incorrect (Eggington 1992). Nakata (cited in ***The Age***, April 21, 2001) states that 'lack of English…closes off higher education…it denies access to information, the basis of the global economies.'

- Students, including school leavers, are less likely to have undertaken prior studies in courses providing background for business or nursing programs.

Difficulties can occur both in understanding specialised content and in necessary skills, for example understanding functions of cells or conversions required for drug calculations (Lemmey, L. 2001, pers. Comm. November 2).

- Science-oriented courses taught by distance education have been largely print-based with few opportunities for visual study aids or hands-on practical components. A Nursing tutor observed that students who are 'visual learners' are in need of resource materials to supplement their texts (Lemmey, L. 2001, pers. comm. November 2.)

- Students may never have experienced the assessment modes favoured by academics such as extended essays or exams. Exams, including closed book, multiple choice with a heavy emphasis on memorising, identifying and reproducing specialised information may pose particular difficulties, inhibiting students from demonstrating knowledge (Christensen & Lilley 1007).

- Indigenous, mature age students tend to begin studies with lower levels of computer and information technology (CIT) literacy including little or no experience of the Internet (Barraket et al 2000). They therefore need to develop these skills, including associated meta language, as part of their studies (Lear unpub.) while at the same time dealing with the unfamiliar demands of the tertiary learning environment.

- It is likely that many commencing students lack confidence in their own abilities and consider a failed assignment a total failure (Brieger, U. 2001, pers. comm. October 31).

Motivation for Indigenous Students in Distance Education

Despite inhibiting factors, Indigenous students have many compelling reasons for undertaking higher education, with themes including education and personal development, security through future employment, a desire to contribute to their own or the wider community and role model consciousness (Ellis 1996; Degregorio, Farrington & Page 2000). However, choice of study mode for mature age students with localised responsibilities and who need vital family support throughout their studies is limited. Moving to the city to study is highly impracticable if not impossible,

and the external mode therefore offers the only university option since it fulfils the need to remain in home communities (Latchem 1996). While there are distinct advantages such as greater flexibility, especially of time management and location, some of the disadvantages of the external experience combine with aspects of students' individual circumstances to create additional challenges.

Study Programs Undertaken via Off Campus Centres

Historically, since their inception in the late 1970s the off campus centres, responding to pressing needs for Indigenous early childhood teachers in regional areas, provided support for Indigenous students enrolled in only one program – the Bachelor of Early Childhood Education and its precursors (Palmer & Ebbeck, 1990). From 1994, under the auspices of the former Faculty of Aboriginal & Islander Studies, support for an increased range of Programs for Indigenous people in these rural communities became available via the AISU. In addition, an increasingly diverse range of programs has become progressively available via flexible delivery. In 2001, students in the off campus centres are enrolled in 17 programs including undergraduate diplomas and degrees as well as a range of graduate programs up to and including masters studies.

Over-representation in the arts and humanities with a corresponding under-representation in areas such as health sciences, business and management has been common in Indigenous higher education (Bin Sallik 1993). However, a comparatively large cohort of students at the off campus centres is now enrolled in the Bachelor of Nursing, fully external since 1997. This suggests strong interest in nursing studies amongst Indigenous people, formerly thwarted by the need to move to a city campus. There are increasing enrolments in business or IT-oriented programs such as the Diploma of Business, the Bachelor of Commerce and the Bachelor of Computer and Information Science (Encel 2000). It seems that for regional Indigenous people, availability of these programs in the external mode encourages students to apply for them

The significant increase in the range and nature of the programs now being studied externally represents both a major change in the character of the centres as well as broadening the range of needs within the support environment.

Operation of the Off Campus Centres

The centres aim to provide, albeit on a smaller scale, facilities necessary for University study – local one-stop shops. While they have shared characteristics, each is highly individualised depending on the community in which it is located and the varying numbers, profiles and needs of the students. Flexibility and a 'supportive environment where students feel comfortable and are able to obtain extra assistance without feeling intimidated' (Bin Sallik 1996, p. 64) are vital. A fundamental aspect of the centres is perceived to be the welcoming, homelike atmosphere where there is a sense of ownership and pride, meeting social and cultural needs (Ellis, 1996; Lear unpub.). A student commented, 'The study centre feels right' (pers. comm. cited in Mills unpub, p. 5)

Trusting relationships and rapport with support staff are important especially for commencing students who have many new issues to address. Currently, across the centres, there is a mix of Indigenous and non Indigenous staff, and a key feature of the AISU Strategic Plan is the progressive implementation of the staff Indigenisation process.

In line with the AISU Home Base system of support, each centre has a fractional time Lecturer/Counsellor whose responsibilities include administration; academic and personal counselling; advocacy; monitoring and recording student progress; University-wide liaison; information dissemination; tutor liaison; provision of individual and/or group tutorials and workshops in areas of study requested by students; preparation and presentation of the annual Undergraduate Preparation for Indigenous Students (UPIS) Program; records maintenance; postgraduate mentoring; employment counselling; publicity; recruitment (http://www.unisa.edu.au/aisu/, 2001). Staff also provide outreach services, visiting students unable to attend the study centres, such as prisoners and housebound people.

The Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS), a DETYA-funded scheme, provides a means for individualised tutorial assistance to address specific needs 'over and above what the institution can provide in order to achieve an appropriate academic outcome' (Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme, 2001). This tuition is

largely skills-focussed, complementary to teaching and leading towards independent learning, identified as a desirable outcome for both students and staff (McInnes and James 1995). Students also appreciate the ongoing personal support of their tutor(s) that is integrated into the learning experience.

Experience indicates that while students appreciate opportunities for peer support and social interaction within the study centres, when it comes to academic assistance, most prefer one to one, face to face support. This is due to the widely divergent knowledge and skills students bring to their studies and the range of personal circumstances and commitments that limit their study time. Sometimes community dynamics also influence the effectiveness of group sessions.

While tutorial assistance can be undertaken at any location (study centre; student's home; local library) mutually agreeable to both parties, the centres provide the main focus of the support services. Some offer 24 hour, seven days per week access to a range of student facilities and a place for quiet study where program materials can be stored. Computers with required software are provided by the AISU, an ongoing challenge in itself with budgetary considerations interacting with changing technology. The study centres also facilitate Internet access for university email and online teaching and learning resources, and each has a small library, telephone and teleconference facilities.

In addition, the centres provide a venue for study and non study interaction with other students and the wider community, both Indigenous and non Indigenous and are often accepted as local Indigenous organisations, being included in information and resource sharing such as consultative groups, community newsletters and functions such as Culture Week celebrations. Indigenous teaching and nursing students undertake practicum and clinical placements in local education and health venues, raising the profile of Indigenous perspectives within these fields. Thus each study centre takes on a recognised local identity while at the same time symbolising the distant university, geographically removed by hundreds of kilometres. These are important immediate and wider community links 'that should be nurtured and maintained to the benefit of all' (Ellis et al 2000, p 1).

Influences of Distance Education Characteristics on Students' Learning

Distance education, referred to variously as 'flexible delivery, 'external studies' or 'open learning' is intended to be learner-centred, affording students greater control over their learning while employing a range of delivery modes and increasingly sophisticated communications and information technologies (CIT) that supplement or replace conventional technologies such as print, audio, video and telephone (Clark 2000; Latchem 1996). For students to function effectively, CIT knowledge and expertise are no longer optional extras but essential for any study mode.

However, for external Indigenous students, personal factors already identified can compromise such control and in turn, characteristics of the external environment can result in further difficulties including:

- A sense of isolation and alienation from teaching staff where students can complete their programs without ever seeing their lecturers or visiting the metropolitan campus in which they are enrolled. Most programs undertaken, apart from Nursing, do not involve any on campus attendance (in any case difficult and expensive for students).

- In programs with small enrolments, a student may be the only one at a centre enrolled in a particular course, leading to lack of course-related peer support

- External Indigenous students are observed to be reticent in initiating and maintaining contact with unknown academics via any means including phone calls, teleconferences or email, preferring face to face contact. Institutional factors such as workload and casualisation of the academic workforce may inhibit opportunities for proactive lecturer contact or continuity of communication. Experience in implementing flexible options including CIT applications indicates that they are often not effective substitutes for face to face interaction (Barraket et al 2000, p.121). Students 'can only learn if they know somebody is there' (Walker 1998, np) and it could be added, if they know who is there and can relate to them.

- Print-based course materials are often daunting in the volume of reading as well as the need for integrating the requirements of the course information guides (including assignment interpretation) study guide, readers and textbooks. Since

academic readings are often written by professionals for other professionals and include assumed knowledge, jargon and unclear expression (Bouffler, 1991), it can appear to students that course compilers do not have realistic knowledge of being ‘on the receiving end’ of the materials.

- Computer and Information Technology (CIT) has the potential to address some of the disadvantages of distance education (Hicks, Reid and George 1999) leading to empowerment in areas such as research and communications (Bourke 2000). Productive use requires ‘convenient and reliable access’, appropriate application by students and academics as part of the broader learning design, and support by ‘staff, systems, infrastructure and processes of the University’ (Barraket et al 2002 p. xiii).

- When students lack expertise to access difficult and unreliable technology and skills to utilise both integrated and generic supports provided by a range of learning resources (Hicks, Reid & George 1999), they are excluded from these benefits. Observation at an off campus centre (Lear unpub) suggests that the majority of students are either unaware of, or resistant to, the University’s online environment including email, student records, the library, online or CD materials and supports, unless staff are present to provide encouragement and hands-on assistance with access and procedures.

- CIT also requires students to learn additional literacies with associated language conventions and skills in order to participate effectively (Benfield 1999).

- Importantly,’ culturally inappropriate computing environments’ may inhibit Indigenous students (Barraket et al 2000 p xiv) unless Indigenous community aspects are ‘promoted, respected and incorporated into the learning and network initiatives’ (Bourke 2000, p1). McLoughlin and Oliver (1999, p.1) advise that ‘systematic attention must be given to particular design guidelines, which include cultural contextualisation’.

Challenges for Staff

For off campus staff, geographical distance from city campuses is sometimes professionally isolating although advantages shared with academics at rural campuses include close connections to immediate surroundings (Ellis et al, 2000). Fractional time employment limits availability at the study centres and with an emphasis on attending to immediate issues it can be difficult to identify and site the support role within the context of the wider tertiary environment.

Critical considerations for support staff surely lie in the notion of 'support' itself. What does it really mean? Whose interests does it serve? Could it reinforce and even perpetuate educational disadvantage, be counterproductive, fostering dependence and institutional hegemony rather than liberation and empowerment? Do support staff apply 'bandaid treatment' to address or even disguise other factors such as the negative effects of higher education cost cutting that might influence quality of teaching and course delivery? Can support practices be rationalised or subjected to scrutiny according to specific paradigms and do they need to be? Might for example, (academic) language development be underpinned by possible interpretations of a skills or genre focus, or assume other perspectives such as Critical Language Awareness? (Fairclough 2001) What are the implications of diminishing higher education funding on the cost effectiveness of current structures and practices? Support staff, sometimes using excuses such as 'I'm too busy attending to pressing needs of students' or "I don't feel like an academic out here', need to challenge their roles while remaining mindful of the need to be cautious about 'inflicting our certainties' on students (MacGinitie 1993, p 679).

Recent Planning Unit and AISU information indicates that Indigenous students within the profile outlined previously (that is, admitted to entry level programs via non standard entry or incomplete higher education studies, over a median age of 30 and studying externally) are at higher risk in terms of success, retention and completion rates. Leaving aside the possibly selective nature of criteria for success which might exclude indicators designating achievement in real terms for these students, as well as factors in the external environment that impact negatively on students such as alterations to Centrelink allowances, this is of concern to external Indigenous

students and communities. Further challenges across the university, including for external support staff, are raised.

Off campus staff are in a distinctive position to view the external study experience at least to some extent from the Indigenous students' perspectives, leading to shared understanding of issues and real, 'on the ground' responses. While their role is distinguished from teaching and research functions within the institution (Lane 1998), they operate across the academic and community discourses and to some extent are allocated the role of brokers between the university and the external learners. Specifically challenges might include:

- Continuing to provide and improve effective support in line with the criteria of the AISU to meet the identified needs of external Indigenous students within the changing learning environment. As well as addressing academic needs, issues such as bridging the isolation gap are very important.

- Addressing the acquisition of additional generic and course-specific skills required due to the expanding range of programs being undertaken.

- Developing additional strategies to empower students to access and utilise the CIT supports and essential information integrated into the (external) university learning environment and beyond.

- Expanding their own expertise through progressive re-skilling to keep pace with the changes to the wider learning environment while also challenging and informing their own practice. In particular, when access is difficult in regional areas and where staff do not have appropriate CIT skills and knowledge they can neither appreciate the role and practices of CIT for the students nor offer effective support within the online environment.

Strategies

As has been shown, the off campus study centres partially 'alleviate the sense of isolation for Indigenous students,' providing not only academic support but also social interaction (Lear unpub). To be effective, an overarching principle must be to continue respond to the needs that learners articulate and to modify support

practices accordingly. A wealth of collective experience indicates a resource that can be recorded, evaluated and revised with a view to continuously improving the unique nature of external support rationale and practice. Wherever possible, without inappropriate intrusions, student input can provide a clearer focus (Ramsey Barker & Jones, 1999). In turn, these evaluations can provide a resource to inform the wider university community of some of the issues for external Indigenous students. As Burke (2001, p.1) observed, 'Instead of deciding what is best for us … ask us. And listen to what we are saying and why'

Support strategies are multifaceted and initially consist of those embedded in the operation of the AISU, including at the outset, providing information to assist students to make prudent choices from a widening range of Indigenous education providers. Selection processes for non standard entrants, as well as sound program and course counselling, aim to establish and affirm the reasons for study and avoid setting people up for failure (http://www.unisa.edu.au/aisu/, 2001)

The annual two week University Preparation for Indigenous Students (UPIS) Program, customised for all campuses and off campus centres, is planned in response to perceived student needs to 'give students an edge' before semester commencement. Organised to provide students with a non-threatening, practical introduction to the expectations of tertiary study, they include three main aspects:

- Academic familiarisation through study skills sessions covering aspects such as time and resource management, assignment analysis, planning and research strategies.

- CIT access, literacy and skills development, (a focussed and intensive approach is a critical requirement for the 2002 off campus programs)

- Knowledge of the support structures in the local area and on campus (http://www.unisa.edu.au/aisu/ 2001).

These programs are subsequently evaluated and refined both in content and methodology. Student feedback confirms the value of these sessions in promoting initial confidence and independence (http://www.unisa.edu.au/aisu/ 2001).

For off campus centres, arranging for all (commencing) students to come together for sessions is difficult and some additional and alternative orientation strategies need to be developed. These could include:

- Encouraging students to access the centre before semester commencement to allow time for individual sessions and practice. Students can also begin course work early.

- Greater use of visual material in each centre – posters showing essay structure; CIT procedures.

- Contact with on campus staff – study advisers; lecturers of First Year courses.

An initiative supported by the AISU Manager that assists in addressing isolation, is visits from on campus teaching staff. Students appreciate the opportunity to meet their lecturers on their own environment and find that course information and expectations are clarified. They are noticeably more likely to make subsequent telephone or email contact with lecturers met in this way. Another benefit is the awareness raising of teaching staff themselves who are better able to see the study experience from the students' perspectives.

Because of the preferred nature of support, the ongoing strategies are largely individualised and accommodating of specific needs, both academic and personal. Some students are adept at identifying their strengths and difficulties in knowledge, understanding and skills and also the amount of assistance they require (Ramsey, Barker & Jones 1999), while others discern this through experience. Thus individual tutorial sessions are usually student-driven and collaborative with a high level of interaction and discussion that incorporate statements where students identify their needs ('I don't understand this reading.' 'Can we talk about my essay plan?' 'How do I do the quotes and the bibliography?' 'I need to put these ideas in my own words.').

At any given time it might be possible to find learning sessions focussing on some or even many of the following: academic reading skills; familiarisation with specific writing genres; assignment conferencing; clarification of scientific concepts; critical literacy skills; expressing ideas and information in clear language; avoiding

plagiarism; computing skills; accessing information on the internet; use of generic supports such as study skills leaflets; editing skills; exam skills and more. Development of CIT skills has tended to be integrated into students' study activities rather than addressed separately, and involves both direct instruction and modelling by staff members, as well as trial and error by students, often assisted by peers or software supports such as the Help Menus.

Staff need to be understanding of students' circumstances as well as flexible and versatile, employing a range of responses which can vary from student to student. Some students request regular sessions while others are satisfied with a 'briefing', returning with an almost completed assignment for perhaps assistance with proof reading or referencing. The concept of student ownership is important in relation to both the processes and final products. As students develop metacognitive skills they have better understanding of their learning processes and are more proficient evaluators of the quality of their work.

Often, support strategies include affirming practices that already exist among students. Experience in the study centres indicates competence in peer support, where incidental, informal assistance is offered to others; for example: suggesting resources; discussing and clarifying print information and assignment topics; assisting with CIT access and expertise. If a student receives negative feedback or feels that personal factors are impacting heavily on their studies, there is usually someone who has had a similar experience who can commiserate and provide encouragement to continue. Dolan and Castley (1998) caution that while formalisation of peer mentoring sometimes camouflages institutional deficiencies such as inadequate teaching, it can also promote teamwork, creative problem-solving and effective communication and negotiation, all skills increasingly valued both educationally and in employment.

Confidence building is an important component of academic success, especially where students have had previous unsatisfactory educational experiences. Off campus centres provide many opportunities to share successes ranging from good assignment grades, successful teaching or clinical placements and graduation with peers and staff. Success is promoted and affirmed in other ways such as graduate

posters, articles in community newsletters and newspapers, and via the student section of the AISU website.

Scenarios identified below (and expanded, Appendix 1) taken at random and representative of only a small sample of a total range, provide examples of ways in which different aspects of support are apparent in the off campus environment. Taken singly they may appear simplistic; regarded in the learning context they may be progressive and cumulative.

- Responding to academic needs of learners
- Supporting student-peer initiatives
- Offering choices and pathways
- Responding to personal circumstances of learners
- Flexibility
- Fostering opportunities for student/community input to academic teaching staff
- Supporting integration of life experience with course content
- Facilitating support through group work
- Implementing staff initiatives
- Affirming positive study experiences

Conclusion

For external Indigenous students for whom isolation from the university can be more than geographical and who face additional barriers through personal circumstances and a legacy of educational disadvantage, off campus study centres can both localise and personalise the tertiary learning experience, while providing a means to expand their knowledge and develop required academic attitudes and skills. Isolation, together with rapid changes to the scope and nature of the increasingly

online learning environment, expands the challenges for all. Off campus support staff must be critical of their roles while responsive to student needs through both established and innovative practice.

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Appendix 1

Examples of Support Strategies for External Indigenous Students in Regional Off Campus Study Centres

Responses to varying academic needs of learners

A Nursing tutor, observing that Indigenous Human Bioscience students were not learning effectively from print materials in the external packages and set textbooks developed a set of 'flip charts' – Side A kidney; Side B parts of the kidney with diagram. Students can identify what they know then turn over to check.

Students found specialised terminology difficult to remember. Memory strategies were developed – afferent (sensory) vs. efferent (motor) pathways –'a' comes before 'e' in the alphabet.

A student expressed dismay at the length of an essay – 2500 words. The staff member suggested making a plan of the structure and working on each section in turn. The student found the essay task manageable using this strategy.

Student-peer initiatives

A First Year Diploma student voluntarily documented her learning in an introductory Computing course in a notebook, over and above course requirements. She commented that this enabled her to readily refer to procedures and terminology when her tutor was not present so that she could work independently. Later she undertook, unaided, production of an Indigenous community newsletter. She stated she could not have done this without the knowledge and skills gained in the course.

A final year BA student provided both formal and informal CIT instruction for First Year Diploma students

Offering choices and pathways

A First Year student had missed some preliminary work because of illness and was so worried about a subsequent written exam that she said she would defer from the program. A staff member suggested that just experiencing what it is like to sit for an exam could be a good learning opportunity for the future even if she did not pass. When the staff member phoned later, the student had made full use of the exam time and felt positive about the outcome.

Flexibility

A student phoned to say he could not attend a pre-arranged tutorial session because he was needed to baby sit a relative's children. The tutor said 'I will need about 15 minutes notice, so when you know you will be free, just phone back and we'll make another time'.

Opportunities for student/community input to academic teaching staff

Students beginning a program newly offered in the external mode were concerned that a lecturer did not seem familiar with their preferred learning styles. They talked to the support staff member who invited the lecturer to visit the centre. A meeting was organised with present and past students as well as community members. Free discussion took place about factors and attitudes the students felt would help them most. Later, students commented that the lecturer was 'on their wavelength'

Integration of life experiences within course content

A student had extensive knowledge and experience of child development and behaviour based on observations of her own and relatives' children. In discussion with a tutor she contextualised this with information in a child development text, relating study tasks to life experience in course-relevant way.

Support through group work

A tutor organised several small group sessions for three second year nursing students revising for a clinical sciences exam over several weeks before the exam. As well as revising course content and undertaking practice exams, the students were able to share their concerns about and strategies for the forthcoming exam with their tutor and each other in a non threatening environment.

Staff initiatives implemented

In response to perceived lack of CIT skills by ATAS tutors, a series of practical workshops was developed and trialled by a tutor who implemented them on a voluntary basis. Tutors were given the opportunity to learn basic computing skills, word processing, use of other software and to access and use the Internet. These skills are essential to enable tutors and students to adapt to increasing use of CIT in the learning environment (Lear unpub).

Affirmation of positive study experiences

A student, invited to contribute to the AISU website, participated in an interview:

'University- it's a new world to me. It enlightened my life. I can understand things that I never understood before … a lot of skills, it's really exciting. You can say, 'Look now, I know that there, I've been doing it all my life, but I never knew it.
But when it is written up, you know how to manage it. It's something like managing your life and managing your future.'

(A. Wilson, interviewed by A. Baker and C. D'Angelo, Port Lincoln Study Centre, August 2000) http://www.unisa.edu.au/aisu/aisu new web/Studentpage_.htm [accessed online 19/11/01]

Changing Identities

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CRITICAL VOICE IN THE WRITING OF INTERNATIONAL POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

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International postgraduate students from non-English speaking backgrounds are sometimes highly regarded experts who are experienced writers of academic genres in their first language. It can be very difficult for them to maintain that expert identity in their writing in English as they are often uncertain about what is an appropriate voice to adopt as a student in a western academic environment. Their lack of familiarity with the expectations of their new discourse communities makes it particularly difficult for them to write reviews of the literature where they need to express critical evaluation and to make appeals to values shared with their readers. These difficulties are demonstrated in a case study of an Indonesian postgraduate student in the Engineering Faculty at Monash University. Issues in the development of a critical voice in this student's writing are discussed.

Keywords: writer's voice, international postgraduate students, critical evaluation

Introduction

Many international students from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) are confronted with significant challenges in the writing they need to do in their postgraduate studies in Australia. These students are sometimes experts in their fields and experienced writers of academic genres in their first languages but they may be unfamiliar with the linguistic and rhetorical conventions of western academic genres. They may be unsure about the identity they are expected to adopt as writer in English and “the expected relationship between themselves as researchers and writers and their readers" (Crosling & Vance, forthcoming). They may find it particularly difficult to adopt an appropriate critical voice in their written work.

The literature review is one genre where the writer needs to adopt a critical voice. The literature review by convention requires the writer to justify the need for their own research by critically evaluating previous research, and many students including international students find it difficult to express evaluation. In an examination of what evaluation means in written discourse, Hunston (1994) argues that expressing evaluation in a text involves both a statement of personal judgement and an appeal to shared norms and values, and she establishes that in academic writing this appeal is to shared values about what constitutes knowledge. Using Hunston’s analysis, it is clear that expressing evaluation demands that the writer has a clear understanding of acceptable practices of expressing personal judgement in "objective" academic texts and that the writer is confident enough to appeal to values they believe they share with their readers.

International students may find it difficult to achieve both these aspects of evaluation in a literature review. As they are working in a second language, they may not have the linguistic resources to express personal judgement appropriately. More importantly, if they come from educational systems and cultural backgrounds in which it is difficult to question the views of respected authorities, they may be reluctant to express any negative evaluation which they consider to be criticism of other researchers. As Cadman (1997) points out, these students often interpret the task of making critical use of published work and source materials as one of criticising published work, a task which they regard with dismay. In addition,

international students who are working within an unfamiliar research culture can find it daunting to attempt to appeal to the values of their new discourse community.

In an attempt to throw some light on the problems which international NESB postgraduate students may have in adopting a critical voice in their writing, I present a case study of my work with an Indonesian postgraduate student. I examine how she developed a more appropriate critical voice in her writing over several drafts of a detailed review of two individual studies.

The Case Study

The Student

The student, whom I'll call Dewi, was an Indonesian student who was enrolled in a one year MEngSc in the Faculty of Engineering at Monash University. In Indonesia, she worked as a university lecturer and, while she had published a number of research papers in Indonesian, she had had very little experience in writing academic English. As for all international students enrolled in relatively short courses, there was no time available for her to become familiar with western academic genres and she felt under great pressure to perform at a high level in English almost immediately.

The Task

As an assessment task in one of her subjects, Dewi had to write a review of two research papers. Her supervisor had discussed with her the format which he expected, namely a short summary followed by a detailed critical review. The student had little difficulty with the summary and she only needed some assistance with the grammar and vocabulary in the drafts of this section of the task. By contrast, she found it much more difficult to write the critical review. The major challenge for her was to understand clearly the conventions of literature reviews in a western academic context and thus to adopt an appropriate voice in her writing. The development of this understanding through our work on drafts of the critical review is discussed below.

Draft 1

The writing in the first draft of the critical review revealed that Dewi had a general understanding of what she was expected to write. She outlined the key features of the research in each study and then attempted to evaluate the research by examining its strengths and weaknesses.

Dewi's evaluation of both studies seemed to be very positive. The positive evaluation was positioned prominently in the opening and concluding paragraphs, with statements such as "this is interesting paper", the study "has succeeded as a useful guide to tactile sensing for many years", "their method is very simple and understandable" and "this paper is very useful for other research". Here, the positive evaluation is confidently expressed and implicitly appeals to shared values of what constitutes good research in the field.

By contrast, Dewi's evaluation of the limitations of the research presented in both papers was very tentative. In the review of paper 1, she stated that "I think that the writers made a mistake when they chose the selected features…This mistake may be just mistype" and "Their comparison graphs are quite confusing. It would have been better if they had used the same scales…". Her claims here are highly qualified and she is almost apologetic about suggesting that there are any weaknesses in the research. In the review of Paper 2, she simply listed a number of limitations in the final paragraph, stating that

> this paper was only based on questionnaires or predictions which were not really accurate …[The researcher] did not mention how was the question format and how he made the summarizing map from his questionnaire responses.

However, she had not identified or analysed these limitations in the body of the review, nor had she given any supporting evidence for her claims. To be convincing, Dewi needed to substantiate these briefly mentioned limitations. Thus, in her first draft of the review, Dewi had not been able to adopt a confident critical voice.

In our tutorial discussion of this draft, I focussed on Dewi's evaluation of the research presented in the two studies. As we analysed her draft together, she gradually

identified and explained the limitations she had found, and it became clear that she considered both studies to have serious weaknesses. While being reluctant to "criticise" other researchers, she was able to provide great detail about the errors in the notation and calculations in Paper 1, and to argue forcefully that the methodology of the research presented in Paper 2 was fundamentally flawed. She had carefully evaluated the claims made in these papers, and had read widely in the literature to analyse these claims in the light of other studies in the field. It was clear that she had actually formed an incisive, well-supported critical evaluation of these studies, but that she had not expressed this in her writing.

There were clearly a number of factors at work. Her major problem was **not** that she did not understand what the process of critical evaluation meant; **rather**, she did not know how to write a critical review which she felt would be acceptable in a western academic context. Although she was certain about her judgement of the studies, she was very unsure about what would be considered acceptable evaluation by her readers and what would be considered unacceptable criticism. To avoid making controversial claims, she omitted much of her negative evaluation, qualified most of the negative evaluation which she did include and softened its effect by carefully locating these negative comments between favourable comments. In short, she had not adopted a convincing critical voice.

The Development of a Critical Voice

The first step in the development of an appropriate critical voice was for Dewi to gain a clear understanding of the expectations of a literature review in English. Her very understandable reluctance to risk making inappropriate criticism meant that she needed to be convinced that it was acceptable to express both positive and negative evaluation of the work of other researchers. I explained the differences between critical evaluation and criticism, and we then discussed the generic conventions of literature reviews in Indonesian and in English research writing. Together we analysed the evaluation expressed in a number of literature reviews in English in her field. In addition, I stressed the importance of discussing her review with her supervisor and getting further reassurance from him that the evaluation in her review was justified and appropriate.

The second step was for Dewi to develop her ability to express the critical evaluation appropriately. She formulated the claims that accurately conveyed her evaluation and we then examined how to express these claims accurately in suitable academic English. We also discussed how to provide the analysis to substantiate her claims.

By the final draft of the review, she had adopted a much more confident voice in her writing. In her review of Paper 1, Dewi clearly identified the "number of inaccuracies in the paper which are quite confusing for the readers". She discussed each of these inaccuracies in turn, first explaining each inaccuracy and then analysing its repercussions. For example, she stated that

> [the] notations for zeroth, first and second order moments are unclear…These confusing notations caused some errors in the authors' explanation of equation 4…Because of these errors equation 4 is ambiguous for the reader.

In these assertions, she has adopted a confident critical stance.

In her review of Paper 2, Dewi provided a detailed evaluation of the researcher's methodology stating that

> [before] the validity of Harmon's study can be discussed, the validity of the methodology needs to be questioned. The predictions he made in this paper were only based on questionnaire responses and a literature review. He did not provide an example of the questionnaire nor did he explain how he developed questionnaire results. It is not clear whether he provided a limited range of possible responses to each of the questions he asked.

Here she appealed to values that she felt were shared by her readers. First, valid predictions could only be made from widely accepted knowledge, and second, a rigorous study would have provided a sample questionnaire so that the researcher's claims could have been properly evaluated. Dewi continued to evaluate the researcher's methodology by providing evidence of the serious omissions that the

researcher had made, summarising by stating that “Without the questionnaire, it is difficult to understand the data in his study and then it is also difficult to see how he made his predictions.” In this review, she has again adopted an appropriate critical voice with confident appeals to commonly accepted standards of rigorous research.

Conclusion

The international postgraduate student from Indonesia in the case study reported in this paper was able to form an incisive critical evaluation of previous studies in her field but she had difficulty expressing this evaluation confidently and appropriately. While similar difficulties may also be experienced by monolingual English-speaking students in the early stages of their research degrees, this student's problems were clearly compounded by her lack of familiarity with the conventions of critical reviews in a western academic context. A clearer understanding of these conventions enabled her to apopt an effective critical voice in her writing.

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FROM OPERATIVES TO STRATEGIC PARTNERS: CHANGING IDENTITIES OF LAS ADVISERS

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As tertiary education organisations continue to shape themselves within the corporate bureaucratic model, anecdotal evidence suggests that LAS staff are frequently being identified as belonging in the base sector of the managerial pyramid, that is as operatives or first line managers, principally focused on the technical aspects of producing the finished product. This perception also suggests that LAS lecturers work consistently within a behaviourist, objectivist paradigm, as ‘ mechanics of knowledge transfer’ (von Glasersfeld, 1995b). The first section of this paper discusses a thesis writing program for a small cross cultural group of honours students from a School of Network Computing. The program aimed at not only developing the academic writing and presentation skills of the students to support them through the thesis writing process, but also establishing within the group a strong sense of collegiate, a sense of identity as young scholars. To achieve this aim, the principles of radical constructivism (von Glasersfeld, 1995b, 1996; Mayer, 1996, Gergen, 1995; Driver et al., 1994) were incorporated into the teaching program. The program concluded with

a formal conference, organised by the students at which they presented their research proposals. The second section of the paper analyses the effectiveness of the program based on the evaluative responses of students, supervisors, other academic staff who had attended the student conference, and the LAS lecturer. The paper concludes with the argument that this model can assist in changing the perception of LAS staff as operatives or technical experts to that of strategic partners working with faculties, departments and schools to develop a sense of community and commitment within their postgraduate students.

Keywords: radical constructivism, post graduate students, groups

Introduction

As yet, in Australia, there has not been a broad based investigation into how Learning Skills Advisers (LSA), under their various titles, are perceived by post-secondary and tertiary communities. However, a recent online discussion among LSA members (Unilearn) revealed wide spread differences in both the status of LSA and the conditions governing their employment, at both post- secondary and tertiary institutions.

In some institutions, LSA are categorised as general staff, at other institutions as academic staff. This differentiation, in itself, has implications for the way staff, in institutions where they are categorised as general staff, are perceived. It places them outside the realm of disciplinary knowledge and expertise inhabited by academic 'professionals': those who use language that is 'learned' and 'knowledgeable'; the language that constitutes the academic community (Brufee, 2000, p.149, 152.). And, furthermore, those LSA who are categorised as academics, rarely, it would seem, are afforded full academic status. They may, particularly if they are employed part-time, or on short term contracts, be expected to have six hours

face-to-face contact with students, daily. They may not, for example, have time for research factored into their hours; yet, for promotion, they must fulfil the research requirements specified by their university. Their research, then, must be done in their own time.

Anecdotal evidence also strongly suggests that the role that LSA do play, and the potential that they have for equal participation in academic life, is underestimated and misunderstood. LSA may well identify with a colleague who has been introduced to other academics as 'the person who corrects their (students) English', the language technician, or relate to the situation where a subject co-ordinator when discussing an assessment issue with a LSA commented: 'I'm looking at this from an academic's point of view, you're a teacher and look at it differently', inferring that the roles are mutually exclusive. Such utterances give support to the critique of the power of Elites in a contemporary society found in Saul (1992).

> 'Our reality is dominated by elites who have spent much of the last two centuries, indeed the last four, organising society around structures designed to produce answers. These structures have fed upon expertise and that expertise upon complexity… Elites quite naturally define as the most important and admired qualities…those on which they themselves have concentrated' (pp.7-8).

The consequence of the strictures in the various models of LSA employment, and narrow perceptions of LSA across many post secondary and tertiary institutions, is that the possibility of LSA being involved in sustained learning relationships with groups of students is limited. Therefore, when the request was made to teach a year long course in thesis writing to a small group of Network Computing Honours students, it was grasped as a political opportunity to demonstrate that LSA could play a significant role in developing not only the written and spoken skills of students, but also, and at the same time, students' understanding of the pivotal role that language plays in their lives. It was a political decision, as all curriculum decisions are, to introduce the principles of radical constructivism into a course, seen by the

faculty in which it was to be taught as a course needing a purely behaviourist approach. The faculty expectation was that students would be provided with information on how to structure and format a thesis proposal, how to produce an acceptable document in academic English and how to make an effective presentation of the information in that document. Those expectations had to be met; the conventions of structure and format had to be explained and demonstrated, but it was possible to go further. Ironically, the process of teaching format and structure in academic documents, is in itself linear and structured. In this instance it was to be taught to an aspiring group of ‘elites’ in the field of electronic communication. This form of communication flourishes 'on efficiency…speed, formula truths and the appearance of change…it concentrates on how things are done and loses track of why…it removes from individuals their strength as nonlinear beings' (Saul, 1992, p.582). It is the 'nonlinear being', the communicative, collaborative being that is the focus of radical constructivist learning theory. And it was through that theory, applied in the teaching of the written and spoken component of the course, that it was hoped to engender in the students a sense of the value of collaboration in the development of knowledge, to meld them into a supportive group of young scholars.

Radical Constructivism

All who call themselves ‘constructivists’ subscribe to the notion that ‘knowledge is the result of a learner’s activity rather than of the passive reception of information or instruction (von Glasersfeld, 1991, p.xiv). However, many different types of constructivism have developed. The names of some of those types that we may be familiar with include social constructionism and social, postmodern, information–processing and radical constructivism. Radical constructivism, championed by von Glasesrfeld, is labeled ‘radical’ in that ‘it breaks with the traditional theory of knowledge (creating) profound consequences for teachers and researchers whose objective is to generate particular ways of acting and thinking in …students’ (von Glasersfeld,1991, p xv). It aligns with the concept of knowledge pioneered by Piaget in the 1930s which defines knowledge as an adaptive function that allows the cognising subject to organise their world of experience and not simply discover an objective reality (von Glasersfeld, 1989). As such, knowledge is actively

received through the senses, through communication with others.

In redefining knowledge, constructivists turn to the processes of assimilation and accommodation described by Piaget. Piaget redefined the concept of knowledge as an adaptive function. For a human being, once a problem has been identified, there is a need to remove the problem, to restore equilibration, to revert to action through sensory-motor and cognitive operations. Then, through the process of reflection the problem solver will determine whether the problem has been solved and equilibration restored. If the problem has not been solved a new cycle of action and reflection begins. ‘These intellectual processes are, for the constructivist, the source and content of knowledge’ (Confrey, 1991 in von Glasersfeld (Ed.), 1991, p.118). These processes also reflect the pragmatic ideas proposed by Dewey earlier in the twentieth century.

However, from an historical perspective, the aspects of constructivism can be identified in the epistemology, the theory of knowledge and learning, of the earliest educational philosophers, and as epistemology ‘is closely related to methods of teaching and learning’ (Gutek, 1988,p.2), traced through to contemporary educators. The ideas have a long history, but have not always been accepted.

Idealist philosophy, for example, which argues that ideas lie latent in the mind needing only to be recalled, would resort to Socratic dialogue, verbal communication, to bring those ideas to the student’s consciousness. Knowledge, then, becomes the result of a learner’s activity rather than passive reception of information. This is a basic principle of constructivism. Pragmatism, on the other hand, resorts to acting and interacting with the environment in a series of problem solving situations to create knowledge. Overriding these epistemologies is that of logic which, through an examination of the rules of valid inference, enables us to frame our propositions and arguments effectively (Gutek 1988, p.4). Basically, the constructivist is aware of the classic conflict of ideas and values between objective and subjective learning theory, and chooses to champion the latter.

Other champions of the subjective stance, in contemporary philosophy, include Bakhtin, Kristeva and Habermas. The central issue for each of them is ‘what is emerging as the central preoccupation of our time: language’(Holquist, 1994,p xvii).

For Bakhtin, the dialogic relationship was central. Kristiva's analysis of Bakhtin's linguistic theory (1973, in Moi (Ed) 1986, pp24 – 61) explains his concept of dialogue as not only language assumed by a subject, but rather 'as a writing where one reads the other… Baktinian dialogism identifies writing as both subjectivity and communication, or better, as intertextuality…Any text is the absorption and transformation of another.' Habermas (1993, pp.296-7) proposes a 'model of action oriented to reaching (mutual) understanding' found in constructivism. Critical to the development of mutual understanding is 'the performative attitude' of those participating in the interaction. They must coordinate their plans of action in order to come to an understanding about something in the world. These principles are identified in the incorporation of action and reflection within a collaborative speech act, also fundamental to constructivism.

Similar emphasis on action and dialogue to develop knowledge about the world can be found in the much earlier writings of the Swiss educator, Pestalozzi (1746 – 1827) Pestalozzi argued that all that we know comes to us through the mechanism of sensation where sense-impressions are converted into thought and organised into coherent concepts and memories through language. 'My method of instruction…makes greater use of language as a means of raising the child from vague sense impressions to the formation of thought' (Robinson, 1977 p.xxvi) Pestalozzi had in turn been affected by the educational philosophy of Rousseau and his call for reform in 'Emile' (1762). Rousseau also believed in inward growth and argued that school was not a preparation for living, but an exercise in living, itself. (Mayer, 1966, p.256-7) This revolutionary approach continues to influence educational thinking, today, and its reflection can be found in constructivist philosophy. However, an understanding of the value of language, action and reflection in developing knowledge about the world, and life itself, is not confined to literate cultures. It is also revealed in non-literate indigenous cultures. Malinowski (1935), for example, discloses in his Trobriand Island narrative the link between the methods of tilling the soil and agricultural rites in the Trobriand Islands and the teaching and learning of cultural values, and knowledge of the physical world. It was a world where problems of physical and spiritual existence were solved through talk, action and reflection. These same principles apply to all indigenous cultures. They, too, are the principles of constructivist philosophy. The fact that the principles of

constructivism can be found in teaching and learning practices across the ages in both literate and non-literate communities is acknowledged by Von Glasersfeld (1995). He argues that constructivism has not unearthed any mind shattering approaches to education, but it has provided a solid conceptual basis for some of the things that, until now, inspired teachers had to do without theoretical foundation.

The Program

The Thesis Writing program for Network Computing Honours students discussed in this paper is a component of a credit subject: Communication and Research Skills for Students of Network Computing (SNC). The program extends over two semesters. All of the materials for the program, a series of eight booklets, were written and produced by Harriet Searcy, (2000), a colleague in Language and Learning at Monash University. This paper relates to first semester, 2001, only The booklets used in this semester were: Thesis Planning and Structuring (Wk 2); Writing a Thesis Proposal (Wk 4; Literature Review (Wk 5) and Presentation Skills (Wk8)

Officially, the program comprises seven two hour classes; however, this time was extended by an additional three hours to accommodate the two presentation rehearsals and the student conference at the end of semester. In addition, I attended the Introductory Lecture (Wk 1) with the Honours Coordinator to meet students and give a general outline of the course.

It was at this first meeting with the students that I also explained to them, and to the coordinator, the philosophy behind the collaborative approach to learning that I wanted to use to enable the students to effectively reach their goals for the semester in this subject. Those goals were a high quality written Thesis Proposal and a high quality oral presentation of that proposal in a formal conference setting. The conference would be fully organised and run by the students. The audience for that presentation would include the academic staff of the faculty, Masters and PhD post graduate students and the students' peers. It was emphasised that these goals had both an individual and group orientation and that through a collaborative learning approach, the goals of each individual and the goals of the group could be achieved. It was also explained that in the future, whether in a work or academic environment,

they would be expected, consistently, to make formal presentations to peers and wider audiences, either individually or as a group member. Brufee (1999, pp. xii-xiii) argues that through collaborative learning students can learn to work together to achieve set goals 'when the stakes are relatively low, so that they can work together effectively later when the stakes are high'. Honours students in general, would surely consider that the stakes are high in their one year course; never-the-less, their experiences during that year can prepare them for future collaborative experiences where, in terms of reputation or monetary costs and or rewards, the stakes may be very much higher. From a constructivist point of view, the overriding initiative was to encourage problem solving in written and spoken language, through collaboration, so as to increase the students' ability to make reliable judgements interdependently within this program, and in the future (Brufee, 1999, p 264).

The purpose of all this preliminary talk and discussion was not only to establish rapport with the students but also to clearly articulate both the short and long term goals of their first semester activities. Dewey (1916) emphasises the importance of articulating clear aims, of activating 'imaginative foresight' in students.

> … it is non-sense to talk about the aim of education – or any undertaking – where conditions do not permit of foresight of results, and do not stimulate a person to look ahead to see where the outcome of a given activity might be …acting with an aim is all one with acting intelligently.
>
> (pp.118-120)

So, from the beginning of my interaction with the students, I attempted to convey to them that I believed that they were capable of exceptional outcomes, that the capabilities were within them. To dissipate any fears that they may have had about performing at a formal conference, I focused on the fact that, in order to be accepted into honours, they had already in their undergraduate years made many individual and possibly group presentations, and that they had demonstrated their promise in being accepted into a community of young scholars. The use of the term 'young scholars' initially shocked them, then bemused them and finally imbued them with a sense of pride. I believe it caused them to reflect on what they had already achieved

and the positive position they were now in to build on those previous achievements. And it implanted into their consciousness a sense of intellectual community.

At the initial meeting, students were asked to bring to the next class a written statement of why they were doing the research they had chosen to be involved in, and what their aims were for the research. Although they had ideas about these issues, they had not worked at clearly articulating them. It was emphasised that this was a difficult task, and that it was not expected that what they brought to class would be the final version. They were encouraged to discuss their problems among the group. At the next class each student in turn wrote their ideas on a white board, and through a process of discussion, and reflection among the class each student managed to produce an aim that satisfied them and was clear to their fellow students. Their final statements were a verification of the effectiveness of collaborative problem solving.

This process continued throughout the semester as students faced hurdles that needed to be overcome, particularly the completion of their research proposals and the organisation of their conference. The overall success of the process was aided by the informality of the setting, the friendly relationships among the students and a non-authoritarian approach to teaching. This encouraged the intrusion of ‘dramatic banter’ into the classroom culture. It allowed for what Kristeva (1966 in Moi (Ed) 1986, p41) describes as the ‘transgression of linguistic, logical and social codes within the carnivalesgue’.

The principle of carnivale played an important part in developing the thinking ot the students and their ability to critically analyse texts and to solve problems associated with those texts.

> Laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below, break open its external shell, look into its centre, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it. Laughter… (clears) the ground

> for an absolutely free investigation of it...Familiarisation of the world through laughter and popular speech is an extremely important and indispensable step in making possible free, scientific knowable and artistically realistic creativity … (Bakhtin, 1975 in Holquist (ed.) 1981 p.23).

This sense of carnivale has been the means of creating an atmosphere within the group where ideas could be freely tested, and was one of the means of instigating the change in the students from members of a group to members of a team. It is interesting to note that within the corporate world, the world into which these students will most probably go, the type of world that administrators are imposing on academic institutions, there is a recognition also of the value of joyful collaboration in problem solving and innovation. Bennis (2000, pp.8-9) argues that business leaders need to develop a more collaborative form of leadership and to realise that those at the top do not hold all the answers. Leaders need a sense of wonder; they need to suspend dis-belief that something can't be done and switch from an authorative, 'macho' style of leadership to that of the 'maestro' orchestrating the creative output of their employees. This collaborative approach will, according to Bennos, result in both leaders and employees enjoying 'the sound of surprise' at the quality of thinking that has been engendered.

Student Profiles

Eight students were enrolled in the class: 7 F/T and 1 P/T. One F/T student only was born in Australia. The student who lists his place of origin as India in Table 1 was born there of British and Anglo-Indian parents and has lived in Australia since he was an infant.

One F/Tstudent lists his country of origin as Portugal, however, he was born there of East Timorese refugee parents. So six of the seven F/T students have South East Asian heritage. One student from this group lists her 'mother tongue', the first language she learnt, as Bengali, despite the national language of Malaysia, her place of origin, being English. The same situation applies to the other South East Asian students. Whether or not the National Language of their country of origin is English, the first language each learnt was one other than English.

The cultural make-up of the group has, I believe, been significant in developing a sense of cohesion among the students. Hofstede (1993, p.91) compared thirty nine countries, and hence cultural groups, on four cultural dimensions: individualism v collectivism; power distance; uncertainty avoidance; and quantity v quality of life. He found that Australians had the second highest score among all countries for individualism, while the Asian countries, from which six of the students come, had a high rating for collectivism. These ratings suggest that for six of the eight students collaboration would not be problematic. That has been borne out in observations of the group. It applied not only to those students who have been in Australia for a relatively short period of time, but also to the East Timorese student who had lived in Australia for eleven years. The Australian F/T student was initially not as involved in classroom discussions as the students of Asian background nor was he as involved in the organisation of the conference. The P/T student, although he attended all classes, also found it difficult to participate fully in the group. There are understandable reasons for this. He is considerably older than the F/T students, works F/T, has considerable responsibilities outside of study and did not have to meet the same deadlines as the other students. As he has said, he doesn't quite know where he fits.

The Asian students were very strongly motivated and focused on meeting deadlines. Their collectivist attitudes were particularly noticeable when students were involved in organising their conference. All carried out their responsibilities with energy and commitment to ensure that the event was a success not just for themselves, but also for the group.

Student F/T; P/T	M/ F	Age	Country of Origin	1st Lang	2nd Lang	Yrs study Aust	Yrs of study at Monash
A. F/T	M	22	Portugal	Hakka	English	10	4
B. F/T	M	24	Singapore	English	Mandarin	1.5	1.5
C. F/T	M	24	Singapore	English	Chinese	2.5	2.5
D. F/T	F	22	Malaysia	Bengali/ English	Malay	1.5	1.5
E. F/T	M	24	Australia	English	N/A	11	5
F. .F/T	M	28	Hong Kong	Mandarin	English	1.5	1.5
G. F/T	M	26	Singapore	Mandarin	English	1.5	1.5
H. P/T	M	38	India	English	N/A	13	4

Table 1: Student data

Teaching Environment

The class was taken in the staff meeting room in the Network Computing faculty. As there were only eight students (seven F/T and one P/T) we clustered informally around one end of a large conference table. This helped dissipate the sense of the teacher as authority figure, and encouraged easy communication among students and myself. Ease of communication was a critical aspect of the processes of discussion and problem solving that applied to the students written and spoken .tasks.

The first rehearsal for the conference was held in the classroom. It was a familiar environment and non-threatening. The second rehearsal was held in the lecture theatre assigned for the conference. The students made a video of both the rehearsals and the final presentation. The rehearsals were another focus for collaboration where students demonstrated genuine interest in helping each other achieve their best. They were also times of much good humour and laughter, where students felt free to indulge in ‘dramatic banter’ in search of the right word or the right phrase to clarify their ideas.

The students studied the rehearsal tapes closely, as a group, and individually. In the group situation, students were remarkably supportive of each as they went through what was for the majority of them the unfamiliar experience of seeing themselves perform in public.

The conference was formal and totally organised by the students. Invitations were sent to all staff and post graduate students; programs were printed and students shared the tasks of welcoming the audience and charing presentations.

Evaluation

It is acknowledged that the evaluation of the program presented in this section of the paper has its limitations. The program was not designed as a formal research project. The small group of students in the program were the first to be enrolled in this subject on their particular campus. The evaluation, therefore, is simply based on student and supervisors' responses to a subject evaluation questionnaire, verbal feedback from the Head of School, recorded on video, and from other academic staff present at the students' conference.

Immediate feedback from the Head of School, who formally addressed the students at the end of the conference, was highly complimentary to all of them. He and other staff members commented on the quality of their papers, the confidence and competence of the presentations, the smooth running of the event, and the sense of collaboration among the students. Following the conference, I was asked to address the faculty at their next staff meeting where I was given the opportunity to explain the constructivist approach to both written and verbal tasks that I had taken in teaching the course. This approach was appreciated and endorsed. All written proposals, submitted after the conference were accepted without further revision.

Feedback from the students has also been positive. In answer to a survey question : How satisfied were you with the collaborative style of teaching in the thesis writing class?, on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being dissatisfied and 5 being very satisfied, all students rated the teaching style, 5. In answer to the questions: How satisfied were you with your written proposal? How satisfied was your supervisor with your written proposals? all students accorded both questions, 5.

In answer to the question: How satisfied were you with your presentation ? one student rated themselves as 5, other ratings ranged from 2 – 4. These presentation ratings were based on the student's own assessment of their performance on the conference video.

Comments on the question: Do you think the teaching style used helped develop a sense of group cohesion among the Network Computing Honours students? Included:

> ***Yes. The closeness of the class and the interaction definitely helped join all the students together.***
>
> ***Most certainly we have a very strong bond amongst the group in terms of academic and scholastic interest.***
>
> ***By grouping students with fairly similar research objectives together, they can discuss concepts together. In a sense, they can develop techniques that may benefit their research more .***

One student, as well as stating that the classes helped develop cohesion in the group, also said that other factors had contributed. The students had to group together at the beginning of semester to lobby for a satisfactory study environment. They were successful in organising the use of a sufficient number of well equipped, adjoining offices to accommodate allof the group. They had been faced with and solved a real life problem. The need to collaborate on the negotiation process to overcome that problem reflects the constructivist principles discussed in this paper. So, unwittingly, the students had taken a constructivist approach to solving the problem.

I strongly agree with the student's comment. What happened in class, I believe, did contribute significantly to the cohesion in the group, but other factors also played an important part. Working together to solve that initial, difficult problem was a major contributor to developing a team spirit, another was the emergence of a leader amongst them; a student with excellent organisational skills, high energy levels, and very well developed interpersonal skills. It was this student who made the previous comment. Another positive outcome from the students' success in first semester is

that they have, of their own volition, taken on the role of mentors to the second semester group of students. The same collaborative attitude that they developed during the program has been enthused into the second group.

Conclusion

The feedback from academic staff in the Network Computing Faculty and the students supports my view that the program, so far, has achieved its primary aim of developing the academic writing and presentation skills of the students to support them through the thesis writing process. I also believe, on the basis of written feedback from the students, who can best comment on the issue of cohesion, that the program has played a significant part in developing in the students a sense of collegiate and a sense of now belonging to a fraternity of young scholars. Such a group of students is a valuable asset for the faculty. As part of their long term strategies, faculties need to build up strong post-graduate communities.

The situation presented in this paper is only one of many possible situations in which LSA could become more closely involved with faculties. Undoubtedly, similar situations already occur in some universities. But, I believe that this does not happen as often as it should. However, the outcomes of the program discussed in this paper do indicates that, given the opportunity, LSA can be active partners with faculties in developing strong student communities. If this were to occur, it would initiate a welcome change to the identity of LAS in many Australian post-secondary and tertiary institutions.

Changing Identities

CONSTRUCTION OF STUDENT IDENTITY

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This paper offers tentative remarks on the possible role certain acts may have in the process of student identity formation and discourse acquisition. These acts will be referred to as ***performative*** acts, even though they are not identical with Austin's (1975) definition of a performative. (For Austin, a performative is an utterance that is characterised by what it does, not by what it says. I am concerned with the force an utterance achieves as a consequence of the social conditions that 'authorise' it rather than as a consequence of its cognitive content. In both cases ‘performative’ refers to ways in which an utterance intervenes in the world, rather than with how it represents the world.) This paper attempts to show some limitations of approaches that focus on the ways in which social and ideological structures and concomitant distributions of power embedded in discourse content and form position learners as they engage with a particular discourse (eg Ivanic 1998, Clark 1992). Such approaches focus on the subjective effects of such positioning, and therefore argue that an awareness of those effects can empower the individual to free themselves from such subjective effects and take up identity positions more to their choosing. By identifying the identity positions a text implicitly confers on reader and writers (and others) by the

selection and organisation of its content, a reader enabled to resist that positioning. Understanding and awareness thus bring emancipatory potential (eg see Clark 1992 p118). However, the position advanced in this paper is that performative acts do not find representation in the content and form of a discourse. They are acts that operate at an intersubjective level and enable the response to the discourse itself, and as such, precede and are not mediated by the discourse content or form itself. Such positioning then is not identified through the process of awareness usually involved, for instance, in the writings on critical language awareness (see Fairclough [ed] 1992) that focus on the way in which identities and social positioning is embedded in discourse content and form. This paper first of all considers weaknesses in the focus on 'awareness', and then looks at instances from students writing from which the importance of performative acts can be inferred.

Keywords: Identity, disclosure acquisition and 'awareness'.

The role of identity in the acquisition and use of discourse has been considered from a number of perspectives. For example, to explain what makes a good language learner Norton and Toohey (2001) argue that the focus needs to be on "[the learners] access to a variety of conversations in their communities rather than on [the learners] control of a wider variety of linguistic forms or meanings than their peers or their speed of acquisition of linguistic forms and meanings" (p310). In attempting to look at the "fundamentally social nature of learning and cognition" (p311) they argue that it is important to look at the social contexts of learning rather than the abilities and motives an individual may bring to the learning situation. Identity represents the position a student occupies within social networks, and is significant in that it facilitates or inhibits access to different discourses, and therefore enables or limits a learner's opportunity to engage with that discourse, practice and eventually acquire it. However, they point out that in the social contexts of the learners they treat as exemplary, "even though attempts were made to subordinate or isolate the learners, both made effective use of a variety of resources to gain access to their peer networks" (p317). Striking here is the theoretical appeal to individual capacities that

wisely used seem able to transcend the social practices that otherwise are determining. Ivanic (1998) looks at the role of identity in the context of academic writing by mature-age tertiary students working in their first language (English). Her focus is on how students construct an identity in their writing. Because identity is a construct, she argues it is always possible to construct identity differently. By enabling students to understand how their writing is shaped by the 'subjectivities' they bring to it and the constraints imposed by the discourses they are subjected to, they can actively make choices about who they want to be in their writing. This concern with choice and empowerment is linked to the wider concerns of critical language awareness (see Fairclough (ed) 1992). Awareness is empowering in that the understanding it provides enables students to recognise how discourses they are subject to position them, and provides the means of resisting them and constructing for themselves an identity they prefer.

There are a number of difficulties with the critical language awareness approach as employed by Ivanic and others. Ivanic (1998) suggests discourse is acquired through "successive encounters with it and a desire to identify with the ideas it conveys" (p207). She notes her students 'expressed a desire to identify with the person from whom they acquired a discourse characteristic" (p186). She later suggests that discourse acquisition is in many respects a matter of imitation, to the point that "it is hard to draw the lines between plagiarism, imitation and acquisition of a new discourse" (p195). While identification may play an important part in discourse acquisition (see for instance Urwin 1984, p283) a number of difficulties arise from this understanding of discourse acquisition. First of all the desire to identify and imitate derive from other discourses that shape one's desire in such a way. Thus the discourse acquired is already infiltrated by other discourses, and therefore precisely what is acquired remains problematic. More significantly, in the academic context there is much in the lecturers or the texts a student is exposed to that is inappropriate for imitation. Differences in intended audience, purpose and so on mean that choices of genre and register found in the texts students are exposed to would not necessarily be appropriate for the student to imitate. Imitation therefore can only succeed when a student already has the means to judge what is or is not worthy of imitation. That is, the student must ***already*** in a fundamentally important respect occupy a pertinent discourse position. The occupation of this position, and

the acquisition of a discourse relevant to the construction of it, is not therefore the consequence of imitation, but rather the precondition for it. It is therefore arguable that performative acts may be necessary to inaugurate such judgments and also therefore discourse acquisition and identity construction. Such acts would therefore precede and shape the cognitive-based decisions that CLA approaches give their attention to. Although CLA is concerned with a focus on the social dimensions of discourse and its practices, in this respect they appear to return at last resort to an emphasis on subject capacities. The social is effective only in so far as it is mediated by the individual. I am trying here to point to a possible way in which the social dimension acts on the individual in a way that is not mediated by him/her, and which therefore is not manageable simply through acts of awareness and consequent choice.

The focus on awareness alone as the basis for individual acts that further a person's own interests is limited in other respects too. Janks and Ivanic (1992) suggest that “consciousness raising is part of a process in which we learn to emancipate ourselves and others” and on which basis “we can decide to act so as to contest subjection . . . of ourselves or others” (p307). The concern with the power of discourse to subject an individual and to construct their world brings into question what awareness might consist of. Any act of awareness will draw on alternative discourses which in turn one might suppose ***constructs*** according to its own interests the discourse it seeks to provide awareness about. That is, the constructive power of discourse seems to pre-empt the capacity of one discourse to disclose the objective properties of another. Thus it is difficult to understand precisely what one becomes aware of, and in what sense such awareness can guarantee effective intervention. It is arguable then that such an emancipatory approach to identity and engagement with discourse remains bound up with the ‘will to power’. “Educators find it hard to accept that their emancipatory intentions, their desire to enlighten, may be implicated with the will to power and may therefore have oppressive consequences” (Usher and Edwards 1994, cited in Pennycook 2001). In the following discussion of student writing, I shall try to show how a student may be 'propelled' into a discourse and a particular identity position within it by a performative act, the force of which depends upon the prevailing social practices and accompanying power relations that support them. (Austin (1975) speaks of the felicity conditions that must be met for a

performative to have effect, and the distribution of power in social relations may be seen as one aspect of this.) One aspect of this 'will to power' may be evident in the paradoxical role the performative act often has in emancipatory discourse. While emancipatory discourse may be directed against the institutions and conventions that the learner is subjected to (see for example Clark 1992), it is precisely the authority of the educator given by such institutions and the social practices supporting them that gives the discourse its force for the learner. That is, such a discourse will only have force for the learner if s/he has submitted to the authority of the institutions and the social practices supporting them which authorises such discourse. While at the cognitive level the emancipatory discourse resists such practices, at the performative level it reaffirms and further entrenches them.

Comment on student texts

An international postgraduate student from Vietnam (student A) enrolled in an LLM had been set a task that had been presented as follows:

Choose a particular civil liberty which interests you and answer the following questions:

1. How does the law of Victoria and the Commonwealth protect it?

2. Do you consider this protection as adequate? Why?

3. Can you find a better model for its protection in another State or Territory in Australia or overseas?

In answering these questions you will need to carefully identify the nature of the civil liberty you have chosen, consider both statutes and the common law and the published views of others.

The student chose to write about euthanasia, and proceeded to provide a description of the protection Victorian and Commonwealth law offered before going on to discuss the adequacy of this protection and an account of an alternative model that in her view presented a better model. Of interest here is the way in which the student presented the first section. We might normally suppose that on recognising that the purpose for presenting a description of existing protection is in order to evaluate it, which the student certainly did recognise, that the protection would be presented in such a way that it pointed towards the evaluation that would be made. That is the purpose of the description would shape the description itself. This was not the case in this instance. One possible reason for this could be that the student felt unable to evaluate it. However, this student had very clear views on the relative strengths and weaknesses of the legal protection offered and the evaluation she intended to make. When asked why she gave no indication of the direction her evaluation would take in the description she replied that she was merely answering the question as set out in the task.

Several points can be made here. There appear to be two student identities, or two aspects of student identity influencing the student's work. These could perhaps be described as 'student subject to institutional authority' (identity A) and 'student as producer of knowledge' (identity B). There is then a failure at this point to integrate the two in a way that would usually be considered desirable. The reason for this failure of integration clearly does not arise from the absence of identity B. The student was not assuming the identity of 'submissive student' because she had not learnt to be otherwise (this argument is still sometimes heard with respect to Asian students!). The question here is not one of ability or capacity or of valid alternatives available to the student but of identity. The student's ability to think for herself and develop a position of her own was clearly demonstrated elsewhere in the essay. However, it appears the student identity A assumed priority. That is, she could enact identity B only at the point she believed she was authorised to do so by the assignment task. The capacity to choose whether to respond to the task in this way or to respond in the way I have suggested was not limited by student abilities. Nor did they appear to derive from habitual practices of a cultural nature, since there was no suggestion by the student that this seemed simply to be the 'natural' way to do things. (cf comments by San Miguel (1996) who accounts for her Sri Lankan

student's choices in terms of cultural practices p41.) Rather, I am arguing there is a lack of a mediating discourse that positions the student in a way that authorises her to act differently. It is not simply an act of awareness that is called for here (that one can in fact present the legal protection in a way that anticipates the evaluation the writer will make) but the assumption of a position by the student in which she feels empowered to do so. This empowerment is not simply a function of awareness. A new position is made available to the student only because s/he has been vested with it by an authorised other (the lecturer, the language and academic skills adviser) who, by drawing on the institutional power invested in them, performatively propels the student into a certain position. While choice may follow from this, such a performative act is a necessary prerequisite. A new identity position has been 'granted' to the student which opens up other possibilities for him or her. However, assuming an identity position from which certain choices can be made is not a function of cognitive acts of awareness, but of an articulation with the distribution of power structured by the social and discourse practices one is engaging with and which propel one into a certain position. I am suggesting this is achieved through a performative act.

In another example, an Indonesian LLM student was referred for language and academic skills advice because of plagiarism. He had submitted his final research assignment, and it was returned to him with the request that he re-submit it in his own words. The lecturer/examiner stated that while the essay was well-structured and the student had dealt with the relevant issues, much of the text was a cobbling together of extracts from his source texts, and the student's own position was quite poorly developed. The student himself stated that he had not done this in any of his previous assignments. He had actually been quite a successful student, obtaining mostly distinctions for his assignments. He stated that in this instance, he had resorted to using extracts from texts because he had not understood the ***lectures*** very well! He stated that he had had no difficulty understanding the texts from which he drew. He continued to explain that because he had not understood the lectures (because the lecturer spoke too quickly) he could not be sure whether or in what ways the research topic he had to select would be relevant. He had therefore chosen a very broad topic, which had been approved. He was clearly fearful that he might somehow transgress a boundary the precise location of which he was unsure. While

a broad topic increased the chance that what he proposed would fall within the limits he imagined existed, it obviously did nothing to clarify them for him either. Although he had demonstrated in previous assignments an ability to use source materials to clearly create his own position, in this instance he failed to do so. However, when told by the lecturer/ examiner that his topic and what he appeared to be trying to do with it was in fact quite acceptable, the student was then able to do what before he had previously felt unable to do in this assignment – develop a clear position of his own and draw on source materials to support it, in the process making them in some way his own.

The student's reliance on source materials reflected his own sense of lack of any authority from which he could speak, and in a sense was driven back onto the authority vested in these source materials. Empowerment in this case did not depend upon being made aware of what possibilities were open to him, or of what in the normal course of events was expected from him. He already knew these things and had already demonstrated that he possessed the necessary skills. It does seem therefore that the utterance by the lecturer/examiner positioned the student in a way that now freed him to draw on the sources that were already available to him. But this was not an act of positioning he could carry out by himself, by his own volition. It was not a choice he could make as such. It was only by a certain articulation with the power structure of the institution that he was enabled to make the move he desired. In this case it was only the lecturer (or an equivalent) who occupied a quite specific place in that power structure who could provide the articulation, through a certain act.

While the student's situation as described here is in many respects very common place, the point I am making is that awareness and volition appear not to be sufficient conditions for a person to act. The person must also be articulated in an enabling way with the power relations that characterise the institutions and social practices one is engaging with, and this I have suggested is achieved through a performative act. It was the authority with which the lecturer spoke that was enabling, rather than the content of his utterance, and it was this act which propelled the student into a position from which he could make use of relevant discourses [those that determine what essays should be like] already available to him. (The same

utterance spoken by someone who did not represent the power relations in the same way, such as a friend, would not have had the same enabling effect.)

Conclusion

I have suggested that an important aspect of discourse acquisition has to do with the ways in which learners are simply propelled into identity positions, through an act that we might describe as performative. I have looked very narrowly at two instances, and tried to show how such an approach might help overcome some of the difficulties that arise with the predominant approaches to identity and discourse acquisition, which focus on awareness and the resources an individual as 'agent' can make use of. The implications of this preliminary study are that it might be worth exploring the numerous kinds of acts that in fact occur, and the ways in which they facilitate, impede or otherwise affect the process of discourse acquisition. The critical dimension to such an approach lies in attempting to clarify the kinds of social ***acts*** that are entailed in discourse acquisition and identity construction, in addition to or rather than the identity positions and power relationships that are embedded in the cognitive content of discourses we engage with. If discourse is supported by an amalgam of such acts, it is not sufficient to focus on identifying and teaching typical cognitive, textual and linguistic features that typify a given discourse. Mastery or employment of such characteristic features would depend upon such acts, and would not be achieved simply through an exercise of understanding. It might thus be of interest to track the ways in which students are articulated with power through such acts and their impact on student writing. This would complement critical discourse analysis that looks at the ways in which power relations find representation in a text itself. It would look at aspects of authorisation of student writing and implications of this for the ways in which construction of knowledge by students is enacted.

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LOSING IDENTITY: A TEMPORARY PROBLEM FOR SINGLE-SEMESTER EXCHANGE STUDENTS

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I cannot be myself, let alone write for academic assessment. I've sort of lost myself". These remarks of an Australian study-abroad student in France are a painful reminder that one semester, or even one year, is a very short time to create an identity in a foreign language. This short presentation does not report formal research but is based on discussions with two students on one-semester study-abroad programs - an Australian in France and an Italian in Australia. Relatively short-term periods of undergraduate study in foreign countries are becoming a feature of international education the world over, and this presentation provides something of a reality check on the excitement and optimism which participants usually feel before they become immersed in the foreign culture and language.

Keywords: exchange students, language, identity

Perhaps you may be thinking the title of this little session is rather over-the-top – a bit melodramatic! Students on exchange don't lose their identities! They have a wonderful time! Don't they? In my LAS advising of international students, I'm seeing more and more exchange students who really need support. They're not having unmitigated fun! So I've been thinking about whether, and in what ways they might be different from international students here for the full duration of their courses and in what ways they share similar experiences. The theme for this conference is "Changing Identities". Maybe all international students undergo some change of identity. Single-semester exchange students in foreign language environments face particular challenges because of the telescoped nature of their international experience and the immanent pressure of the final semester(s) of their degrees back home. They have so little time to fully incorporate all that is new, as well as deal with the challenges often thrown up by accommodation and course arrangements. This is especially true when the exchange agreement between home and host university suggests that all has been satisfactorily arranged, but that is not so. Assuming a healthy sense of identity in their mother tongues, exchange stidents may well feel a temporary loss of this identity as they struggle to negotiate life in a foreign language.

Don't get me wrong! I think student exchanges are a great opportunity for students to really stretch themselves. Students don't go on exchanges unless they're prepared for a challenge. Many more Australian students make enquiries than actually proceed to go abroad, partly because they become aware, often by talking things through with a Study Abroad officer in their university, of just how challenging the exchange can be. But just think of it! They get their qualification from their home university, they get a taste, but not for **too** long, of another country, of different teaching styles and a different culture. They mix with other international students too, and get the chance to cope on their own, to experiment a bit and make a few mistakes, perhaps, away from the eagle eyes of friends and family, but without being away from everyone they know for **too** long. And what better way to improve one's foreign language skills than living in that language culture for half a year!

So where's the downside? Why suggest there's a possibility of them losing their identities? The literature is unlikely to address this issue, except perhaps from the field of psychology or psycholinguistics, but I thought I'd be able to find something

about how exchange students felt about their experiences, and what they thought were the positive and negative aspects; but the student voice is absent. The Australian literature of student exchange concentrates on administrative and business perspectives, advocating best practice, developing strategies and vaunting successes, measured by increasing numbers of bilateral agreements, of incoming and outgoing students and of programs which match stated university policies of internationalisation and globalisation, (Anderson 1996; Back, Davis & Olsen 1996; Davis, Milne & Olsen 1999).

I haven't found a single study in the Australian context which focuses on the quality of the experiences of incoming or outgoing, international, single-semester exchange students who have studied in a language other than their mother tongue, although Tootle (1999) strongly argues the need for such research. One telling article, however, did concern the experiences of European engineering students studying abroad on exchange (Markowski & Mainwaring 1995). The authors were considering the sort of linguistic and cultural preparation needed to cope with cultural differences in new study environments and to benefit more fully from an international sojourn. Their title comes from a student comment: "Engineering study abroad? – It's like expecting Carl Lewis to run backwards without any training!" Other overseas literature (eg. Kelleher 1996; Blumenthal, Goodwin, Smith & Teichler 1996; Skilbeck & Connell 1996) focussed on the macro-picture - benefits of exchange for international or regional co-operation, or career opportunities in a world of global business or personal development.

Exchange experience of two students

In first semester of this year, an Italian student on exchange from Florence was referred to me, because he was having a really hard time coping with his study, and his social interactions. My emotions and professional antenna had already been sensitised by my daughter, Lucy, having embarked, about a month previously, on student exchange in a French university. So I thought I'd talk informally with both of them about their experiences. A comment of my daughter's really started me thinking about the notion of identity and language. In a phone conversation I had asked her about her first written assignment and she said "I can't even be myself in

French, yet, let alone feel able to write for academic assessment." Now I know that some feel that academic writing strips people of their identity anyway, so where's the problem! But Lucy obviously feels that becoming fully functional in a foreign language and culture involves some change of identity. Alessandro, (who, like Lucy, was happy that his real name be used at this conference), also talked about losing his sense of knowing how to be and what to do, in Australian English-speaking society, and his host university.

For most of us, our identities are inextricably bound up with our mother tongues – the languages we learnt in babyhood and used in early childhood and usually beyond, with family and friends. But just last month I had a fascinating conversation with a Singaporean student whose mother tongue is Mandarin, yet who regards Singlish as the language in which she feels most Singaporean and standard English (which she speaks and writes extremely well) as the language where she has most power and most capacity to engage in the realm of ideas. Nevertheless, all international exchange students I've worked with have expressed their frustration at not being able to express their true identities because only in their mother tongues do they have the fullest sense of who they are. Even if they satisfy or exceed the host institution's minimum language proficiency requirements, their weaker command of the foreign language in which they must study and operate socially in the host country restricts them and sometimes reduces them to silence. They are usually in language and culture shock when they start their formal study and some remain in that state throughout the semester.

Of course one of the reasons why students apply for exchanges to a foreign language environment is to strengthen their foreign language skills. Language study and discipline-based academic study, however, are very different study areas. The exchange student who is under pressure to achieve high grades for the home university, but who has limited proficiency in the four macro-skills of the language in which study (and life) must now occur, may immediately move into high stress mode. All available time is spent "studying" rather than immersing him or herself in all those activities which involve the social language skills the student so wants to develop. This was the situation with Alessandro. He couldn't understand what was said in lectures and tutes and he couldn't read quickly or widely enough to catch up on the

business-based general knowledge in the Australian context that was assumed in his second and third year subjects. He derived mainly frustration from trying to read newspapers and popular business periodicals, laden as they are with culture-specific schema, idiomatic and colloquial expressions, and reflecting Australian humour. His preoccupation with his poor language skills undermined his confidence in all interactions with fellow students, administration staff and even real estate agents.

In my intentional conversations with Ale and Lucy, firstly we talked about what each hoped to get out of the student exchange experience. Lucy is doing a French major, speaks Spanish and loves languages per se. She wanted to go on exchange to France because she could immerse herself in the culture and the language, and actually take French language studies as taken by native speakers intending to teach French as a foreign language, as part of her Australian degree. Alessandro had been studying Classics, including Latin and Greek, but then switched to studying business because business was better for job purposes. One reason why he applied for an exchange was that it would look good on his CV to have studied some business subjects in another country. He'd heard that there would be no hassle about assessment. The other reason he applied was that he thought he'd have a great time, and get to visit Australia, and maybe improve his English a bit, and after he finished the semester he'd be able to do some traveling.

So their study areas and goals were quite different. It's interesting that neither of them mentioned developing "a new international outlook" or "global work skills" or fulfilling a "key internationalisation performance indicator", all terms which feature largely in Australian university mission statements, policies and strategies about internationalisation. The achievement of their personal goals, to whatever extent they did achieve them, caused both of them for a time, feelings of despair and discomfort and a sense of unreality, which might be explained as a temporary loss of identity.

Most international students experience some periods of loneliness and homesickness, and the duration of those feelings and what I've termed a temporary loss of identity might be related to their foreign language skills. Although he admitted that English is not an important subject in Italy, Ale was stunned at how far below communicative competence level his English skills were. He had done quite well in

the qualifying reading and writing skills tests and thought he wouldn't have too much trouble, but each week when he had his LAS appointment he'd tell me how hard everything was. When I spoke to him after he'd finished his exams he said "Now I'm free to start improving my English". In contrast, Lucy had started her semester with quite high-level social language skills, because she had previously spent about three months travelling and working in France, but her academic writing and reading skills were less well developed. She found the very formal lectures, with students taking copious notes and rarely being invited to ask questions or make comments, or in any way argue with the lecturer, very difficult, and quite alienating as a teaching and learning style. Ale had been equally thrown by the expectation that he would not be given all the information in lectures but would be required to read widely, do group work, join in tute discussions, and give oral presentations. Both students, therefore, had LAS issues which detracted from the rapid adjustment needed to maximise the potential benefits of a one-semester exchange.

Everything I've said pertains to NESB students from overseas for a full course, but my point is that the single-semester exchange student has so little time to adjust to **all** that is foreign in the host university and country and, depending on the particular arrangements between home and host university, so much at stake. Agreements about parity of subjects are a potential minefield. Ale started his end of semester exams still not knowing whether his professor in Florence would accept the Personal Investment subject he studied here as equivalent to a financial management subject he would have been studying there. There are many myths about exchange agreements, and one of them is that subject details are all sorted out before the exchange semester starts! Not so! In her first week, Lucy also had to negotiate her course details, in French, with French university administrators, because they had not understood the details of points allocations and her majors which had been forwarded by her home university. Until all parties involved in exchange arrangements are fully informed and fully professional in their handling of understandably apprehensive incoming students, there is a great possibility of those students feeling very vulnerable and lost.

As well as studying, exchange students live a life outside lectures and off campus. This is where I believe short-term exchange students hope to gain most, and on the

whole, I feel they do. Ale, however, was so stressed that most of his social life was spent with Italian speakers, more specifically with speakers of his Florentine dialect because as he put it “That’s where I can be myself”. Socialising with Australians was not easy, and since the academic side of his life was also not easy, he sought comfort in the familiar, rather than taking himself to where he felt like a fish out of water. Lucy enjoyed the social side of her exchange because she had earlier made French friends when she worked on a farm. She could go there for the occasional weekend to relieve academic stresses. Around the campus and in her accommodation, however, she found that French students didn’t really want to have much to do with international students.

Substitute “Australian” for “French” and it sounds very familiar – not a recipe for helping single-semester students settle in. Lack of ready acceptance by local students causes exchange students to seek out speakers of their mother tongue or other international students of similarly reduced skill in the target language. If one goal of an exchange is improved language because of exposure to native speakers, then during semester time, exchange students may be very disappointed.

I’ve just touched briefly on a few aspects of single semester exchange: foreign language skill, different teaching methods, reasons for seeking exchange, administration of exchange programs and the extra-curricula experience. These can have great impact on how quickly and how comfortably students settle into their host country. I don’t wish to suggest for a moment that these students are being exploited or mislead in any way. Nor do I underestimate the inestimable value to personal development of challenging experiences. A single semester on exchange into a foreign language culture, however, is a very intense experience. This is particularly so when there are worries about the effect of results on the eventual transcript from the home university. Temporarily at least, therefore, students can feel as if they have lost their identities because of personal and intellectual disorientation. LAS Advisers are in a privileged position in that students often open up to us, because they feel that someone is genuinely interested in them, as individuals. I think it is part of our work to keep raising awareness of the complexities of international education in its various forms, so that university

infrastructure and practices can truly reflect the oft-stated university commitment to quality.

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STARTING A COURSEWORK POSTGRADUATE DEGREE: THE NEGLECTED TRANSITION

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The focus of most research into student transition relates to the important transition that students face when they move from high school to first year at university. This particular transition is also the focus of much support given by LA units, both in terms of workshops and academic preparation programs offered, and individual consultations. From my experience of working with postgraduate students over a number of years it has become apparent that the transition to higher degrees (both coursework and research) can prove to be just as daunting a transition. The problems faced by students making the transition to a coursework postgraduate degree were examined in 2000 at Glasgow University and are currently being compared to those faced by postgraduate students at the University of Queensland (UQ). A questionnaire, interviews and focus groups were used to gain a picture of this transition at Glasgow University and similar methods are being conducted at UQ. The results suggest that students face significant problems when beginning a coursework degree related to the worry about expectations, the 'step-up' in standards, the break from

study they have had due to time in the workforce, and in some cases because they are moving into a new discipline area.

Keywords: coursework degree, transition, induction

Introduction

Students moving from high school to start a university course face an important transition and can encounter many significant problems. What these problems are and how students can be supported through this transition have been the focus of much research (eg McInnis et al., 2000), conferences (eg 4th Pacific Rim, First Year in Higher Education Conference 2000 and 14th International First-Year Experience Conference 2001), Discussion Forums (eg The University of Sydney, Improving the First Year Experience 2000) and also an important part of most of the work of Learning Assistance Units. At the same time there has been a growing awareness by universities of the need to train new research (PhD) students to improve their research experience, increase completion rates and reduce time to completion.

The problems faced by research students are well documented (for overview see Symons & Samuelowicz, 2000; Higher Education Series Report No 37, 2001; Ainley, 2001). Some problems relate directly to the work (eg unsuccessful experiments, restricted access to important equipment and other unexpected hitches to the research), while others relate to isolation (Conrad & Phillips, 1996), supervision (Rudd, 1989; Cullen et al., 1994), and general personal problems which may be either brought on or exacerbated by the degree process (Denicola & Pope, 1994).

Zuber-Skerritt (1987) argues that many of these problems, while documented for research students, are actually worse for coursework students because of 'their greater inexperience in research and dissertation writing and by the imposition of severe time limitations' (p.93). It can also be argued that they are worse for part time students, for mature-age students returning to study after a break or for international students who may be studying in English for the first time and have to make the transition to a different academic culture.

Coursework master degrees aim to improve expertise in particular professional areas and can allow a person to increase their specific skills or be used to move into a new professional area. They are often undertaken on a part time basis. For example, of the approximately 3000 coursework students enrolled at Glasgow University for the 99/00 academic year, 50% were part time. Similarly, at the University of Queensland (UQ) just over 50% of the 3113 students enrolled in postgraduate coursework in 2001 are part-time.

The number of coursework postgraduate degrees offered by Universities world wide and the number of students attracted to enrol are increasing, so more and more students are facing this transition. And this transition may be made more problematic by the course being undertaken on a part time basis, be undertaken after a number of years away from study, be in a field quite different from undergraduate training and may be at a different university (or country) than previous study.

Purpose of this Study

From my experience of working with postgraduate students I have come to realise that for all the reasons already mentioned this group of students do appear to suffer significant transition problems and in the main do not receive support to negotiate them. There appears to be a general belief that since coursework students have completed an undergraduate degree they already know all they need to know about undertaking university study. However, there are postgraduate degrees where an undergraduate degree is not mandatory, a number of years experience is sufficient to gain a place. Transition issues for these students can be severe.

This study aims to gain a better understanding of the transition problems faced by coursework students, firstly at Glasgow University and then at UQ. It will also ascertain if students seek help with their problems and whether they find the help they receive to be sufficient.

Methods

The results from Glasgow University were collected as part of a larger research project carried out in 2000 – an audit of the help services available to postgraduate students at the university. The focus was on obtaining the student perceptions of their problems and the help they received. The importance of obtaining the student perception to truly assess the effectiveness of introduced 'help' strategies cannot be over-emphasised (Zuber-Skerritt, 1987).

Specifically, the research at Glasgow University related to this study includes:

1. a web-based survey, with the questionnaire being sent to all student email addresses. The responses were submitted anonymously to a central address. The questionnaire contains mainly tick boxes but there are some questions which called for free responses. Apart from general demographic information the survey listed various areas of postgraduate work that have been identified by the literature and through experience as potential sources of concern and the students were asked to acknowledge if they had experienced problems in that area or were worrying about it, whether they had sought help or might seek help and whether the help had been sufficient. (The number of responses = 65)
2. in-depth interview of four students
3. two focus group discussions
4. collection of information relating to what induction and training programs are offered to postgraduate coursework students through interviewing academics (11) and administrative personnel (6)
5. discussion with 'help' personnel including counsellors, learning advisers, librarians, chaplains, etc.

The results collected at Glasgow for coursework students are compared with the overall results of all postgraduate students (both coursework and research – total number of survey responses was 278, and 25 students were interviewed). Currently, similar research is being carried out at UQ but has been held up. The questionnaire

has not yet been administered but 6 students have been interviewed and focus groups are planned.

Glasgow Participants

The 65 respondents to the survey represent a fairly good selection of students. Fifty percent are female and 50% are non-UK students. Thirty-five of the respondents are under 28 years of age, 22 are between 28 and 40 and 8 are over 40. Most of them are full time students and there is a good cross section of stage of degree (24 classified themselves as just beginning, 7 mid-way and 34 as near the end). Eleven of the 12 faculties are represented.

The interviewed students include 2 males, 2 non-UK students, 2 part timers, 2 midway through their degree, one at the beginning and one near the end. Both focus groups contained a mix of students.

Results of the Glasgow University Research

In the main, the results for the coursework students at Glasgow University mirror the results obtained for all postgraduate students, that is, the transition to coursework postgraduate study is no easier than the transition to research.

Perceptions

The majority of students rated their overall experience at Glasgow University as good or very good but 29% of coursework students rated their experience as average or worse (compared to 21% for research students). However, if the students are divided by whether they are UK or non-UK students, a marked difference is revealed. Forty-two per cent of non-UK students rated their experience as average or worse compared to 16% for UK students. Non-UK students face many problems as they undertake their degrees in a new country, new academic institution and maybe new language. They often have tremendous pressure on them from family, home government or funding body to do well.

Students aged 28 – 40 also rated their experience worse than the other age groups (36%). Such students usually have specific career goals and are making sacrifices to achieve them (for example, leaving well paid jobs, studying part-time, etc). Therefore they have high expectations of the institution to deliver the service (the course).

Survey Results

The beginning period of a postgraduate degree includes finding out about the institution, getting to know what is available and where it is located, settling into the department, meeting fellow students and staff, and gaining an understanding of what is expected of one as a student and what one can reasonable expect from one's lecturers and supervisors. This period also includes actually starting the degree – going to lectures, attending tutorials, etc – and may include settling into a new city and new accommodation, and helping family members adjust to schools and work. For some it may include getting used to living on a more restricted income than previously.

Transition issues for some students also include concerns about writing (assignments, the research proposal and dissertation), organisation (such as using the library, computers and statistics, the availability of resources and time management), the supervisory relationship, and other general academic and non-academic aspects of doing the degree.

The results of the survey can be seen in Table 1. Problems with most items in the ***Induction Issues*** and ***Getting research started*** clusters were acknowledged by over half the respondents with 69% having problems with understanding expectations. Approximately 75% of students with these problems sought help and between 20 – 40% were not satisfied with the help provided.

With all items in these clusters, the coursework students recorded more concerns than did the research students. This initially may appear surprising but the students wrote about the pressure of completing in such a short time, the need to find a supervisor and settle on a topic quickly, their complete lack of experience of doing

research, and their general worries about what lay ahead and what they called the 'step up' in standard. Many research students start their degree with a topic already well thought out either for themselves through interest or previous experience, or by their supervisor and it may even be attached to a scholarship. This is not usually true for coursework students who have a very short period of time to do the research component and no luxury to 'try out' ideas before finally deciding what to do. The non-UK students also recorded more problems than UK students in these clusters.

Organisational issues caused problems for some students (for example, 58% had problems with time and work management and 46% with using the library). These percentages are very similar to those recorded for the research students. Similarly, the S***upervision*** items caused problems for approximately one third of the students, slightly higher than for research students. Students wrote about the short time available to build up a 'decent relationship' with their supervisor, the number of students their supervisor has, and that they 'don't feel as important' to their supervisor as the PhD students. Non-UK students experienced slightly more problems with these items than UK students. Between 50% and 90% of students sought help, but many were unhappy with that received.

Writing was a concern for just over 40% of the students. Although ***writing in English*** seems of less concern, of course for many non-UK students it is a major worry. For all the writing items, non-UK students recorded higher and were less able to find the help they needed. Most students sought help with writing but variable numbers were happy with the help received. Personal, accommodation and money concerns were acknowledged by a number of students with many asking for help and some not receiving it.

Academic problem & non-academic problem (n=65)	Problem encountered or envisaged	Help sought or will be sought	Help not sufficient
Induction issues			
Understanding what's expected(1)^	45 (69%)*	32 (71%)#	7 (22%)**
Knowing rights & obligations(6)	28 (43%)	22 (79%)	7 (32%)
Knowing available resources(9)	36 (55%)	19 (53%)	6 (32%)
Getting research started			
Finding a supervisor(2)	24 (37%)	18 (75%)	7 (39%)
Deciding on a topic(7)	42 (65%)	37 (88%)	10 (27%)
Conceptualising the research(4)	42 (65%)	31 (74%)	5 (16%)
Planning the research(14)	39 (60%)	28 (72%)	8 (29%)
Organisational issues			
Work & time management(5)	38 (58%)	20 (53%)	8 (40%)
Using the library(11)	30 (46%)	18 (60%)	5 (28%)
Using statistics(17)	27 (42%)	17 (63%)	4 (24%)
Using the computer(21)	16 (25%)	9 (56%)	3 (33%)
Lack of resources(26)	29 (45%)	19 (66%)	16 (84%)
Supervision			
Communication with supervisor(15)	30 (46%)	27 (90%)	13 (48%)
Feedback from supervisor(22)	25 (38%)	22 (88%)	11 (50%)
Meetings with supervisor(27)	18 (28%)	14 (78%)	6 (43%)
Other problems with supervisor(28)	13 (20%)	6 (46%)	3 (50%)
Writing			
Writing assignments(10)	28 (43%)	22 (79%)	1 (5%)
Writing in English(8)	19 (29%)	15 (79%)	7 (47%)
Writing the research proposal(16)	28 (43%)	23 (82%)	8 (35%)
Other academic issues			
Exams(13)	31 (48%)	23 (74%)	6 (26%)
Giving presentations(18)	29 (45%)	14 (48%)	2 (14%)
Participating in tutorials(24)	18 (28%)	11 (61%)	4 (36%)
Non-academic problems			
Money(31)	33 (51%)	19 (58%)	8 (42%)
Accommodation(32)	15 (23%)	12 (80%)	5 (42%)
Personal(33)	22 (34%)	16 (72%)	8 (50%)
Other non-academic problems(34)	10 (15%)	6 (60%)	2 (33%)

^The number in bracket is the number assigned to the problem on the questionnaire.
*The percentage is of the total number of respondents.
#The percentage is of the number of students who identified with the problem.
**The percentage is of the number of students who sought help.

Table 1: Survey responses for coursework students at Glasgow University

Interview and focus group discussion

The students in the focus groups talked about having ‘no idea of what lay ahead’, ‘no idea of what it really means to do research in this field’, ‘no idea how to pick a topic that hasn’t been done to death’, and wondering how different things would be in Scotland compared to back home. One student said she would ‘love to ask questions, really trivial things, and not feel stupid’.

Many students found the very beginning difficult. Most said there had been no induction into their department or faculty besides a social gathering. They all felt they needed more information.

> There was no induction. It was assumed we knew everything. It must have been terrible for anyone from another university. (non-UK student, did undergraduate degree at Glasgow)
>
> System completely different from my home country and I don’t know how to cope with the new system and what to do. I just keep crying. (non-UK student, survey response)

Students wanted to understand what the course was going to be like, where the various resources such as the library and computer rooms were located, what would be expected of them, what standard of writing and research is required, and what were the likely problems and where they could get help. They also wanted to understand their position in the department, for example, could they get a cup of coffee from the staff room or student common room, what are the rules about photocopying, ordering supplies, is there any administrative, computer or statistical help, and much more.

Interviewed students and survey responses expressed surprise and grave concerns about the lack of adequate resources. Some non-UK students felt they were paying a lot of money to do degrees and should get better facilities. Some departments cater for the coursework students very well, supplying dedicated computer rooms for postgraduate coursework students, common rooms, and regular seminar series.

However, some students talked about being ‘like a gypsy’ and ‘carrying everything in my backpack and trying to find a desk in the library to call home’.

Supervision came in for as much comment and complaint from coursework students as from research scholars. The complaints are well known – not enough direction initially, insufficient feedback or too many demoralising corrections on drafts that are given only to initiate discussion, not enough understanding and/or sympathy for individual situations and supervisors who are too busy and have too many students. A common complaint brought up by the interviewed students, the focus group participants and also written on the survey was the problem of getting a supervisor. One student wrote ‘it took far too long to get my supervisor appointed for my masters dissertation’. Another student was in the final stages of writing and had never had a supervisor appointed.

Feedback in general (from supervisors and on essays and exams) came in for criticism.

> I don’t worry about my writing but I never get enough feedback. Usually my essays come back with just a mark and one comment – it doesn’t matter if it is positive or negative there is no explanation, nothing I can work with. (UK student)
>
> I would like some feedback on my essays and exams. I eventually got one essay back but there were pages missing. I also got no feedback on my presentation. I’ve no idea whether I did a good job or not. I thought these sorts of things were supposed to help us learn. (UK student)

Students wanted to understand expectations and by not receiving sufficient feedback they had a more difficult transition.

University help with transition issues

There is little university-wide induction for postgraduate students at Glasgow University. A half-day informal postgraduate student orientation was held at the start

of the 2000/01 academic year with 'stalls' providing information on available services. While this is a good initiative it in no way addresses the main concerns of student. More detailed induction is left to the faculties and departments and what is offered varies markedly.

Many of the academics and administrators interviewed believe that postgraduate students do not need induction as they are experienced students. Some reported that no students had ever told them of problems or said 'they can always ask for help'. On the other hand, students typically don't ask academics or administrative personnel because they 'don't want to bother' them, feel their question is 'too trivial', don't want to create a bad impression, or just feel too overwhelmed by everything new. Some students reported what they classified as 'bad experiences' when they had sought some clarification or taken a problem to university personnel. Most reported getting advice from other students.

Interview with 'help' services personnel

The 'help' services personnel, in the main, were well aware of the transition problems faced by postgraduate students. The counsellors, learning advisers, international support officer and chaplain all reported that they regularly saw students who wanted to ask advice about the issues discussed above. They all agreed that there was no real understanding of the problems associated with this transition by university staff and no university wide approach to help students navigate this transition. In most cases they felt overwhelmed by the number of students seeking help with problems and under-resourced to tackle them.

UQ research

The initial analysis of the six interviews at UQ reveals that the situation at UQ is very similar to that at Glasgow. Students felt 'thrown in at the deep end' and really struggled to 'get a handle' on what they were doing. Once again a common theme is 'everyone expects me to know what I'm doing and I feel that I must be the only dumb one'. Worries were expressed about many aspects of writing (being critical, 'correct' structures, referencing and being 'academic enough'). The research component of

the degree and the relationship with supervisors were also concerns of the six students. Even at the beginning some were wondering if they had made the correct decision coming back to university.

Conclusion

While there is a genuine desire by academic and non-academic staff for students to succeed and to enjoy their time at university, there appears to be a general lack of appreciation by staff of what it is like to be a postgraduate coursework student in today's economic and competitive environment. There seems to be a mismatch between how students feel about their induction (whether formal or otherwise) and what they feel they need to be told, and what academics think students need. Nevertheless, a good induction and training program is important to help students have a good beginning period (Boyle & Boice, 1998; Youngman, 1994).

There appears to be a belief at Glasgow University (and perhaps at UQ) that it is only 'bad' students who experience problems. Therefore it follows that if the selection process was better, only 'good' students would be allowed to enrol and there would be fewer problems (MacKay, 1996). As Golde (1998) writes, 'it is tempting to explain away attrition in this way; not only does it allow for individual variation and nuance, but it removes responsibility for attrition from the institution or department' (p.55). For international students, 'good' refers to level of English language competence (Jurgs et al., 1995).

In recent years Glasgow University and UQ have made significant changes in the area of postgraduate induction and training and these have improved the beginning period for many students. However, as this research shows there are still students who are experiencing less than ideal starts to their coursework degrees. Youngman (1994) argues that the content of training courses should be more specific with targeted topics and they should present strategies of immediate use to students. Therefore, university wide, faculty, graduate school and departmental induction and training programs should be formulated to specifically spell out what the course is going to be like and take into consideration what the students themselves want to know and see as their needs.

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LAS ADVISERS AND THE CHANGING IDENTITY OF THE WORKPLACE: THEIR SOURCES OF STRESS AND THE STRATEGIES THEY USE TO COPE

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Research on stress in the workplace reveals that work related stressors are complex and include inter-relating factors such as: restructuring of the workplace, management issues, changing work profiles, job security, workloads, working conditions, relationships at work, home-work interface, career development, and individual personalities. From a questionnaire, LAS advisers were asked to identify the key stressors associated with the changing identity of their workplace and to indicate some of the strategies they use to manage their work related stress. Factors contributing to LAS advisers' stress relate to: institutional changes; a perceived lack of commitment by managers to the work of LAS advisers; attempting to

provide an equitable level of service within a context of shrinking resources; the conflict and ambiguities inherent in the LAS support role while trying to meet the needs of teaching staff and students; the lack of time for research; and the high number of student contact hours. Strategies frequently used by LAS staff to manage workplace stress include: ensuring that they take lunch breaks, spending time with colleagues and liaising with teaching staff. In the questionnaire LAS advisers were asked to nominate changes in the workplace that they believe would lessen stress. The most commonly desired change was for an increase in resources for LAS work.

Keywords: ***stress, change, strategies***

Introduction

From the late 1980s much research has been done to investigate the relationship between employees' well-being and their work environment (Schaufeli & Buunk, 1996, p.313). In many countries occupational stress has become a major concern of governments, business and individuals (Di Martino, 1992, p.3). More specifically, there are an increasing number of studies examining work satisfaction and stress levels of teachers (DEET, 2000; Dinham & Scott, 1998; Dua, 1994; Dunham & Varma, 1998; Farber, 1991; NTEU, 2000; Otto, 1986; Wissink & Stevenson 1998). Some studies (Kivinen & Rinne, 1998; Munt, 1999; Smyth, 1999) link the stress levels of teachers with "the economic rationalism underpinning educational policy [which] is both intensifying the work of teaching and dictating teaching practice" (Munt, 1999, p.3).

All industrialised economies have undergone significant change in the past decade and the tertiary education sector in Australia is no exception. "There has been greater politicisation of education and greater pressure from various stakeholders to 'reform' education, with the result that educational change has become almost a constant" (Dinham & Scott, 1998, p.2). A report from the Australian federal government Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) based on

responses of 2 609 academics at 15 Australian universities found that "since 1993 a number of aspects of academic roles, outlooks and sources of satisfaction have changed" (McInnis, 1999, p.xiii). For instance, general job satisfaction and satisfaction with job security had significantly decreased. At the same time, average working hours per week and hours spent on administration had significantly increased. Overall there had been an "increase in the proportion who say that their job is a source of considerable stress (from 52% to 56%)" (McInnis, 1999, pp. xiii-xiv).

Stress can be considered as a physiological and psychological response to specific demands made on the individual. These demands or causes of stress are often referred to as stressors and may refer to any environmental condition that results in a physical or emotional demand on an individual. The word stress has positive and negative connotations. As noted by the International Labour Office (Di Martino, 1992, p.4), some stress is normal and necessary for people to dynamically interact with their environment. The relationship between stress and performance can be conceptualised along a bell curve distribution. In a situation of very low stress, there may also be very low motivation, and performance may be impaired. In Edworthy's (2000) study into stress in further and higher education the concept of stress is defined as "a process that can occur when there is an unresolved mismatch between the perceived pressures of the situation and the individual's ability to cope" (Edworthy, 2000, p.7). LAS advisers have a unique position with regard to a number of stakeholders - students, lecturers, tutors and administrators - and can be subject to several opposing demands at the same time, therefore the aim of this research was to examine:

1. The major sources of work related stress for LAS advisers.

2. The range of strategies that LAS advisers use to manage the specific stressors of the LAS role.

3. Potential changes in the workplace that would lessen work related stress.

Changing identity of tertiary education

The magnitude of the changes that have occurred in the education sector in the past decade is frequently referred to in the literature discussing the causes of work related stress in teachers. The key factors that have affected the tertiary education sector are reduced funding, growth in diversity and number of students, and changes in delivery modes. These factors have had far reaching effects on academic staff and LAS advisers.

Commonwealth funding of Australian universities has been decreasing for more than a decade. At the same time, student numbers have increased 57.6% over the past decade and academic staff numbers have been reduced 3.8% (DETYA, 1998a, 1998b; 2000). To cope with reduced funding and staffing and increasing student numbers, class sizes have increased and consequently so have academics' workloads. The DETYA survey of changing work roles of academics found that the proportion of academic staff citing too many students as a factor hindering teaching had increased by 10% (McInnis, 1999, p.37). Although 68% of full time staff and 62% of casual and part time staff said they were committed to the pastoral care of their students (p.51), larger classes mean less time for discussion and heavier student assessment loads, so that inevitably there is less time to assist students out of class. It is reasonable to assume that language and academic skills staff also find the demand on their time and resources has increased as more students are referred for additional help as a result of the pressures on lecturers and tutors. Another aspect of the funding changes is the rising cost of an undergraduate degree; for example, a business degree currently costs approximately $5015 per annum (ATO, 2001). One of the consequences of the expense of getting an education is that students expect value for money from their investment in their education and so they are more assertive about their needs, including the need for language and academic skills support.

Another set of factors which characterise the changing identity of tertiary education are the increasingly diverse student demographics in terms of age, first language, cultural background, educational background and vocational ambitions. For example, in 2000, of the non-overseas students enrolled in Higher Education (excluding

external studies), 81 612 spoke a language other than English at home (DETYA, 2000), and 215 143 were enrolled under equity provisions (DETYA, 2000). In addition, international students represent 14.7% of the total student population (4.7% in 1991)(DETYA, 2000). There also has been a twofold increase in the number of postgraduate students in the past decade (DETYA, 1999). Many postgraduate diplomas are marketed to employees who have not previously studied in a university and these students often need LAS help to understand the requirements of their course.

McInnis (1999, p.37) found that there had been an 11% increase in the number of academic staff who believed that "too wide a range of students' abilities" hinders their teaching.

Similarly, 31% of the respondents to the NTEU (2000, p.24) survey felt that a more diverse student population had increased their workload. University administrators and academic staff have in turn placed more pressure on LAS advisers to assist in meeting the needs of such a diverse group of students.

These shifts in age, focus and skills of the student population have required changes to the curriculum and teaching methods. Two-thirds of academics have "reported that developing course materials for new technologies has had a major impact on their changing work hours" (McInnis, 1999, p.xiv). In 2000 the enrolments of 95 361 students were categorised as "external" (DETYA, 2000). Some academics and LAS advisers have moved to teach off campus or been required to adapt to new technological modes of delivery.

LAS advisers have been in the forefront of devising strategies to support both students and academic teaching staff as new relationships between teacher and student have emerged as the result of shifts in the sources of funding, the changing student profile and the influence of new technologies in our society. There is little evidence however, that LAS staff has been adequately resourced to cope with the increased demand for their services.

Job dissatisfaction and stress

Change does not necessarily cause stress or mean a lessening of a person's satisfaction with their workplace. Nevertheless, there is evidence of a correlation between increased dissatisfaction with work and increased levels of stress. McInnis's (1999) survey found that 61% of academics are negative in their outlook regarding their academic career, yet 51% reported that they are basically satisfied with their job (p.9). However, this represents a drop in the level of general job satisfaction from 67% in 1993 (p. xiii). In addition, 56% of academics regard their job as a considerable source of stress (21% do not) (p.9).

In the NTEU (2000) survey, 28.5% of academics reported that they were dissatisfied with their job (55.1% were satisfied). They also indicated a decrease in job satisfaction since 1996 (pp. 36-38). The NTEU suggests there is a correlation between stress and job satisfaction since 16.6% of academics (compared to 11.9% of general staff) report that they find their job almost always stressful and they have the highest level of dissatisfaction of university staff.

Workplace stressors

Research shows that adverse effects of workplace stress on employees is widespread across blue and white-collar occupations and cultures (Di Martino, 1992). Stressors can be divided into two main groups: physical and psychosocial (Di Martino, 1992; Walsh, 1998). Physical stressors include aspects of the physical environment such as noise level, chemical hazards, lack of privacy and room temperature. The psychosocial category is much broader and relates to a variety of factors including the characteristics of the job itself, role conflict, interpersonal stressors and factors relating to organisational management and structure. In their literature review and discussion of research and theories relating to professional burnout, Schaufeli & Buunk (1996) describe the wide range of studies and methodologies that characterise this field of interest. Nevertheless, despite different methodologies and the criticisms levelled at them, there is considerable agreement about the key workplace characteristics that are implicated in causing work related stress. These are discussed below with particular reference to teaching.

The literature reporting research on stress in teachers covers all levels (pre-school to postgraduate) and many subgroups, for example, students with a disability. However, only one article (Cowling & Wilkes, 1999) relating to LAS teachers, but which specifically referred to the work of international student advisers, was located. Otto (1986, p.109) lists a number of concerns for highly stressed teachers including: "insufficient time for work that needs to be done; students' problems which are impossible to solve, given available resources; and, a feeling of powerlessness in relation to the wider education system and particular aspects of it with which teachers disagree." Other key factors relevant to tertiary teachers include: management and administration structures and processes (Dua, 1994); conflict and ambiguity in definition of role (DEET, 2000); lack of feedback about work (Walsh, 1998); and interpersonal work relationships (Brown & Ralph, 1998).

Reducing workplace stress

The plethora of self-help books available in any bookstore would seem to indicate that the solution to reducing stress lies with the individual. Much of the "pop" literature and some of the academic literature discuss the physical (eg. relaxation techniques), cognitive (eg. positive self-talk), practical (eg. time management) and social (eg. talking with colleagues) ways that individuals can attempt to reduce the effects of workplace stress. Some organisations, recognising the harm that stress causes their employees, hire specialists to run stress reduction workshops.

Farber (1991) refers to these individual approaches as first-order strategies and states, after an extensive review of the literature on these strategies, that they are "generally ineffective" (p.297), for "unless there is ongoing commitment to modifying structures and procedures that contribute to staff stress... the benefits of stress workshops are ephemeral" (p.305"). Walsh (1998, p. 27) expresses a stronger view that is also supported by Munt (1999), that stress training can be seen "as attempts to increase employee tolerance to noxious or unacceptable job characteristics."

Dunham and Bath (1998) emphasise the importance of whole-school stress management because "one of the major causes of work stress is the school organisation" (p.139). Unfortunately, as Walsh (1998) notes, there are few reports of programs that target strategies for reducing stress in the workplace. However, she

states that "there is mounting evidence that job redesign interventions... can... enhance employee well-being and alleviate work-related strain" (Walsh, 1998, p.29). Such interventions include increased employee control and autonomy, greater clarity of job descriptions and providing performance feedback. Dunham and Bath (1998, p. 150) also believe that "the key to success of any policy is to show that it has the full support and commitment of those at the very top." They also comment on the importance of middle management and "the crucial impact of middle managers' attitudes and actions on the well-being of their colleagues" (p.152). As a consequence they recommend that middle managers receive "appropriate training about running meetings, appraisal, time management and good communications" (p.152).

The staff at the University of New England who responded to Wissink and Stevenson's (1998) survey about stress indicated the importance of self care and nominated "interaction with other staff" as "the most popular strategy for dealing with workplace stress"(p.77). Schafer (1987) cites research that shows that social support at work can result in two different types of positive input. The "direct effect" demonstrates that "the greater the social support from supervisors and co-workers, the less stress and the better health becomes" (p.316). The indirect effect occurs when appropriate social support reduces the damaging effects of stressors such as autocratic management, by acting as a filter and a moderator to the way stressful events are interpreted and experienced.

Wissink and Stevenson's (1998) respondents also wanted improved communication at departmental and faculty level regarding the running of meetings, decision making, information dissemination and support measures for staff. Similarly, Cowling and Wilkes (1999) found that international student advisers believe that organisational support including "more consultation, better communication, inclusion in decision making at organisational level, clearer expectations of what the job involves, training/staff development" (p. 96), as well as self care, are important for reducing stress and improving job satisfaction.

For this investigation a questionnaire was developed based on a review of the literature on organisational stress, its causes and remedies (Dinham & Scott 1998;

Dunham & Bath, 1998; McShane & Von Glinow, 2000; NTEU, 2000; Walsh, 1998; Wissink & Stevenson, 1998).

Methodology

Survey design and implementation

An initial draft of the questionnaire was piloted with LAS advisers in another institution. Following the pilot, the format, categories of questions and some individual question wordings were modified. The final version of the questionnaire placed stressors under five broad sections: work demands; lack of control over processes; conflict and ambiguity in definition of role; lack of feedback; and work relationships. Forty-six discrete items were listed under these five sections, as well as space for any other issues that related to each section.

The respondents were asked to rate on a six-point scale (always/often/sometimes/rarely/never/ NA), how often the specific items in each section were a source of stress for them in their job. In addition, at the end of each section there were two open-ended questions. The first asked respondents to describe what strategies they could suggest to help manage the stressors caused by workplace demands. The second asked them what they would like to see happen in their workplace that would lessen workplace stressors.

The survey respondents were drawn mainly from LAS advisers in Victorian universities who attended a Victorian Language and Learning Network meeting in June 2001. Most of the questionnaires were completed at that meeting; the rest were returned to the researchers by mail.

Data analysis

Data were analysed by totalling the frequency of responses. Responses were then converted to percentage scores for each of the 46 discrete items.

The data from the two open-ended questions that followed each section were collated and summarised to highlight key themes. However, it was not possible to distinguish in the responses whether the respondent currently used the strategy or

was putting forward a suggestion. Very possibly some of them fell into the mode of "Do as I say, not as I do"!

Methodological limitations

A nonprobability sample was used and hence the results may not completely represent the views of all LAS advisers working in Victoria and should not be generalised to represent the views of LAS advisers Australia wide. The aim was to get a thumbnail sketch of the situation regarding workplace stress as perceived by LAS advisers working in Victorian tertiary institutions. The subjective nature of the self-report questionnaire means that it gives information about an individual's level of stress, but it is unsuitable as a basis for comparing workplace practices in educational institutions.

The particular words used in any questionnaire are always subject to interpretation and can lead to varying interpretations by both respondents and researchers. As the majority of the questionnaires were filled out at a meeting, people had the opportunity to clarify terminology and several comments are worth noting here. One respondent felt that the categories ranging from "always" to "NA" did not allow for the situation where a demand which did cause great stress was however only a rare occurrence. Another respondent commented that items banded together as qualitative work demands in fact could reflect quantitative demands; that is, it may not be the one or two students with particularly high demand needs that cause stress, but the overall number of such students which creates a considerable strain on resources. Another relevant comment was made by a respondent who suggested there should be sections in the survey that allowed respondents to explain why particular items caused great stress.

Results

Profile of the respondents

Of the 38 LAS advisers who completed the survey, 34 were female and 4 were male. Seventeen were employed on a full-time basis, with the remaining 21 employed part-time. Thirty respondents were in a tenured position, while four were on contracts and

four were sessional staff. Twenty-five respondents were classified as academic staff, ten as general staff, two identified themselves as having a TAFE classification and the remaining four were sessional staff.

The profile of the respondents to this survey revealed that tenured academics' student contact hours (SCH) ranged from 10% to 87% of their workload. The distribution was quite symmetrical, with half of the respondents' SCH in the range of 50–58 % of their workload. Overall only seven staff indicated they did not have additional duties outside of their teaching load.

The principal responsibilities of the respondents were:

i) one-to-one tuition	35
ii) workshops	35
iii) coordination	26
iv) team teaching	22
v) committee membership	20
vi) teaching subjects for credit	12

Other responsibilities listed included: publicity, out reach and community activities, managing staff, devising professional development programs, preparing budgets, administration and marking of tests, developing student resource materials in a variety of modes, policy development, strategic planning and special projects.

Our survey did not provide details about the size of the institution or the location of the campus.

Causes of stress

There was a very high response rate (99.9%) to all of the 46 listed items. Analysis showed that twenty factors were nominated as always or often causing stress to 30% or more LAS advisers. These factors came under the sections of work demands, lack of control over processes, conflict and ambiguity in definition of role and work relationships. Table 1 lists the stress factors, the percentage of staff who nominated them as causing stress always or often and their frequency ranking.

Table 1: Factors that "always" and "often" cause stress to 30% or more LAS advisers.

Stressors	**% staff affected always or often**	***Ranking***
Work demands		
Lack of time for research	74	1
Lack of time for preparation of resources	66	2
No. of student contact hours	63	4
Volume of work done out of hours	47	5
Dealing with students with low literacy	45	6
Reporting demands and data collection	34	14
Volume of administrative work	31	18
Lack of control over processes		
Staffing levels	66	3
Funding uncertainty	45	7
University management	42	8

Faculty/Departmental management	40	10
Resource allocation	37	11
Feelings of powerlessness in the face of change	37	12
University restructuring	34	15
Inadequate IT support	34	16
Inadequate administrative support	34	17
Inadequate office space	31	19
Conflict and ambiguity in definition of role		
Other academics' expectations of your role	42	9
Student expectations of your role	31	20
Work relationships		
Lack of supportive leadership/management	37	13

The open ended questions

1. What strategies can you suggest to help manage the stressors in this section?

2. What would you like to see happen in your workplace that would lessen the stressors in this section?

The response rate to these two open ended questions was 86.5%. The responses to these two questions were separated into "Individual" and "Organisational" strategies. Organisational strategies were placed under three broad categories: LAS, lecturers and tutors and management. Initially every suggestion was placed under a category and then strategies that addressed the same issue were totalled. Some judgement was used in reducing the many individual responses to the 50 generic items listed. Table 2 is a summary of the suggestions put forward by LAS advisers to reduce workplace stress.

Table 2: Responses to the open ended questions

Category of suggestion	**No. times suggested**
Individual	
take a lunch break	14
talk to colleagues	13
accept personal limitations /prioritise	8
work at home	6
say "No"	6
keep work & home life separate	6
accept institutional limitations	4
physical exercise	4
time management	2
LAS	
increase liaison with academic staff	14
more professional development	6

clarify student expectations of LAS support	5
develop a mutually supportive team	5
more time for research	4
study leave	4
opportunities for being mentored	4
develop/distribute clear promotional material	4
make detailed reports to management	4
need a clearly defined non-teaching time	3
network with LAS staff in other institutions	3
clarify procedures for students to get help	2
network with other student support services	2
develop guidelines for dealing with emails	2
develop a list of relieving staff	2
proactive contact with large groups students to reduce need for individual help	2
Lecturers and tutors	
recognise LAS expertise ie. not just remedial teachers	17
professional development of teaching staff	10
accept shared responsibility with LAS staff for teaching students	9
recognise LAS advisers as academic staff	6
develop consistent guidelines for academic writing style	5
develop adjunct courses	4
integrate LAS skills in core curriculum	2

Management	
provide more resources & staffing for LAS	20
develop understanding of LAS expertise	20
professional development for more effective management	16
less rhetoric, more commitment to learning	13
recognise LAS advisers as academic staff	9
improve interpersonal skills	9
create more opportunities for shared decision making and problem solving	8
provide for more administrative support	8
improve physical environment	7
change evaluation methods of LAS work	6
no solutions	6
involve LAS staff in long-term planning for allocation of resources	5
implement consistent & higher level entrance requirements for international students	5
ensure a fairer pay structure and terms of employment	4
provide better IT support	3
allow for LAS input into job descriptions	2
acknowledge special needs students	2
resolve management conflict between rural and metro campuses	2

Discussion

The results of the survey indicate that LAS advisers have many issues in common with other academic staff that cause significant stress. Other stressors (for example, other academics' expectations of their role) are peculiar to LAS staff. The causes of stress as summarised in Table 1 are discussed below.

Work demands

Stress caused by work demands affected 35% of LAS staff. The high number of student contact hours as a percentage of workload (the majority between 50-58%) is probably a major contributor to the stress LAS staff feels. In the McInnis (1999, p.20) survey, academics rated "teaching classes" as 17.1% of their total activities and "teaching related activity" as a further 24.7% of total activities during the teaching period.

Five of the six most stressful factors were in the section titled "work demands". Lack of time for research was nominated as the major stressor for 28 out of 38 respondents (74%). This factor was also identified by the NTEU survey as the second highest stressor (63%). The McInnis (1999) survey found that while 91% staff believe that research is the "current priority in the reward system" (p.14), more than two thirds "find their teaching load is a hindrance to research" and nearly half say lack of funding is a problem (p.45).

The second, fourth and fifth highest causes of stress were lack of time for preparation of resources, number of student contact hours and volume of work done out of hours. These accord with the literature on stressors affecting other academic staff, but are much greater causes of stress for LAS advisers than was noted in the McInnis and NTEU surveys. The volume of work done out of hours (ranked 5th) supports the findings in a report by the Australian Centre for Industrial Research and Training (Light, 1999, p.9) that "a work culture has grown in which job commitment has been equated with working exceptionally long hours". It seems that LAS advisers work in this way in an attempt to provide effective services and programs for the student body while maintaining their reporting requirements (ranked 14th) and administrative work (18th).

Increases in administrative work are noted in much of the literature. However, reporting demands generally are the responsibility of heads of academic and administrative departments. Although the majority of the respondents were classified as academic staff, it seems that the demand for LAS advisers to report on their activities is much higher than for other academic staff.

Dealing with students with low literacy levels was the sixth most stressful factor affecting 45% of respondents. In the NTEU (2000) and McInnis (1999) surveys academic staff commented on the increase in workload due to the diverse range of students' abilities, but did not nominate this as a stressor. Initially this response seemed surprising since LAS advisers' main task is to work with students to develop their academic language skills. On reflection it could indicate that when LAS advisers consider they have insufficient time to devote to individual students who require intensive support they might feel frustrated with the situation. In the Cowling and Wilkes (1999, p. 92) survey, 37.7% of international student advisers stated that "dealing with different language levels" was stressful for them.

Lack of control over processes

The research literature on stress highlights the importance of feeling in control of work practices. The items in this section represent 50% of the main stressors nominated by the respondents.

The key stressor in this section (ranked 3rd overall or 66%) is staffing levels. It is also closely related to many of the items mentioned under work demands. Staffing levels were a cause of stress to significantly less academic staff (51%) in the NTEU (2000) survey. This particular issue generated many pessimistic written comments about the likelihood of a positive change and provided further expression to the "feelings of powerlessness in the face of change" which was identified by 37% of the respondents.

Closely aligned to the issue of staffing levels are funding uncertainty and resource allocation, which were identified by 45% and 37% respectively of the respondents. In her study into effective student support services in further and higher education in England, Bell (1996, p. 146) argues that "the delivery of a quality service" will

"depend on the resources available". Thus if the time and energy of LAS advisers are strained by inadequate staffing levels, resource allocation, administrative and IT support, and a poor physical environment, then the quality of the service provided will be seriously compromised.

University (42%) and Faculty/Departmental management (40%) were named as major causes of stress. Lack of supportive leadership/management, located under the section headed "work relationships", also was identified by 42% of respondents. The responses to the open ended questions in this section elaborated on the nature of these stressors and they are discussed in the next section. University restructuring was rated as stressful by 34% of respondents. The specific aspects of the restructuring process, which were most stressful, were not discernible from the survey.

Conflict and ambiguity in definition of role

Two issues emerged under conflict and ambiguity in definition of role - other academics' expectations of the LAS role (42%) and students' expectations of their role (31%). Both of these issues reflect the blurred boundaries that surround LAS advisers' work roles which lead administrators, other academic staff and students to make assumptions about who is responsible for student learning and what can be achieved given limited resources.

LAS advisers suggestions for reducing workplace stress

The following discussion examines the relationship between the major stressors shown in Table 1 and the suggestions for reducing workplace stress shown in Table 2.

Individual

The highest number of responses (36.9%) noted the importance of taking a lunch break. In addition, some emphasised the importance of leaving the building. The need to make such a suggestion possibly reflects the on-call nature of their work and

consequent lack of a timetabling structure which characterises many LAS advisers' work schedules. One respondent commented, "I feel very pressured to be always available for needy students." The lunch period (12 noon till 2pm) is also the main time when students are free from lectures and tutorials. This suggestion can be linked to many of the key stressors identified in the survey such as the number of contact hours, volume of administrative work and student expectations of the LAS advisers' role.

Talking to colleagues was one idea suggested by 34.2% of the respondents. This strategy is supported by research which indicates that social support can be very beneficial to overall well being as it may act as a buffer to counteract workplace stressors (Williams, 1995). This also is reflected in Schafer's (1987) direct and indirect effects. However, achieving and maintaining effective social support in the workplace may often be problematic for LAS advisers given their time and work demand pressures and the way in which LAS staff often work on the periphery of departments or schools. As well, there may be practical difficulties one of which is encapsulated in the comment, "We don't even have a staff room so there's no opportunity to socialise over a cup of tea."

The third most popular suggestion for individuals related to accepting personal limitations and prioritising (26.3%). Accepting institutional limitations (10.5%) could also be included in this category. The assertive act of saying "No" was also favoured by 16% of respondents. However, few respondents elaborated on their ways of establishing priorities. One suggestion was to "work on what will benefit most students in the long term first."

Six respondents said working at home helped them to cope with workplace demands. "Working at home is the only way I can keep my head above water". This strategy is in stark contrast to the suggestion from another group of respondents to "keep home life and work separate."

Organisational

The strategies suggested to help reduce workplace stress caused by organisational factors were classed as actions that could or should be taken by LAS advisers

themselves, by lecturers and tutors, and management. Within this range of suggested actions, there were recurring themes indicating a need for improved relationships with lecturers and tutors and management to promote greater recognition and understanding of the work of LAS advisers and a clear definition of their role; the need for professional development of managers and all academic staff; increased resources; and LAS advisers inclusion in decision making processes that directly impact on their work.

Relationships with lecturers and tutors

The importance of liaison with lecturers and tutors was mentioned by 37% of respondents. Forty-five per cent of LAS advisers also indicated the need for lecturers and tutors to recognise LAS staff's expertise. Others stated the need for LAS advisers to be acknowledged as academic staff by lecturers and tutors, and to accept LAS advisers' shared responsibility for teaching and learning.

As well as developing a better understanding of the LAS advisers' role, the other predominant suggestion regarding lecturers and tutors was a need for their professional development. Five respondents specifically mentioned the need for lecturers and tutors to develop consistent guidelines for academic writing style. One respondent wrote about "dealing with the inadequacies of subject staff" and another wrote, "work with academic staff so assignments are appropriately worded and comprehensible".

Many respondents recognised that the role of LAS advisers does not easily match the roles of other academic staff. Several comments such as "I am dealing with a job with no boundaries, thus I cannot satisfy the needs or meet the demands", and " my job never feels finished", highlight the often nebulous nature of the LAS role and the way in which it contrasts with the role of most lecturers and tutors who have clearly defined non-teaching times and timetabled student contact hours. LAS staff, on the other hand, have difficulty separating their SCH from other duties. This is reflected in many of the stressors ranked 1-5 in Table 1. Role ambiguity and blurred boundaries of responsibility seem to create for LAS advisers a sense of "an ever expanding role".

Professional development

Lack of time for research was ranked as the prime cause of stress (Table 1) and respondents' suggested strategies for resolving this issue included (unspecified) professional development, study leave, clearly defined non-teaching periods and opportunities for being mentored. This raises questions about what LAS advisers perceive they need most for professional development. It is unclear from the survey whether LAS staff believes such activities will lead to more productive work with students or perhaps more pragmatically will raise their profile in the university and increase their academic credibility. Two respondents certainly thought so. One wrote, "I need to complete a PhD for recognition" and another explained that there "is pressure to gain a PhD, but I have no time".

Social and professional networks

A number of the other strategies that were suggested for reducing stress were related to social and professional networks. There were many comments about the value of supportive colleagues and working as a team. At the Victorian Language and Learning Network meeting held in June 2001, the majority of the 40 plus attendees voted affirmatively on the importance of continuing the network. This survey also contained comments about the sense of isolation experienced by some LAS advisers.

Management

By far the greatest number and the most strongly worded suggestions for reducing LAS advisers' workplace stress were directed towards management.

The majority of respondents believe more resources and staffing will reduce their stress. This issue is connected to at least 12 of the 20 stressors listed in Table 1 and in particular to the stressors ranked 1-4. This was a predictable response given the findings of the McInnis and NTEU surveys and the sentiments clearly articulated at the recent Vice-Chancellors Committee's submission to the Senate regarding public funding of Australia's universities. The president of the Committee told the Senate that the universities were in "crisis" with "rising staff ratios, slowly degrading

infrastructure and a decline in the quality of student educational experience and staff morale" (Noonan & Contractor, 2001, p.3).

The comments about lack of resources were often linked with the perceived lack of recognition by managers of the value of the work of LAS advisers. Fifty three per cent referred to the need for their expertise to be acknowledged and a further 24% want recognition as academic staff. More than a third also expressed disillusionment with managers' lack of genuine commitment to learning. There was a call for "less rhetoric about the quality of education and more action". These sentiments are mirrored by those respondents who want more opportunities for shared decision making (21%), involvement in long term planning (13%) and better evaluation methods of LAS work (16%).

Perhaps the most surprising comments were those made by 42% of respondents who specifically mentioned the need for professional development of managers. There were several comments about autocratic management styles, secretive behaviour and management "bullies". Two people mentioned calling in the union to support them. These remarks were in addition to comments by a further 24% of respondents who wrote that their managers needed to develop their interpersonal skills. Such comments substantiate why university and departmental managers respectively were perceived to cause 42% and 40% of respondents' significant stress. Sixteen per cent declared there were no solutions to issues dealing with managers or funding. The words "futile" and "I know it won't happen" appeared several times at the end of some comments.

To some extent these findings replicate those of the Wissink and Stevenson (1998) and Cowling and Wilkes (1999) surveys with regard to the desire for increased consultation and involvement in decision making. What is most evident in the responses to the two open ended questions in this survey is that some managers in universities, while under pressure themselves, have failed to develop policies through consultation with LAS staff to deal with change and the stress that it causes. It seems they may have ignored or misunderstood their role and responsibility for supporting their staff, and they may have failed to appreciate the need for leadership to strengthen their working relationships with all their staff.

Drawing tentative conclusions

The original aims of the study were to identify specific stressors for LAS staff, to share the strategies used to manage stressors and to discover potential changes that would lessen the stressors. The second aim became subsumed under the third because the key stressors identified by the respondents related to the "big picture", that is, the pressure that the changing identity of the workplace is putting on LAS advisers through funding and management practices. This emphasis on workplace and not on individual stress management supports the notion that "stressors do not impinge on a person in a vacuum. Rather, they are part of a larger environment" (Schafer, 1987, p.124). The respondents do not have control over many of the perceived stressors and consequently the weight of the suggestions for relieving workplace stress was directed towards management.

The skills of managers are seriously questioned by many of the respondents. There is little evidence of managers attempting to develop policies and strategies that focus on their workplace's organisation and practices with the aim of improving the well being of their employees. The consequences of this negligence are complex and far reaching as "the implications of a failure of middle managers to recognise and deal with stress in themselves and their colleagues are enormous" (Dunham & Bath, 1998, p.152).

A study such as this one tends to raise more questions than provide answers. It does however begin to fill a qualitative gap in the larger studies into stress of higher education staff by focussing on one small group in this area. It clearly points to areas where the needs of LAS staff differ from other academic staff. This is shown in their desire for professional development and time, including study leave, for research like their academic colleagues. The results of this survey overall demonstrate a strong call for the recognition of the value of LAS advisers' work by other academics and management which is not noted in other surveys of university staff.

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CHANGING TECHNOLOGIES: CHANGING PRACTICE

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Technological developments are having a significant impact on many aspects of higher education. This paper outlines some of the impact of these developments on academic learning support provision in higher education, particularly issues concerning the challenges and benefits of providing academic learning support online. The paper provides recommendations for addressing these issues in ways that help ensure the successful integration of technology and academic learning support. It also considers the potential impact of technological developments on the position and practice of learning advisers working in higher education.

The need for academic learning support online

Those of us involved in higher education are aware that our world of work is changing quickly and irrevocably. We are operating in a time of rapid political, socio-economic and technological change. Some of the distinguishing features of higher education in the current era include:

- an increasing demand for access to higher education opportunities
- a demand for more client responsive, open and flexible delivery of courses

- a growing number of learners with diverse needs, abilities and learning backgrounds
- a rapid transition from traditional delivery methods to forms of digital delivery
- an emerging expectation that digital media will enhance learning to accommodate the needs and preferences of learners in higher education.

One of the outcomes of these features is the development of technology that enables the provision of online approaches to teaching and learning. The learning challenges and opportunities presented by this development have significant implications for the design and provision of academic learning support services. It is essential that learning advisers respond by adapting existing and developing new forms of support to meet the needs of online learners. The availability of new technology offers us an opportunity to improve the nature of our teaching and extend the provision of our services. It challenges us to reflect on the implications for our students and ourselves.

Challenges of providing academic learning support online

Updating skills

The delivery of learning support to students using print-based resources and face-to- face or small group sessions is familiar work to learning advisers. However the option of using online delivery creates opportunities and challenges to work in what is, for most of us, still relatively new territory. This territory cannot simply be given over to the technical experts. Advisers need to be in the forefront of techniques and strategies coming into education rather than be seen as out-of-date and resistant to change. Furthermore the provision of support online must be based on sound learning and teaching as well as innovative technology. For this reason it is important that learning support staff learn the skills necessary to establish and maintain sites albeit with help from information technology specialists.

Playing a more influential role

Traditionally learning support has been positioned outside the ‘real’ academic work of tertiary institutions and was charged with 'filling the gaps' in students who came to higher education institutions without the literacy or numeracy skills required. Accordingly learning advisers have not occupied a prestigious position in higher education. Rather they were framed within a discourse of remediation. Their role was considered as remedial teaching for " students who were beyond the real pale of academic work" (Nicholson, 2000, p.4). Rather than passively accepting this remedial model of their work learning advisers need to consider developing a ‘professional development’ model of student support (George & O’Regan (1999). In this model, instead of simply working with students only, learning advisers share their expertise with faculty academic staff to help embed effective learning support in online courses.

In their rush to: meet demands for equity, prevent financial loss through student attrition, and attract more students in a competitive market, tertiary education providers are likely to pay more attention to the need for support services including online academic learning support. This has potential to help improve the position of learning advisers. If we participate early and effectively enough in the provision of supportive online learning environments, we may benefit from increasing recognition of the important contribution that learning advisers make to the recruitment and retention of students.

Considering time, resources and staff

The design and development of multimedia courseware is a complex and time-consuming process (Nicholson and Nagi, 1966). Cost is also likely to be an important consideration. Providing quality learning support online does not happen on the cheap! Creating and using web delivery of multi-media may be well outside the funding allocation for most learning support centre budgets.

Providing learning support online creates another potential dilemma. If sites are interactive we may find ourselves totally overwhelmed by a deluge of work from eager students expecting quick replies to their electronic communications with us.

We may not have the resources, including personnel, to meet this demand. Synchronous or real time delivery, for example, has the obvious benefit of immediate feedback, but this requires adequate and flexible staffing to be effective.

The impact of the online learning environment on students

Students studying online face all of the traditional barriers to learning and also some new ones. Successful online learning requires a complex combination of skills and knowledge including technological literacy. Hill & Hannafin (1997) suggest that the success of searching and making sense of information in hypertext environments is influenced by a complex mix of metacognitive knowledge; perceived orientation (getting one's bearings); perceived self efficacy (self confidence); system knowledge and prior knowledge of the relevant discipline.

Online study requires that students be independent learners, able to motivate themselves and to manage their time successfully. In this requirement it is not different from the skills and attitudes needed for study in traditional learning contexts. However the 'temptations' of surfing the net may be more distracting than diversions available in conventional study. Working independently away from the discipline of scheduled lectures and tutorials is a challenge that will necessitate considerable learning support for some students.

In a sense learning online means that students are learning in a new structure. The use of hypertext environments may lead to confusion, disorientation (being "lost in hyperspace") and distraction (Marchionini, 1988). When on-campus students come into a classroom they can see the teacher and the whiteboard. In other words it is obvious where to look for things. Students can hold a book in their hand and flick through it to see the main divisions and the number of pages. However in computer learning this sense of obvious structure is gone. The student may not see the progressive layout and may skip from one part of the site to another. They may pass some sections without even realising that they have missed important information. Far from assisting students to construct knowledge, hypertext can create confusion that undermines comprehension (Plowman, 1996).

Learning advisers are well aware of the benefits of teaching in workshop situations where students can learn from each other as well as the teaching staff. However learning online may decrease chances for student interaction. In particular those students who are learning wholly online (i.e. not mixed mode) are faced with the problem of working in relative isolation compared with their on- campus peers. Discussion boards and email cannot yet provide a comparable alternative for the interaction that can take place in workshop or small group sessions.

Robbins (2000) draws our attention to the fact that emotional engagement with the students is one aspect of academic skills advice that cannot easily be accommodated for in an online environment. Emotional support is an important part of our work. As well as attending to a student's academic needs, we sometimes assess that they are in need of other support such as counselling. We often need to provide encouragement as well cognitive assistance or skill advice. In an online context it may not only be very difficult to detect that a student is in need of emotional support but also difficult and, in some cases, unwise to attempt to deliver such support when we are not face-to-face with the student.

Much of our work in learning support is based on a diagnostic process as we work alongside the student on a one-to-one or small-group basis. We are able to communicate directly and engage in dialogue with the student about the process of learning. We are able to give immediate feedback. It is not possible to duplicate this immediacy and directness in an online environment. Online we will miss: "…the subtle messages of body language that can reveal a student's level of understanding, or distress, or hint of undiagnosed problems" (Robbins, 2000, p. 149).

Social and cultural contexts

Online delivery has the potential to greatly increase the cultural, social and linguistic diversity of students taking courses. Some of these students may not be familiar or comfortable with the Western academic tradition. Biggs has observed that the "learner brings an accumulation of assumptions, motives, intentions, and previous knowledge that envelopes every teaching/learning situation and determines the course and quality of learning that may take place" (1996, p. 348). Lack of alignment

between the student's assumptions, motives, intentions and knowledge and those of higher education institutions has been identified as an important factor causing students to withdraw from their studies (Tinto, 1995).

Bates pays attention to the social and cultural features which can impact on learning as well as the instructional side of learning. He emphasises the need for research into learners' response to using technologies, including what learners themselves believe are the advantages and disadvantages of such approaches to learning. He argues that it is important to determine "whether there are groups or types of learners who benefit more than others from technology –based learning" (1997, p. 20-21). For example, in the New Zealand context, the experiences and views of Maori learners concerning the use of technology in education warrant particular consideration.

The need for critical reflection

Many advocates of online education emphasise its positive aspects and pay little attention to the communicative and technical difficulties experienced by students. Hara and Kling (1999, p. 1) note that 'there are few systematic analytical studies of students who have experienced new technologies in higher education.' They describe the 'distresses' of some students using an internet-enabled distance education course. 'Distresses' is a general term used to cover students' difficulties such as frustration, anxiety, and confusion and panic (Hara and Kling, 1999, p. 2).

Uncharted territory

Much existing information about online learning relates to the provision of discipline specific courses online rather than learning support online. Learning advisers must work across all disciplines. Robbins notes that:

> Academic skills delivery differs from most university teaching in its intermittent, just in time nature and its need to operate within and respond to complex context arising from the different discipline communities, specific communication genres, and the learning history and needs of individual students. (1999, p. 145)

Benefits of providing academic learning support online

Widening access

Providing support online will widen access to academic learning support services. In the past, the majority of students in higher education were full-time students who attended a campus for their learning activities and had access to the learning support facilities provided at their learning institution. However, an increasing number of students will be studying online. Many of these students will be part-time with work and family commitments. Access to traditional on-campus learning support services will be difficult for some of them. Furthermore traditionally certain groups, including distance education and part-time students, have had limited, if any, access to the academic learning support systems provided on campus. With the development of technology and online education approaches to teaching and learning, there are opportunities to increase access to learning support provision for all students, including the above groups, whether they are studying in online or traditional contexts (Thompson, 2000).

Improving access to resources and teaching tools

Online learning environments can do much more than just broaden access to learning resources in time and space. The most obvious benefit of interactive multimedia is that "a virtually limitless array of resources can be incorporated into the lesson plan, providing learning experiences that otherwise would be unavailable to students" (Lamb, 1992, p.33).

Online teaching and learning provides the opportunity for learning advisers to make use of some unique features of the web. Mason (2001) alerts us to the following features:

- Hyperlinking rather than linear conception of content
- Links to resources, both internal and external
- Communicative potential

- Multimedia potential: webcasting, simulations, video/audio clips for specialist purposes
- Potential for quick and easy up-dating of materials

There are a number of new opportunities and challenges in teaching students using online resources. Hypertext environments, for example, can be used to help students acquire and construct knowledge (Carver et al, 1992) and also to give them an overview of the structure of a knowledge domain (Jonassen & Wang, 1993).

Fostering student centred learning

Most learning advisers are aware of the need to allow the learner to take control of their learning activities rather than having support provided in a manner that makes them a passive receptor rather than an active participant. Interactive multimedia can be used to offer support in a way that allows the student some independence. Hypertext links provide flexibility of use by allowing learners "to explore by self determined linkages" (Barker and Tucker, 1990, p.16). Students should be able to select program sections in the order of their choice, rather than simply work through a pre-determined course of study.

Overlock (1995), Whitnall et al (1994), and Jones and Smith (1992) outline the possibilities for improving the quality of the online learning experience for students. The traditional communication settings are the tutorial, the lecture, and the seminar.

Lambert-Gardiner (1993) argues that the hypermedia setting is educationally superior to these because it simulates the real life situation of the student and just as in the real life situation, students are dealing with information from many sources. "Multimedia... provides educators with the tools to bring learning alive" (Lamb, 1992, p. 33).

A well-designed learning support site can enable learners to tailor the material to their requirements, both in terms of depth and pace. An online support environment using multimedia would be able to utilise these desirable educational characteristics: learning is individualised, self paced, experiential, and active.

Improving quality

As Gunn (2000, p.6) points out, expansion into online learning has " put quality issues at the top of the agenda". Online learning offers a new set of pedagogical opportunities that may function to raise the quality of learning support. In many cases it has raised the quality of instructional design, resulting in very well designed teaching materials. (Inglis et al. 1999).

Responding to diversity

Despite our encouragement, some students do not respond well to the demands of collaborative learning. For a variety of reasons such as shyness and language difficulties, they are reluctant to participate in face-to-face group discussions. The possibility of communicating through discussion boards or other online services may help to meet the needs of such students. Others, for a variety of reasons, may be reluctant to visit a learning support centre on campus. The provision of learning advice online may help us to establish contact with these students who may not otherwise use our services.

Recommendations - addressing the Issues

Adopting a flexible approach

Our response to the challenges requires careful thought about the relationship between pedagogy and the provision of online learning support. Rather than simply using print based skills advice, or indeed face- to- face advice and directly transferring it to the web-based medium, learning advisers will need to experiment with the technology.

Roblyer and Edwards point out that a flexible rather than doctrinaire approach is required:

> Technology using teachers must recognise that integration strategies differ according to which instructional model is followed. Effective strategies are the result of analysing which kind of instructional approach is needed (directed, constructivist, single subject, interdisciplinary) for each learning situation and

using appropriate technology resources and integration strategies that help carry out the approach. (1997, p.23)

While we should be flexible, overall there is evidence of a need for sites that provide a constructivist learning environment. Research suggests that a constructivist learning environment enables learners to gain knowledge more effectively than an instructivist one (Sims, 2000; Pham, 1998; Wilson, 1996). Ambron reminds us that interactive learning is learner centred learning. He argues that "people find it easier to learn and remember knowledge visually, and that information will stick in a person's memory longer if it is obtained by the learner actively reaching out for and manipulating it rather than being fed passively". (1990a, p.17-18)

Creating dialogue

Simply placing existing written resources on a learning support site will only encourage the transmission mode of education. Laurillard (1993) provides an outline for a much more effective use of technology. She argues that teaching materials, audio, audiovisual multimedia and print must be used as integral parts of the teaching process rather than as supplements to it. Laurillard argues that “there is no room for mere telling, nor practice without description, nor experimentation without reflection, nor student action without feedback” (Laurillard, 1993, p 85). To make effective use of technology in education it is vital to devise ways of exploiting the potential of online learning to develop effective discussion. Learning advisers need to design forms of support that will ensure collaborative and meaningful dialogue between participants. Simply encouraging e-mail and bulletin or discussion boards may not be enough. These may simply create large amounts of information which become time consuming and unproductive. Such activities are devoid of any explicit learning opportunity and tend to be included as a complementary rather than an integral form of learning activity. Learning advisers need to create a support site that encourages students to share information related to the learning tasks.

Providing discipline specific learning support

All too often study skills are taught out of the context of the subject area in which the student is studying. Hicks and Leask (2000) point to the need for embedding learning

support in the subject area in which the student is learning. Chalmers and Fuller (1996) argue that integrated programs have been found to be more effective than separate learning strategies programs in affecting student learning outcomes. This is especially true in higher level thinking skills such as analysis and critical thinking. Tait and Entwistle (1996) criticise study skills advice that is taught separately from course content because of the difficulty experienced by students in transferring the skills into their own course context.

Working with faculty academic staff

Tinto's research (1987, 1995) shows that, regardless of the type of institution or the type of students, integration with faculty is a key factor in academic success. Nightingale (1988) also argues for a close relationship between faculty and learning support staff. While there are generic resources that can apply across a range of subject areas some skills are more deeply embedded in a field or discipline, and should be developed in conjunction with the discipline or the field, not apart from it.

Developing a learning support site in stages

Hicks and Leask (2000) argue that it is important to supply a range of resources so that students can access support that is both appropriate to their level of development as students and related to the requirements of the tasks they must complete. To begin with, it may be wise for learning advisers to be selective in going online with learning support. Advisers can place some resources on line for students to access and then move on to the next stage of making the site interactive. It would also be possible to target specific sections of the student population that require more intensive assistance in understanding academic culture.

Hicks, Reid and George (1999) have outlined a range of online approaches to the provision of learning support for students studying in online learning environments at the University of South Australia. Essentially they have developed three forms of online support for students: generic stand alone resources; parallel and adjunct resources closely aligned with the subject/course requirements; and integrated support developed as a result of close collaboration between academic and support staff.

Researching our assumptions

Although there are many online academic learning support sites there is very little literature detailing how these sites have been planned and constructed. While many higher education providers have placed learning support resources online it is also difficult to find any literature which contains evidence of a thorough and systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of such sites.

There are many opportunities for research to investigate the provision of learning support online. Two of the most important questions to ask are: how can we utilise the technology to do things that we could not do before and how can we use it to improve learning outcomes for students? To date there have been relatively few studies that have explicitly focused on how to adapt learning support to the changing learning environment in higher education. There have been even fewer studies that have dealt specifically with the development and delivery of online learning support for students studying in an online learning environment. There is a need for research to develop and guide new models of learning support provision that encompass this area of online learning.

Conclusion

The provision of academic learning support online creates some benefits and many challenges. The existing limited capabilities of the online medium and the considerable time and cost requirements of establishing an effective interactive site are considerable obstacles to the development of comprehensive sites. Despite these obstacles, learning advisers cannot simply wring their hands and say the challenge is too great! There is a danger of technology being used to merely strengthen the one way transmission mode of teaching. Learning advisers can help to prevent this by contributing their skills and knowledge to influence the design of supportive online learning environments.

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MAKING THE TRANSITION TO STUDYING IN ENGLISH: IS EXTRA TIME IN EXAMINATIONS FOR NESB STUDENTS A DESIRABLE OPTION?

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Tertiary study in a foreign language is an enormous challenge. The extent of this challenge is reflected in the performance of NESB students. NESB students have a higher failure rate than their ESB classmates and tend to be under-represented at the higher end of the grade spectrum, although over time, as they adjust culturally and acquire greater tertiary literacy skills, their performance tends to improve. Examinations, in particular, would appear to discriminate against NESB students, who take longer to process text in English than their ESB classmates. Allowing NESB students extra time in examinations for their first three semesters would appear to be a logical and equitable solution which would go some way towards addressing the disadvantage that they experience. However, there are strong bastions of resistance to this idea within universities: many academics and administrators do not accept the concept of positive discrimination; others claim that university admissions requirements

should exclude students who have limited English literacy skills; others claim that allowing extra time for some students is too complex administratively. Indeed, there may be more constructive ways to address the disadvantages faced by NESB students. This paper will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of allowing NESB students extra time in exams as a way of helping students make the transition to studying in a foreign language.

Keywords: NESB students, examinations, equity

The adjustment of NESB students to studying in Australia can be difficult. Although attitudes appear to have changed considerably over the past ten years, and universities are now much more inclusive learning environments, the fact remains that NESB students are still disadvantaged. Hawthorne (1999, p.51) maintains that this is no longer the case, as the gap between NESB and ESB success rates has reduced. Indeed, the success ratio for Australian NESB students is 0.96 (DETYA 1999). Nevertheless, NESB students, and particularly international NESB students, are still underrepresented at the higher end of the grade spectrum, and over-represented at the pass end of the spectrum (Wilson 2001, p.3). This disadvantage is particularly true in the first few semesters of NESB students' experience in tertiary study in Australia.

For equity reasons, universities need to address this problem. There is, of course, no single easy answer. A raft of strategies needs to be in place including, above all, providing student support and staff development. However, from a policy point of view, one way to address this problem is to allow NESB students extra time in exams. This is a highly contentious issue, and one which raises strong feelings within the University.

In this paper I will discuss the arguments for and against such a policy and make suggestions for LAS advisers who may be considering trying to introduce the concept into their own institutions.

Why allow extra time?

LAS advisers are well aware of the problems faced by NESB students. To some extent these difficulties are cultural. The cultural web underpinning education in Australia, the expected roles of teacher and student, the expected outcomes of education, even the construct of learning itself may all be new to students who do not have much experience of the Australian tertiary environment. Exams in particular may require new skills and approaches. Cargill and Chanock (2000) point out that ESB students may be facing similar challenges of adjustment. Students making the transition from school to university, or making the transition from one discipline to another, all have to acquire competence in new cultures of learning. However, NESB students, especially those newly arrived in Australia, often have a greater leap to make as they are adjusting not only to the discipline and the tertiary institution, but also to the national culture.

The difficulties faced by NESB students are also linguistic, as the cognitive load of working in a second, and especially a foreign language, is considerable. Anyone who has had the experience of studying in a foreign language will corroborate this. Although working in the new language becomes easier with time and experience, the transition stage can be very hard.

Research substantiates that exams, especially those requiring strong literacy skills will take longer for NESB students. In terms of reading, for example, Strother and Uljin (1987) showed that Chinese and Arabic speaking students took three times as long as native speakers to read a Computing Science text. NESB students' reading comprehension has also been shown to be less accurate than ESB students'. Farrell et al (1992) found that NESB students had an average score of 73% in an ACER-developed academic reading comprehension test, whereas ESB students scored 89% on average.

NESB reading difficulties are exacerbated in exams, particularly multiple-choice exams, as NESB readers typically rely on top-down reading strategies such as guessing meaning from context, and picking out main ideas. However, reading exam papers generally requires a bottom-up approach because little context is given, yet precise understanding is needed. In Farrell et al's study (1992), NESB students scored an average of 55% as compared to 79% for ESB students on bottom-up processing tasks. The complex grammatical forms of multiple choice questions, which often depend on tricky grammatical relationships such as double negatives, tense usage, and subtle use of modal verbs (might/ should etc), are thus particularly difficult for NESB students.

It is sometimes claimed that these difficulties do not apply in exams in Mathematics and Information Technology, as the linguistic load is less. However, the presentation of mathematical and computing problems often involves complex grammar, and may be very confusing for NESB students.

Writing also takes longer for NESB students. They face challenges both at the level of sentence grammaticality and text level coherence. At the level of coherence, a growing body of literature highlights cross-cultural differences in rhetorical organisation of ideas (Hinds 1987; Kaplan 1987; Kirkpatrick 1997). Students who are capable of writing well-organised, clearly expressed assignments may find it hard to compose coherent text under the time constraints of an exam. Unfortunately, there appears to be little research on the effect of time constraints on NESB students' writing. Kroll (1990) compared the essays of NESB students in a college writing class written in-class (with time constraints) and out-of-class (with no time constraints). She discovered that there was no significant difference in accuracy or in content. However, she did not ascertain how long students spent on their out-of-class essays or specify how severe were the time constraints of the in-class tasks. Further research needs to be undertaken in this area.

What are the precedents for extra time in exams for NESB students?

The practice of allowing extra time in exams for students with disabilities is well-established. However, it is much less common for NESB students. Bartlett (2000) conducted a survey via the Unilearn network and discovered three universities which have policies allowing NESB students extra time in exams: the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), the University of South Australia and Flinders University. In each case the extra time allowed is ten minutes/hour. Flinders University and the University of South Australia overcome any possible difficulties in defining who is eligible for extra time by allowing any students who self-identify as 'NESB' on enrolment to apply for extra time. UTS has a more complex system by which students have to apply through the ELSSA Centre. At UTS, students are only eligible for extra time in their first two semesters, or if they have been attending ELSSA workshops, for their first three semesters. Both systems are working well and have been well-received by the university community (Barthel, A., pers comm., 3/4/01; Barker, P., pers. comm., 21/8/01).

What are the arguments against allowing extra time?

Interestingly, some of the strongest opposition for allowing extra time in exams comes from students and graduates who themselves come from non-English speaking backgrounds. Their main argument is that they do not want special treatment; they would rather compete on equal terms with English-speaking background students. To me, this argument stems from a lack of understanding of the concept of equity. That is, in compensating for disadvantage, this policy would allow students to compete on a more equal basis. However, perhaps it also stems from the desire to avoid casting second language students as having some sort of disability.

Inevitably there are die-hards around the university who argue that, as there are specific English language admission requirements, special conditions for NESB students are unnecessary. If students cannot handle the exam conditions, that is because they should not be studying at university in the first place! In other words,

the admission requirements should be tightened up. The same people are likely to argue that if NESB students were seen to be given special privileges, there would be a backlash from English-speaking background students. Even more distressingly, this attitude is associated with a conviction that NESB students cheat widely on take home assignments and that exams are the only way to reveal their true worth!

An argument which is persuasive to senior management is that allowing extra time would impose an extra financial and administrative burden on the university. However, the scheme in place at University of South Australia, for example, involves minimal administration; and, as lecturers can choose how long their exams last and whether to hold an exam at all, the cost of extra time for employing invigilators would seem to be irrelevant.

A rather more confounding issue is that it is difficult to determine which NESB students need extra time. Some students who can be classified as NESB have actually attended school in Australia or other English-speaking environments for many years, and their language difficulties, if any, are more akin to their English-speaking background colleagues. Others who have been in Australia for many years and would not meet the DETYA definition of NESB (arrived in Australia less than 10 years ago) may be completely unfamiliar with academic English. Complex administrative arrangements like those in place at UTS can go some way towards overcoming this problem, but are not popular with the University administration. On the other hand, broadbrush arrangements like those of the University of South Australia may allow many students an unfair advantage.

From a pedagogic point of view, it can be argued that exams should not be set as a race against the clock. If exams are to have academic validity, care should be taken to ensure that they are not testing time and stress management, nor the ability to write legibly at speed. Instead, ample time should be allowed for all students to complete the exam tasks, no matter what their language background, learning style or handwriting ability.

However, perhaps the most compelling argument against allowing extra time for NESB students is that an extra ten minutes/hour is a token time and does little to compensate for the language and learning difficulties experienced by some NESB

students. Furthermore, students who have used inappropriate study techniques, such as relying on rote-learning, will certainly not be helped by this policy. For this reason, it is more important to focus on enhancing NESB students' skills rather than to reify their disadvantage.

Reflections

Allowing extra time in exams for NESB students is clearly a debatable concept. When I was asked to prepare a paper on the topic for my university I thought it would at least raise awareness of NESB issues, even if the idea itself was not accepted. The university-wide discussions which ensued were certainly very interesting and along the way revealed pockets of Hansenism which did not surprise anyone. In the end the proposal was turned down. I think there were four main reasons why the proposal was not embraced.

First of all, allowing extra time for NESB students in exams would introduce yet another complexity into the university bureaucracy. Any such proposal has therefore got to be as streamlined and straightforward as possible, and all the possible administrative loopholes have to be ironed out before the proposal is put forward for discussion. The proposal I made was based on the UTS model rather than the simpler, 'cleaner' University of South Australia model. The UTS model has the advantage of putting NESB students in direct contact with ELSSA (the Learning Centre), as students have to get approval from ELSSA before applying to their faculty for extra time in exams. A third semester of extra time is also dependent on attending ELSSA workshops. However, this model was perceived as administratively clumsy and too dependent on personal interpretation. There were also niggling questions such as 'What does a third semester mean?' 'What about part-time students?' Similar petty administrative questions about how to organise the extra time dogged the discussion and should have been resolved before my paper was circulated; for example, 'Won't the students be disturbed if some leave earlier than others?'

Second, as with any proposal in the university, it is always necessary to get high-level support before throwing it open to public discussion. At the University of

Canberra, it was unfortunate that the Pro Vice Chancellor who most strongly supported the concept left the University before the matter was resolved.

Third, there is simply not enough hard evidence to support the proposal. There is a need for much more research into NESB assessment issues in tertiary environments. Most obviously, there is the question of whether extra time in exams has any effect on NESB grades. We also need to know more about the performance of NESB students in different types of assessment: do some types of assessment (multiple choice exams for example) discriminate against NESB students? In addition, we need to know more about the effects of different kinds of preparation programs. For example, do academic literacy courses have a significant effect on NESB students' performance on exams, or would one-off examination preparation sessions have a comparable effect? It would also be important to establish which assessment items lead to the most effective learning outcomes. And the list goes on.

Finally, allowing NESB students extra time in exams is a bureaucratic solution to what is in reality a pedagogic problem. For this reason, raising staff awareness and developing students' academic skills are higher priorities than twitching university regulations. In particular, subject convenors need to be more aware of how to set exam papers which do not discriminate against students from non-English speaking backgrounds. This means using language which is clear, concise and free from obscure idiom; setting multiple choice questions which do not depend on tricky grammatical nuances; and allowing plenty of time for all students to complete the exam paper. LAS staff with expertise in language could assist by reviewing exam papers for their colleagues in the disciplines. A second important issue is for staff to understand that exams are not an appropriate arena for testing their students' knowledge of grammar. While it is acknowledged that good communication skills are one of the generic attributes expected of graduates, it is more appropriate to assess such skills in other ways, and to use exams as a means of testing discipline knowledge and analysis rather than grammatical competency. Lecturers also need to realise that it takes time and hard work to acquire high level academic English competency, and that the English language admission requirements are a starting point, not an end point. Finally, there is a need for more flexibility in assessment

procedures to accommodate different learning styles of both NESB and ESB students.

Students, too, whether NESB or not, need to be made fully aware of what to expect in exams; how their answers will be assessed; and how to prepare for the exams. Of course, there should also be opportunities and encouragement for students to strengthen their academic English skills through a wide range of support mechanisms - in particular, early referral of students who may be at risk. At the same time, the university community has to recognise that the 'medical model' - a 'dose' of English language - whether it is administered through an entrance test, an accredited English subject, workshops, or individual consultations, will not in itself be an answer to the difficulties of studying in a second language.

Conclusion

In conclusion, allowing extra time in exams is certainly a generous, inclusivist gesture towards NESB students. However, in terms of addressing equity, there are other more compelling, and less contentious, issues which LAS lecturers need to confront, particularly in terms of staff and student development. Proactive strategies of staff and student development will lead to long-term gains in terms of student learning outcomes. In contrast, introducing extra time in exams for NESB students may be seen as mere tokenism, or even a reification of disadvantage.

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ABSTRACTS

THE BUYERS AND SELLERS OF KNOWLEDGE: CHANGING IDENTITIES OF ACADEMIC LEARNING CENTRES IN THE AGE OF GLOBALISATION

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Over the last decade an increase in demand for access to tertiary qualifications from Australian universities has led to a questioning of language proficiency levels necessary to successfully undertake tertiary studies. This increase in demand is both externally driven, through the forces of globalisation and the marketing of degrees and internally motivated through the lure of revenue available from the enrolment of full fee-paying students.

The broadening of the student profile as a result of these changes has led to a scrutiny of language proficiency levels on entry and in relation to assessment procedures.

The tension between the need to offer courses to as wide a range of students as possible, to provide necessary support for those students and to ensure the maintenance of appropriate standards of scholarship places academic language and learning centers at the heart of an important debate over the direction of higher education in Australia in the 21st century.

This paper will present preliminary data and examine some of the issues related to the role of academic language centers in meeting the needs of students and faculties in a climate of pressure on the minimum language requirements for tertiary study at undergraduate and postgraduate level. The paper concludes with a recommendation that coordinated research needs to be undertaken across the tertiary education sector to monitor the progress of overseas full fee paying students entering via various pathways and determine the best practices for academic learning centers to meet their needs.

ACADEMICALLY SPEAKING: NEW IDENTITIES OR OLD REALITIES?

Alex Barthel
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Many students who come from language backgrounds other than English have considerable difficulties in speaking English. Difficulties exist at the discourse, the interactive, the morpho-syntactic as well as at the suprasegmental and paralinguistic levels.

This paper examines some of problems in spoken English faced by university students . Particular emphasis is placed on the problems faced by students from differing cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The presentation gives a brief analysis of the causes of the main pronunciation problems of South East Asian students.

Students of South East Asian backgrounds, speak languages (Cantonese, Vietnamese, etc.) which are based on suprasegmental and paralinguistic codes considerably different from English. This results in them having more serious pronunciation problems than students who speak languages, closer to English at the suprasegmental level (Danish, Dutch, German, etc.).

A range of academic contexts, formal and informal, where spoken language is the main communication channel is examined: these include seminar presentations, tutorial participation, casual conversation and 'administrative negotiations'. The role of formal tuition in spoken communication (at discourse, suprasegmental and segmental level) and several options to integrate the development of spoken discourse skills into courses will be discussed.

MAPPING THE CONCEPTUAL WORLD OF THE STUDENT WRITER

Colin Baskin
James Cook University, Cairns Campus

This paper is positioned within ongoing debates about the meaning and role of academic literacy in shaping and framing the academic and professional writing practices of student writers. It explores the relationships between literacy, individual writers and the academy, and points to the way that particular student groups describe academic writing practices, and in turn act upon their descriptions. The key to understanding what-counts-as-academic literacy is grounded in the social processes and practices that organise the 'everyday' world of the student. This world is explored initially through a content analysis of 175 student responses to 'what counts as good academic writing' and is confirmed using factor analysis. The emerging conceptual map represents an aggregated description of 'what-counts-as-good-academic-writing'. This description of good academic writing captures certain aspects of inter-subjectivity amongst student writers – its form, purpose and structure. Once embedded, this inter-subjectivity further enables student writers to collaborate in the construction of knowledge and practice relating to academic literacy. In mapping the conceptual world of the student writer, the paper offers a view of academic literacy as a socially constructed and signifying space. It is within this institutional space that opportunities reside for students to assume 'powerful' and/or 'less than powerful' identities' as writers and as members of the academic community.

"FINDING YOUR WAY": AN ONLINE PACKAGE FOR OFFSHORE STUDENTS

Colin Beasley and Jon Watts
Murdoch University

Increasing numbers of overseas students, many of whom speak English as a second or other language, are enrolled at Australian universities through twinning arrangements between Australian and Asian higher education institutions. These students usually study one or two years of their Australian degree at the twinned institution offshore and then come to Australia to complete their degrees. However, many of these students experience considerable difficulty adjusting to the transition to living and learning at their Australian university. This presentation details a collaborative online project between a language and learning professional and a disciplinary specialist to help prepare offshore international students for their later study onshore at the authors' university. The project explores notions of culture and cultural change and focuses on understanding and navigating differences between national cultures, and also between educational cultures so that students can better understand and meet the academic expectations of students in Australian universities. Although the project focuses initially on the needs of overseas students entering the authors' university in the second or third year of a degree majoring in media and communication studies, it hopefully can be used as a model for the development of equivalent packages for international students in other courses of study.

INTEGRATING ESL IN THE CURRICULUM AND IN THE FACULTY

Tracey Bretag
University of South Australia

Although content-based ESL has been advocated by practitioners in the field for over 15 years, very few universities in Australia offer such courses for credit*. One reason for the paucity of integrated ESL courses in most universities is that current tertiary infrastructures preclude effective inter-faculty collaboration. Content specialists usually work in their particular departments, and language instructors are most often found in separately housed student support centres. Researchers who advocate a content-based ESL curriculum invariably highlight effective inter-faculty collaboration as being central to the success of the course. This paper will provide a brief overview of the development of content-based ESL courses in the School of International Business at the University of South Australia, and suggest ways that similar courses could be established in other institutions.

ENHANCING ESSAY FEED-BACK USING 'MINDTRAIL' SOFTWARE: EXACTLY WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE IN STUDENT DEVELOPMENT?

Margaret Cargill
Adelaide University

As part of my changing identity as an LAS lecturer, I find myself working with lecturers to help them provide students with worthwhile feedback on essays. This is a demanding task, particularly when classes are large. Comments in the margins take time to write, and markers often find themselves repeating comments on many papers. With multiple markers, consistency of approach to feedback is elusive. 'Mindtrail'" software offers lecturers the opportunity to construct a detailed 'knowledge tree' based on their assessment criteria, so that when assessing an essay a marker can select appropriate marks and comments from a pre-existing bank, with the option of editing bank items if necessary. This process leads to the production of a detailed printed report for each student, which may include directions to appropriate learning development resources. Limited initial experience with this software during 2000 suggested that its use could improve the degree to which first year students improved their marks on a re-submittable essay. However, it was unclear what component/s of the new approach were making the difference. This presentation reports on a small comparative study in Semester 1, 2001 which aimed to differentiate between the effect of using the software to provide printed reports to students, and that of using the same detailed criteria but marking the assignments 'by hand'. As well as reporting on the study findings, the presentation introduces the software package and discusses its strengths and weaknesses as a tool for providing essay feedback in the university context.

STUDENT IDENTITIES IN TIMES OF CHANGE

Erst Carmichael
University of Western Sydney

Student identities undergo enormous change on entry into the university system. Many find the change in expectations from high school or TAFE overwhelming and the alienation of a large institution adds to this. Our work as LAS advisers, whether as lecturers/tutors in discipline specific contexts, generalists in workshop situations or one-to-one teachers of tertiary literacy/numeracy, is limited to some extent because we are part of the institution. With the move toward technologising and globalising university study it is increasingly important that new students have access to a non-threatening, informal learning situation that will provide them with non-institutional, student driven support. Such a program exists at UWS and has been found to provide first year students with sufficient encouragement to continue with their courses, and often to develop their understanding of academic expectations, despite the chaos of the ongoing restructuring situation they find themselves in. Much of the peer mentor program at UWS has been co-ordinated by the Learning Centre, and has been a rewarding experience for those involved.

FROM MYSTERY TO MASTERY

Kate Chanock
La Trobe University

The identity that universities assign to their students is a mystifying one; it moves continually from novice to expert, from out-group to in-group and back, sometimes by shifts so subtle that students have trouble recognizing them, sometimes by sickening lurches from which they have difficulty recovering. For example, students are expected to write as experts, but are marked as novices. They are expected to "invent the university" (Bartholemae 1985) when they could be oriented to its culture. They are asked for creativity but penalized for departing from convention. This paper looks at the various ways in which university teaching positions the learner, and the alienating effects of inconsistency in this regard. It goes on to suggest ways in which LAS advisers might help to clarify the students' role as novice members of a discipline, and introduce some discussion of this into mainstream teaching practices.

HALL OF MIRRORS: REFLECTIONS ON A MULTI-CAMPUS LANGUAGE AND LEARNING PROGRAM

Rosemary Clerehan, Christine Orsmond and Anne Wilson
Monash University

This paper presents a broad picture of a multi-campus language and learning program which operates across six Australian campuses and one South African campus, with links to still another in Malaysia. The model of delivery which has been adopted is a "mixed model", incorporating aspects of all four models identified as operating in the Australian context (McLean, Surtie, Elphinstone & Devlin, 1995).

The paper considers how the program has evolved since its expansion to all campuses in 1996, taking into account theoretical, pedagogical, policy, political and strategic perspectives. The ways external and internal forces act and interact on the service will be examined. A particular focus of the paper is how these forces might shape a language and academic skills program which echoes the Australian model on an "overseas" campus. A language and academic skills program is clearly affected by changing identities of many kinds, but can also be an agent of change.

The question is raised as to how a changing identity might be managed to facilitate maximum opportunity for program growth and development. The paper suggests finally that, with our understanding of the relationship of the generic to the specific (Taylor, 2000), language and learning units are well-placed to adapt to the kinds of change described.

CHANGING IDENTITIES: LAS ADVISERS

Gail Craswell and Annie Bartlett
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Language and Academic Skills (LAS) advising in Australia has, in the last ten years, emerged as an identifiable profession within the tertiary education sector. That emergence has been the result of intense research and reflection, not only in terms of advisers' roles and status, but also in terms of understanding the students with whom we work and their LAS needs. The resultant changes have challenged and extended our fundamental conceptions of the roles and status of LAS advisers, their practice and profession. However, such changes have been largely undocumented, and, arguably, little attention has been given to developing a comprehensive framework for LAS pedagogy. In tracing the emergence of the LAS profession and evaluating the changing identity of LAS advisers in terms of their roles and status, we attempt to reconceptualise the LAS profession with a view to emphasising its multidisciplinary nature. We also take the preliminary step of outlining, in this discussion paper, a framework for LAS pedagogy.

ROLES, RELATIONSHIPS AND RESPONSIBILITIES: CHANGING LECTURER AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

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When students' and teachers' beliefs and expectations about their respective roles and relationships are significantly different, misunderstandings may occur which can have a negative impact on academic outcomes (Harris and Thorpe, 1999; Barker, 1997) and can seriously undermine a student's sense of identity. This paper discusses the results of a survey administered at the start of first semester to twenty -nine international postgraduate coursework students and twenty of their lecturers, which identified a number of differences in belief between the lecturers and students about their respective roles and responsibilities. Written comments by both lecturers and students , which indicate that expectations may be mismatched, are compared. Some ways in which academic skills advisers might assist students to become aware of these differing expectations and adjust to a new cultural context are discussed.

CHANGING IDENTITIES: LANGUAGE & ACADEMIC SKILLS

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Events in communication have historically made a tremendous impact on the world around us. Both the telegraph and telephone had significant ramifications on global awareness. With their creation, they changed forever our lives and how we communicate. Today, in the 21st century, as the world embraces unprecedented advances in communication technology, we are seeing the creation of a culture born with a global identity unlike any we have seen before. The changes in the way we communicate globally have necessarily affected the language and academic skills necessary to succeed in today's world. Just as technology is in a state of constant metamorphosis, so are the skills needed to utilize it. Education is, and has always been, the purveyor of change. It is incumbent upon educators not only to understand the immensity of the changes occurring in our global communication, but also to be able to recognize how this communication affects the changing identities and need of instruction in language and academic skills, and to be able to meet the challenge of the 21st century.

MAKE LIKE A CHAMELEON

Kate Deller-Evans, Chris Klinger, Salah Kutieleh, Robyn Najar, Valli Rao, Elizabeth Weatherford, Peter Zeegers

It is a paradoxical statement that perhaps the one constant in our identities is change. Higher education is experiencing a period of unprecedented transformation and identities within universities are responding accordingly. While academics are facing the question of changing identities, learning advisers seem to be facing the challenge in double measure. Not only do we face with the rest of the university community the challenges posed by issues such as globalisation, restructuring and new technologies, we also have to address the question of what do we hope to achieve as a result of chameleon-like behaviour? For example, the perception of Learning Centres as peripheral to the student learning, or Centres which are academic units grounded in learning/teaching and research. The relationship between the identity of Learning Centres and the identity of Learning Advisers is a pivotal issue to this.

This presentation, will discuss one example of the impact of the changing identity of Learning Advisers on the identity of a Learning Centre. The change has resulted in the Learning Centre moving away from an auxiliary unit into an academic unit grounded in both learning/teaching and research. As a result of this, there has been a change in how the university community perceives the Learning Centre and its role in education. For example, greater diversity in student support, greater involvement in the teaching of credit courses, broader scope for program development and postgraduate supervision. In this presentation we will also discuss the impact of these changing identities in terms of the future pathways they appear to be leading us into.

TEACHING GENRES IN THE DISCIPLINES : CAN STUDENTS LEARN THE LABORATORY REPORT GENRE ON-SCREEN

Helen Drury
University of Sydney

Successful written communication in the disciplines is highly valued in tertiary assessment processes and is a preparation for professional life. Yet, the challenge remains to find an effective way of teaching this skill within varying discipline and institutional contexts. As institutions try to meet the needs of a changing student population, online forms of "learning" have been welcomed. However, can this mode provide students with new insights into how to write the genres of their disciplines and facilitate their understanding of the purpose and context of different text structures?

Online courseware that aims to teach writing skills needs to be informed by both applied linguistics and learning theories. Within applied linguistics, genre based approaches to teaching the language of the disciplines are now widely accepted. This approach can provide learners with generalised, systematic

guidelines about how to create meaningful and purposeful texts, although each student will create their own individual text. Genre theory has also been used to describe and develop approaches to teaching writing which emphasize a communicative, purposeful and socially based theory of learning.

This paper will illustrate the application of genre theory in the design of an on-screen program which aims to teach students how to write a laboratory report in three different disciplines, namely, biology, biochemistry and chemical engineering. This program provides guidelines, models, interactive exercises and feedback and takes into account the genre variations between these disciplines. Outcomes of a pilot evaluation of part of the program will be discussed.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IDENTIFIED AS CUSTOMERS: THEIR EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS

Julianne East
La Trobe University

Currently in Australia, higher education is urged to operate more commercially, and in these times of change students are identified as customers. University marketing promises quality of service and there is vigorous competition for the enrolment of international students. In this paper it is argued that universities are now expected to change to meet students' needs and that international students in their identity as customers will have expectations and perceptions of quality service. While much is written about the needs of international students, little has been written about how international students perceive their experience and there is only limited research on international students as customers. The paper reviews customer concepts in universities and reports on the perceptions of a group of La Trobe University international students. The data were gathered from group discussion, questionnaire and interview. The students had much to say that was insightful about what they value about the Australian university experience and what they expected of this experience. They wanted to be assured of the quality of the teaching, wanted the University to respond to their educational needs, wanted to improve their English language skills and wanted to experience Australian culture and mix with local students. Not surprisingly, there were gaps between the students' expectations and what they perceived to be the quality of the educational service that they actually received.

TRAVELLING UP THE LIFELONG LEARNING CURVE: A REGIONAL ODYSSEY

Bronwyn J. Ellis
University of South Australia

Providing language and learning support on a regional campus of a metropolitan-based university over the past twelve years has entailed witnessing and responding to myriad changes: in the support unit structure and nomenclature, the institution, the campus, the student body, the region. There has been a continual rethinking of role and focus for the campus itself and its staff. Changing layers of discourses have included: equity, inclusivity, student-centred learning, flexible delivery, internationalisation and economic rationalism. The paper considers the impact of these changes in emphasis on work in language and academic skills support and the tensions between competing discourses. It highlights the importance for those involved in academic skills development to be themselves lifelong learners, able to respond to new needs in changing circumstances. This is, in fact, an imperative, if they are to continue to assist students to be engaged in a transforming learning experience.

BEYOND BIRMINGHAM: LAS ADVISER AS INDEPENDENT SUBJECT SPECIALIST?

Jan Fermelis
Deakin University

The controversial issue of whether EAP should be 'common core' and/or 'subject-specific' is closely allied to those of where the identity of LAS advisor is positioned on the continuum between general academic and specific, and whether the LAS support is best located within the faculty or provided in a language centre context. This paper argues that it is possible for the LAS adviser to effectively occupy a more independent, subject-specific position which goes beyond that outlined in the Birmingham model of co-operation, collaboration and team-teaching (Dudley-Evans & St John 1998, Dudley-Evans 2001). The case of one Australian university is described and analysed in terms of its business faculty-based language and academic support program, which includes unit-for-credit study and an extensive program of regular, subject-specific tutorials, and which was established in response to the perceived needs of its high population of international students. In some instances the LAS support has extended even further, and incorporated the undertaking of one-to-one tutorial sessions, mainstream subject tutorials, and subject lectures. This has been interpreted as a reflection of the LAS adviser's evolution as de facto subject specialist and also recognition by local students of the additional dimensions to content delivery able to be provided by the LAS subject specialist. It is suggested that there are precise professional and situational requirements for this level of teaching independence to function appropriately and effectively, but that the academic skills and pedagogic qualities of the LAS adviser are able to greatly enrich the total teaching-learning experience. The question is finally raised as to where exactly the demarcation lies in such cases between the identities of LAS adviser and independent subject specialist.

FEAR INTO FUN — LEARNING BY LISTENING, HEARING, ACKNOWLEDGING AND UTILISING ABORIGINAL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE

Russell Gluck, Tammy Anderson, Jaymee Demos, Rachael Challenor, Liana Fenton-Kerr, Wilma Vialle
University of Wollongong

This paper reports a process of creating safe places to learn through encouraging people to speak, be heard and acknowledged. The process dissolves students' fears with fun. It is raw, in your face and 'off-the-wall', theoretically sound, practical and most importantly underpinned by the intention of 'brokering' relationships that value and benefit all stakeholders in the learning environment.

10am — at Russell's office in the Aboriginal Education Centre. The cry is heard "I can't do this assignment, I haven't got a clue what they want or how they want it. I just don't think like they do. I sit in ***their*** lectures, tutorials, and do the reading. I try and play ***their*** game — ***shit it's just not happening***!" Panic, fear of failure, being failed and self-loathing for taking the risk to study is full-on. 'I should never have come here! God! The Uni made a mistake letting me in! And now everyone is going to find out! Shit I could just run away and die!

10.15am — the student and Russell are singing, dancing, drawing and, acting out.

11.30am — they appear to be having fun. It sure as hell is noisy as the process spills out of the office into the passageway.

Noon — the assignment is within reach.

End of week — the event is triangulated with other students' experiences and used to reflect on the curriculum process.

Following Friday — the rich data contained in the students' experiences is used to broker relationships with the subject coordinator to benefit all learners and teachers.

NUMERACY IN THE WORKPLACE: THE CASE OF NURSING AND IMPLICATIONS FOR LEARNING ASSISTANCE

Barbara A Giorgio
Australian Catholic University
Mohan Chinnappan
University of Wollongong

Historically, nursing was seen as vocational not academic. As a relatively recent arrival in the university sector, nursing represents the increasing diversification of knowledge as vocational disciplines become academic. The problem of standards in a field like nursing is compounded by a significant increase in resident and overseas non-native speaker and mature age student enrolments. There seems to be a consequent misalignment between the demands of the workplace and these students' levels of numeracy and literacy. The most widely documented consequence of a lack of nursing competence is in drug administration errors. While nurse educators carry the major responsibility for training nurses, academic advisors play a significant role. Students feel overwhelmed by the linguistic and mathematical demands of medical discourse and are anxious about the real possibility of failure. Lecturers are overwhelmed by the sheer neediness of these students, and are frustrated by the magnitude of their problems. Academic advisors need to be more multi-skilled than ever in meeting the demands placed on them. They have to identify the knowledge gaps, bridge theory and practice and support both linguistic and mathematical problem solving. The present study investigates the nature of the knowledge gaps these nursing students present with when attempting to solve drug calculation problems. The results indicate an inability to conceptualize the problem both mathematically and linguistically. Some recommendations are made for the continuing language development of these students such that they might graduate, well equipped to meet the demands of the future health-care work-place.

INSTITUTIONAL BENEFITS OF CURRICULUM INTEGRATED LEARNING DEVELOPMENT

Greg Hampton
University of Wollongong

Previous studies of the impact of curriculum integrated learning development at the University of Wollongong have indicated that such programs significantly improve students' tertiary literacy. In the broader institutional context of teaching and learning policies and processes of quality assurance, such programs might also be expected to contribute to student progress, retention and completion rates. The impact of learning development programs on these indicators at the University of Wollongong was evaluated by monitoring the academic progress and retention of cohorts of commencing students. In some faculties, participation in the programs was significantly associated with improved retention and pass rates. The benefits of such programs to the institution are elaborated in terms of an institutional strategy for facilitating students' transitions throughout the stages of their undergraduate degree.

MAKING CONNECTIONS:THE CHANGING IDENTITY OF LEARNING SUPPORT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Margaret Hicks and Rigmor George
University of South Australia

As universities move into the 21st century they are experiencing many changes including globalisation, corporatisation, internationalisation, the introduction of new technologies and increased accountability. This has led to a more diverse student population, an increase in technology facilitated delivery, more corporate styles of institutional management, higher staff/student ratios and closer links to industry-based needs. These changes have had an impact on all university staff and students and have required staff who work in learning support and professional development units to reconfigure their work in ways which are more strategic.

In response to these changes, the student support area at the University of South Australia underwent a significant change at the beginning of 2000. This not only involved a renaming of the centres but a change in the practices of all professional staff within this group (learning advisers, counsellors, careers staff, international student advisers and professional developers). This paper will outline the reasons that led to this move and how Senge's notion of the 'learning organisation' has been used as a theoretical framework to develop the change. A description of the changes that have taken place will be given and in particular the work of learning advisers will be highlighted.

MOVING FROM FACE-TO-FACE TO ONLINE WORKSHOPS TO SUPPORT NESB STUDENTS IN THE CLINICAL PRACTICUM: INTRODUCING A MORE CRITICAL APPROACH

Virginia Hussin
University of South Australia

Students in the clinical practicum need to engage with the multiliteracies and multi-layered identities of the workplace, the community and the academic institution. Here multiliteracies are framed as, ‘social practices that are complex, multifaceted and ideologically loaded’ (Baynham 1995, p. 8). The focus of this paper is the support work done by a Learning Adviser with non-English Speaking Background students in the Health Sciences to help develop oral communication and workplace literacy for the clinical placement. The paper describes the face-to-face workshops which use ‘orders of discourse’ (Fairclough 1995) in their design and which focus on the development of ‘communication strategies’ in spoken interactions (Faerch & Kasper 1983; Tarone 1983). The paper then identifies some of the features of the online versions which, while encouraging interactivity and responding to a cohort of students who increasingly require flexibly delivered modes of support, present particular challenges.

The paper draws on the writing of critical literacy researchers to address the question: How can ‘critical literacy’ approaches be incorporated into online student support work? In particular, the paper uses the New London Group’s Pedagogy of Multiliteracies (2000) to analyse two online workshops, finding examples of the first and second stages of this pedagogy, ‘situated practice’ and ‘overt instruction’ but further opportunities for the development of the important third and fourth stages of ‘critical framing’ and ‘transformed practice’.

INTERDEPENDENT ACADEMIC IDENTITIES: LANGUAGE AND LEARNING PRACTITIONERS AND THE SUBJECT WHO WRITES.

Bronwyn James
University of Wollongong
David McInnes
University of Western Sydney

Starting with questions of how a language and learning practitioner might assist a student to write in ways demanded of them by a university, we argue that writing pedagogies at an undergraduate and postgraduate level must take account of and work with the complex of informing and transforming conditions of student identity and subjectivity.

The identities-in-practice of language and learning practitioners have an interdependent relation to the identities-in-practice of the students with whom they work. In exploring this interdependence and its implications for writing pedagogy, we draw a distinction between the writing subject (a self that writes like an academic) and the subject who writes (an idea of self which exceeds the notion of the writing subject through a recognition of the subject's embodied, affective and gendered history). We argue that consideration of the pedagogical interdependence needs to be seen through the experience of students as more than simply writing subjects. To do this, we work with an idea of the subject who writes.

A crucial question in our consideration is, are new and developing subjectivities, as produced in and through the university context seamless and replicable or do they embody and challenge traces of the emotional, cognitive and experiential history of the individuals learning to be academics?

We take an approach which allows us to explore the ways in which institutions attempt to 'discipline' students into their disciplines and we make the claim that this experience of being 'disciplined' is one which (for the subject who writes) exceeds linguistic, cognitive and textual competence.

FROM THE INSIDE OUT: CHANGING OUR IDENTITY

Gwynneth Jansen
Manukau Institute of Technology

The post-compulsory education and training (PCET) sector in Australasia is in a state of flux. This fluidity is often seen as threatening, sweeping student support services aside in its wake. There is, however, another way to view the new environment. The more fluid an environment is, the more likely it is that opportunities will present themselves and that worthwhile changes can be made provided an appropriate analytical tool is used. This paper begins with a brief overview of the changes in the PCET sector in Aotearoa/New Zealand and describes some of the implications for academic support services. In the second section the paper will describe how to use Johnson and Scholes' (1997) cultural web analysis as a tool to document an organisation's culture. The final section will discuss how the team at the Learning Centre at Manukau Institute of Technology in South Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand used this tool to examine and change the centre's identity to become an academic partner rather than an institutional casualty.

GENERIC ATTRIBUTES: AN AGENDA FOR REFORM OR CONTROL?

Janet Jones
University of Sydney

In the last decade, the concept of a set of generic skills, qualities and attributes that support lifelong learning has become firmly placed on the national and international higher education agenda. Higher education institutions in the UK, Canada, the USA, South Africa and Australia, in response to external pressures from the employment and government sectors, have been involved in major efforts to improve the quality of graduate outcomes. Whether this effort has been, or indeed should be, driven by educational, economic, political or social factors is a complex issue and one which continues to stimulate considerable debate across the higher education, employment and government sectors. Critics argue that the pursuit of the goal of graduates with desirable generic attributes and skills, equipped to participate effectively in society for life, is either unrealistic (Kemp and Seagraves 1995; Drummond, Nixon & Wiltshire 1997; Preston 1999) or a 'wasteful chimera-hunt'…which 'should now be abandoned' (Hyland and Johnson 1998, p.163). However, institutional policies and statements of generic attributes have led to changes in the curriculum and pedagogy of both academic departments and learning centres, as universities race to redefine their concept of 'graduateness' to stake out their market niche. This paper is intended as a background paper on key issues in the generic attributes agenda in Universities in Australia. The impact of this agenda on learning centres will form the basis for discussion at the conference presentation.

STAFF AND STUDENT ROLES IN CENTRAL AND FACULTY-BASED LEARNING SUPPORT: CHANGING PARTNERSHIPS

Janet Jones, Helen Bonanno andKaren Scouller
University of Sydney

The changing face of universities today reflects their various responses to pressures both external and internal to the institution. External pressures include the exponential expansion of knowledge and the new technologies, the marketisation of education, combined with shrinking government funding and increased accountability. Within the university, factors such as increasing student diversity and internationalisation, institutional devolution and restructuring along with decreased funding and a renewed focus on quality assurance in teaching have changed the way learning centres and their staff support students at a central level and within faculties. This paper will use case studies of the work of the Learning Centre at the University of Sydney to explore some of the challenges facing both forms of learning support and the responses we are making to these challenges. In the provision of central learning support our responses have included the evolution of a comprehensive and more flexible program and the increased refinement of skills development and learning pathways. The changing nature of Faculty requests for student learning support has meant a shift away from an 'ideal' model where learning development is embedded into the subject curriculum. This has resulted in a degree of compromise in the way in which we deliver learning support to Faculties and in the partnerships we create.

THE PEDAGOGY AND PRACTICE OF ONLINE ESL CREDIT SUBJECTS

Jennie Lynch
La Trobe University

The identities of both lecturers and students in Universities are being challenged as their roles in the teaching and learning process are changing. This paper examines how Internet Based Learning can provide for best practice within three principles of learning: fostering a critical and reflective approach to learning, encouraging independent and collaborative learning and motivating students. It reports on the reflections of both students and lecturer in an IBL credit subject at La Trobe University. It concludes that there is a degree of conflict between the pedagogical and practical issues in IBL.

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF IDENTITY: A CASE STUDY

Rosalind Martins
University of Western Sydney

As university students, particularly non-recent school leavers, re-position their lives according to the challenges of higher education, there are concurrent changes to their sense of identity. This paper reports on a case study of three students, their experiences of tertiary study, and their sense of identity. There are many different theoretical frameworks that can be used to investigate the experience of higher education on the construction of identity; this paper looks at how the case study data provides links to several areas, including issues of gender, socioeconomic and educational disadvantage and empowerment. Some of these issues are introduced in the light of the students' changed and evolving perspectives on their lives.

STUDENT IDENTITIES IN TIMES OF CHANGE

Bernadette McGowan, Ann-Marie Parkes, Robyn Lance, Beverley McVilley, Jan Manners, Michelle Frank, Stewart McKinney, Roz Dunn
Charles Sturt University

Charles Sturt University, a multi-campus, regional university, comprises diverse student cohorts. It is the role of the Learning Skills Advisers (LSAs) to meet the learning needs of the student body. In order to address these needs effectively, student identities need to be recognised and acknowledged. Internationalisation, globalisation, increased accountability and online services require different responses from universities in the way they foster and encourage lifelong learning within learning communities. This paper will be co-written by team players from the Wagga Wagga, Goulburn, Albury, Bathurst, and Dubbo Campuses. Each member will contribute information and anecdotal evidence regarding respective student cohorts and, due to the knowledge obsolescence of five years, will reflect upon past, current and predicted programs in relation to acknowledging changing student identities and, hence, meeting changing student needs.

Student cohorts to be discussed will be restricted to include Distance Education students and International students. External contexts, in combination with developments in related fields, have an impact on our identities as LSAs within our institutions. Learning Skills Advisers are now further challenged by the inconstant identities of learners during this time of continuous change.

AN AUTHORITATIVE CURRICULUM IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

Bernard McKenna and Glen Thomas
Queensland University of Technology

Ironically, employers perceive that university graduates are deficient in independent and critical thought, the very skills that many universities abandoned in their attempt to vocationalise themselves. While vocationalising, universities have also shifted to a consumer-based model of educational delivery. These changes have been occurring within a complex of events and discourses, such as globalisation, reduced government expenditure on education, changed patterns of labour formation, technological development, and neo-liberal individualism. Unfortunately, anti-intellectual managerialism, credentialism, and inappropriate neo-liberal ideology have forced upon academics quite inappropriate models of what a university should be. Nevertheless, this current "universities crisis" has forced a reconsideration what it is that universities are supposed to do. Historically, they have been centres of learning, research sites, and credentialing authorities. This paper suggests that universities must re-consider their role in the credentialing process in terms of their fundamental roles of contributing to an intelligent and informed citizenry; providing intellectual and artistic development, engagement and reflection; and developing versatile intellects. More specifically, the paper identifies higher order cognitive skills of synthesis and evaluation, as well as a coherent program of moral awareness that should be built into a university curriculum.

LAS CENTRE IDENTITIES AND PRACTICES WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION: FRAGMENTS FOR NEGOTIATION

Gavin Melles
Melbourne University

The teaching of language and academic skills is diffused across higher education insitutions and is not uniquely located in LAS. This means that a discussion about identities and futures of 'LAS' in times of change is in itself problematic. Likewise, the discourses around centre identities within faculties, the role of technology and the web, and responses to an increasingly diverse student body float across insitutions with no privileged convergence on LAS. So it is necessary first to acknowledge that 'our' identity is still very much open to negotiation and contestation and that the insitutional fragmentation of LAS practices has consequences for a workable identity and a coherent response to times of change. I use a recent shift from New Zealand to Australia across two language centres, some postructural 'scaffolding', and representations of current practices and discourses to try to locate some responses to these questions and their implications for LAS professional identity practice, and organisation within institutions.

CHASING THE LEARNING CURVE: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT STAFF WHO WORK WITH INDIGENOUS TERTIARY STUDENTS IN OFF CAMPUS STUDY CENTRES

Suzanne Mills
University of South Australia

Off campus study centres have played a crucial role in providing supportive learning environments for Indigenous students in regional centres throughout South Australia for over two decades. Many of these students have achieved university access via special entry procedures, they are of mature age and have cultural, community and family commitments that make moving to city campuses difficult. While students undertake their programs via flexible learning, each study centre is to some extent a microcosm of the distant metropolitan university. Academic support staff work with students enrolled in an expanding range of programs to facilitate the development of academic and linguistic skills that pave the way towards independent learning. However, the learning environment itself is undergoing rapid and continuous change with increasing reliance on new technologies in teaching and access to learning resources. The challenges faced by off campus staff in keeping abreast of the new technologies while at the same time continuing to foster the development of students' academic skills in these dynamic circumstances are outlined. Strategies developed by staff are considered in terms of their intercultural context.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A CRITICAL VOICE IN THE WRITING OF INTERNATIONAL POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

Jane Moodie
Monash University

International postgraduate students from non-English speaking backgrounds are sometimes highly regarded experts who are experienced writers of academic genres in their first language. It can be very difficult for them to maintain that expert identity in their writing in English as they are often uncertain about what is an appropriate voice to adopt as a student in a western academic environment. Their lack of familiarity with the expectations of their new discourse communities makes it particularly difficult for them to write reviews of the literature where they need to express critical evaluation and to make appeals to values shared with their readers. These difficulties are demonstrated in a case study of an Indonesian postgraduate student in the Engineering Faculty at Monash University. Issues in the development of a critical voice in this student's writing are discussed.

FROM OPERATIVES TO STRATEGIC PARTNERS:CHANGING IDENTITIES OF LAS ADVISERS

Judith Morgan
Monash University

As tertiary education organisations continue to shape themselves within the corporate bureaucratic model, anecdotal evidence suggests that LAS staff are frequently being identified as belonging in the base sector of the managerial pyramid, that is as operatives or first line managers, principally focused on the technical aspects of producing the finished product. This perception also suggests that LAS lecturers work consistently within a behaviourist, objectivist paradigm, as ' mechanics of knowledge transfer' (von Glasersfeld, 1995b). The first section of this paper discusses a thesis writing program for a small cross cultural group of honours students from a School of Network Computing. The program aimed at not only developing the academic writing and presentation skills of the students to support them through the thesis writing process, but also establishing within the group a strong sense of collegiate, a sense of identity as young scholars. To achieve this aim, the principles of radical constructivism (von Glasersfeld, 1995b, 1996; Mayer, 1996, Gergen, 1995; Driver et al., 1994) were incorporated into the teaching program. The program concluded with a formal conference, organised by the students at which they presented their research proposals. The second section of the paper analyses the effectiveness of the program based on the evaluative responses of students, supervisors, other academic staff who had attended the student conference, and the LAS lecturer. The paper concludes with the argument that this model can assist in changing the perception of LAS staff as operatives or technical experts to that of strategic partners working with faculties, departments and schools to develop a sense of community and commitment within their postgraduate students.

A TEXT-BASED APPROACH TO TEACHING DOCTORAL WRITING WORKSHOPS

Cynthia D. Nelson and Caroline San Miguel
University of Technology, Sydney

Academic literacy and learning centres seem to be contributing increasingly to the education of postgraduate research students, often through writing workshops. In this paper we argue that research education can be enhanced through text-based workshops which involve facilitating inquiry about the choices writers make and the effects of these choices on readers. The paper draws on a current research project that investigates professional doctorate writing. This research has emerged from our experiences over three years of designing, delivering and evaluating doctoral writing workshops in the professional doctorate program of the Faculty of Nursing, Midwifery and Health at the University of Technology, Sydney. We describe the pedagogic approach we have developed and illustrate this approach through a sample workshop task. Of particular interest in this task is how students negotiate their own changing identities in their texts as they shift toward writing for academic as well as professional readers. This paper may interest those who work with students who are undertaking research degrees or degrees linked to professional practice. More generally, it may interest those who use student texts in teaching writing.

DOING IT TOGETHER: THE PAINS AND GAINS OF COLLABORATING TO PRODUCE ONLINE RESOURCES

Kerry O'Regan
University of South Australia

One of the recent changes within the University of South Australia has been the re-invention of teaching and learning support together with counselling services to form a unit called Learning Connection. Another major change has been an increasing emphasis on online provision of services and resources. These two changes have themselves brought subsequent changes in work practice for Learning Advisers within the University. The requirement to produce online resources has brought what we do very much

into the public domain; no longer is our work something that takes place privately between individuals behind closed doors. Online workshops and downloadable resources are there for the world to see and are vigorously promoted by Learning Connection to the University community. The pressure to quickly produce a comprehensive suite of high quality online resources led the Learning Advisers' team to work collaboratively on their production. This has raised a number of professional issues in terms of principle and process including: articulating and resolving implicit and explicit views of teaching and learning; developing effective ways of writing collaboratively and of respectfully engaging in extensive and rigorous peer reviews; and resolving the tensions associated with intellectual property and individual, group and corporate ownership of the materials produced. This paper draws on some of the literature relating to collaborative writing and peer review; relates the experiences of those involved in the process of collaborative production at the University of South Australia and suggests ways in which this process may involve minimal pain and maximal gain.

CONSTRUCTION OF STUDENT IDENTITY

Steve Price
Monash University

This paper offers tentative remarks on the possible role certain acts may have in the process of student identity formation and discourse acquisition. These acts will be referred to as ***performative*** acts, even though they are not identical with Austin's (1975) definition of a performative. This paper attempts to show some limitations of approaches that focus on the ways in which social and ideological structures and concomitant distributions of power embedded in discourse content and form position learners as they engage with a particular discourse. Such approaches focus on the subjective effects of such positioning, and therefore argue that an awareness of those effects can empower the individual to free themselves from such subjective effects and take up identity positions more to their choosing. By identifying the identity positions a text implicitly confers on reader and writers (and others) by the selection and organisation of its content, a reader enabled to resist that positioning. Understanding and awareness thus bring emancipatory potential. However, the position advanced in this paper is that performative acts do not find representation in the content and form of a discourse. They are acts that operate at an intersubjective level and enable the response to the discourse itself, and as such, precede and are not mediated by the discourse content or form itself. Such positioning then is not identified through the process of awareness usually involved, for instance, in the writings on critical language awareness that focus on the way in which identities and social positioning is embedded in discourse content and form.

LOSING IDENTITY: A TEMPORARY PROBLEM FOR SINGLE-SEMESTER EXCHANGE STUDENTS

Mary Lou Ridsdale
Swinburne University of Technology

I cannot be myself, let alone write for academic assessment. I've sort of lost myself". These remarks of an Australian study-abroad student in France are a painful reminder that one semester, or even one year, is a very short time to create an identity in a foreign language. This short presentation does not report formal research but is based on discussions with two students on one-semester study-abroad programs - an Australian in France and an Italian in Australia. Relatively short-term periods of undergraduate study in foreign countries are becoming a feature of international education the world over, and this presentation provides something of a reality check on the excitement and optimism which participants usually feel before they become immersed in the foreign culture and language.

NEW IDENTIY - A DOUBLE EDGED SWORD

Sue Shaw and Jan Regan
Southern Cross University

This paper reports on an initiative undertaken by Learning Assistance at Southern Cross University. This initiative was undertaken in an attempt to cope with an ever increasing demand for student support with no commensurate increase in staff, and to respond to evidence which suggests that students need to learn academic skills in context - in context of culture, university, discipline and particular assignment task. In close collaboration with a subject lecturer, a process-based model was developed to enable students to learn the necessary skills to produce an academic essay while engaging in the process of completing a real assignment task. This provided the students with an opportunity to understand the purpose of the skills being taught within the context of their study. Two sets of sessions were designed in conjunction with the lecturer and held in the students' tutorial times with the lecturer present. Thus any questions about content were able to be answered by the lecturer. A workshop format was used so that students were actively engaged in the task. The initial session was used for discussion of the process and analysis of the question for content and directional words. Included was an examination of the explicit marking criteria as well as the tacit expectations implied in the unit objectives and by studying at university in a Western culture. Examples of former assignment responses to the same or similar task including examples which scored highly and examples which did not score well were used. A follow up session was run six weeks later where students brought along their completed assignments for directed peer and self-review.

LANGUAGE USE IN CHANGING IDENTITIES: FROM HANDMAIDEN TO COLLABORATOR

Jan Skillen, Bronwyn James, Alisa Percy and Neil Trivett
University of Wollongong

In recent times, learning developers have been involved in a shift from the periphery of academia to the middle, from the peripheral business of universities to the core business, and from outside curricula to inside curricula. These shifts have been concurrent with changing our identities within our institutions and within academia and making that change visible. One mechanism for making that change visible to others is the language which we use to represent what it is we do and who we are: that language effectively constructs our identities in the minds of others. This paper looks at the words we use about ourselves that can inadvertently enrol others into seeing us as handmaidens rather than as collaborators.

STARTING A COURSEWORK POSTGRADUATE DEGREE: THE NEGLECTED TRANSITION

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The focus of most research into student transition relates to the important transition that students face when they move from high school to first year at university. This particular transition is also the focus of much support given by Learning Assistance units, both in terms of workshops and academic preparation programs offered, and individual consultations. From my experience of working as a learning adviser with postgraduate students over a number of years it has become apparent that the transition to higher degrees (both coursework and research) can prove to be just as daunting a transition. The problems faced by students making the transition to coursework postgraduate degrees were examined in 2000 at Glasgow University. A questionnaire, interviews and focus groups were used to gain a picture of this transition at Glasgow University. The results suggest that students face significant problems when beginning a coursework degree related to the worry about expectations, the 'step-up' in standards, the break from study they have had due to time in the workforce, and in some cases because they are moving into a new discipline area.

LAS ADVISERS AND THE CHANGING IDENTITY OF THE WORKPLACE: THEIR SOURCES OF STRESS AND THE STRATEGIES THEY USE TO COPE

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Research on stress in the workplace reveals that work related stressors are complex and include inter-relating factors such as: restructuring of the workplace, management issues, changing work profiles, job security, workloads, working conditions, relationships at work, home-work interface, career development, and individual personalities. From a questionnaire, LAS advisers were asked to identify the key stressors associated with the changing identity of their workplace and to indicate some of the strategies they use to manage their work related stress. Factors contributing to LAS advisers' stress relate to: institutional changes; a perceived lack of commitment by managers to the work of LAS advisers; attempting to provide an equitable level of service within a context of shrinking resources; the conflict and ambiguities inherent in the LAS support role while trying to meet the needs of teaching staff and students; the lack of time for research; and the high number of student contact hours. Strategies frequently used by LAS staff to manage workplace stress include: ensuring that they take lunch breaks, spending time with colleagues and liaising with teaching staff. In the questionnaire LAS advisers were asked to nominate changes in the work place that they believe would lessen stress. The most commonly desired change was for an increase in resources for LAS work.

CHANGING TECHNOLOGIES: CHANGING PRACTICE

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Technological developments are having a significant impact on many aspects of higher education. This paper outlines some of the impact of these developments on academic learning support provision in higher education, particularly issues concerning the challenges and benefits of providing academic learning support online. The paper provides recommendations for addressing these issues in ways that help ensure the successful integration of technology and academic learning support. It also considers the potential impact of technological developments on the position and practice of learning advisers working in higher education.

MAKING THE TRANSITION TO STUDYING IN ENGLISH: IS EXTRA TIME IN EXAMINATIONS FOR NESB STUDENTS A DESIRABLE OPTION?

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Studying in a foreign language is an enormous challenge. The extent of this challenge is reflected in the performance of NESB students. Particularly in their first semesters at university, NESB students have a higher failure rate than their ESB classmates and to be under-represented at the high end of the grade spectrum. Over time, as they adjust culturally and acquire greater tertiary literacy skills, their performance tends to improve. Examinations, in particular, tend to discriminate against NESB students who take longer to process text in English than their ESB classmates. Allowing NESB students extra time in examinations for their first three semesters would appear to be a logical and equitable solution which would go some way towards addressing the disadvantage that they experience. However, there are strong bastions of resistance to this idea within universities: many academics and administrators do not accept the concept of positive discrimination; others claim that university admissions requirements should exclude students who have limited English literacy skills; others claim that allowing extra time for some students is too complex administratively. Indeed, there may be more constructive ways to address the disadvantages faced by NESB students. This paper will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of allowing NESB students extra time in exams as a way of helping students make the transition to studying in a foreign language.

Review of Fraser, H. (2000) Learn to Speak Clearly in English (CD-ROM for adult learners of English as a second language) Canberra: DETYA (ANTA Innovative Project)

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Pronunciation can undoubtedly be a key factor in developing a sense of personal identity within a new linguistic and cultural setting. It may contribute to the amount of successful contact that new migrants or international students have with the culture and, in some cases, determine whether employment and other goals are achieved.

For many students pronunciation is not perceived as an issue needing specific attention until negative feedback suddenly makes it so. In my observation, feedback about lack of intelligibility often hits home only when it comes from 'real world' conversation partners, rather than from language learning peers or an English language teacher. This may occur in such high stakes situations as when students are required to present a seminar for assessment purposes, or attend an interview. In Language and Academic Skills advising the students who present for assistance with pronunciation are often final year undergraduate or postgraduate students who have an assessment barrier or a job search looming.

With limited one-to-one time available it is not possible to allocate much time to the pronunciation needs of these students. The issue is often that they need to become more aware of the role of pronunciation in communication and to have an overview of the way in which top-down and bottom-up aspects of communication function in the total package.

Helen Fraser of the University of New England has developed the materials in this CD-ROM for just this situation. The underlying message is that it is possible to change pronunciation and that it is within the capacity of the individual to do so. Pronunciation is presented as an aspect of the shared process of communication. It is also acknowledged that speakers will be interacting with people who have different accents and varieties of English. The author has recognised that students often lack the metalanguage for talking about pronunciation, so has made an effort to keep this to a minimum and to discuss the topic in simple language. The four sections to the package cover a brief description of communication, the role of sentence and word stress and the usefulness of critical listening. There are brief exercises to demonstrate key points.

This CD-ROM is clearly aimed at lower level language learners. However I have asked students at advanced levels to trial it as an overview of areas for pronunciation improvement. Only one the six students who trialled it had a negative reaction to the language and examples. All six recognised the importance of the points discussed and could elaborate on ways they could apply these to forthcoming communication situations. While there are numbers of texts to help students improve aspects of pronunciation, few take the time to explain in comprehensible language why this is important and where to start. This gap is ably filled by 'Learn to Speak Clearly in English'.

Note: Helen Fraser has also produced a companion CD-ROM for teachers titled 'Teaching Pronunciation: A guide for teachers of ESL'. Both are available from Language Australia, at about $30. Postal Address: GPO 372F Melbourne VIC 3001, URL: (http://sunsite.anu.edu.au/language-australia/) Email: sales@la.ames.vic.edu.au, Phone: 03 99264779 Fax: 03 9926 4780

Review of Berkow and Berkow, English Composition: Writing for an Audience

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This series of twenty-six half-hour videos is framed within the tradition of the American college writing class. The videos fall into two groups: thinking and writing strategies, and the writing process. Each video consists of a series of useful tips on college writing delivered by credible sources such as college English teachers and university professors. The series emphasises the role of writing in the world of work beyond the college classroom. It features a wide and inclusive range of professionals including novelists (e.g. Frank McCourt), marine biologists, media personalities (e.g. Michael Moore), comedians (e.g. the MAD scriptwriters), a car mechanic, and a police woman. All stress the importance of reading and writing in their jobs, and show how writing techniques, such as the 'rhetorical mode' of describing a process, support their professional needs.

The series is peppered with enticing writing jargon: 'audience', 'voice', 'discourse communities', 'critical thinking'; and the sociocultural nature of writing is a central theme. The videos present many thought-provoking quotes, such as this one on voice: 'You're not asking what the topic is; you're asking what does this voice say about the topic.' However, the content is disappointingly thin, and much of the advice is reiterative and vacuous. For example, in the video on 'Research' we are advised that 'the key ingredient is wanting to do it'!

Despite the title of the series, the producers do not seem to have defined their audience very effectively. The videos appear to be pitched at students; however, much of the

advice is addressed to teachers. In fact, there is no sense of dialogue with the audience, nor are the viewers invited to participate and interact. This makes it hard to relate to the stream of talking heads.

The series advocates various approaches to planning and editing. But once again, the producers do not seem to be acting on their own advice. Although each video begins and ends with a set of iterative clips showing the main points, there is no definable structure, and the series could well be cut back to a fraction of its length. Furthermore, the occasional written examples are set against distracting background images.

Despite our reservations, some students will find these videos useful. In particular, 'Argument' and 'Reading as a Thinker' could be useful self-access resources. Creative writing students may get some good ideas from 'Freewriting and Generating' and/or 'Finding Something to Say'. (But don't buy both, because there's heaps of overlap in footage.) EAP teachers or foundation course teachers might use sections of the videos; for example, 'Comparison and Contrast' could be useful. However, it is hard to imagine many LAS advisers spending time on screening these videos in group sessions.

In conclusion, it is disappointing that the producers of this series did not exploit the medium of video more effectively. Hopefully the accompanying textbook, 'A Community of Writers' by Elbow and Belanoff, and the two workbooks which have not yet been released in Australia, will be more practical, and will enable students to put into practice the advice which they are served in the video series.

References

Elbow, P. & Belanoff, P. 2000, A Community of Writers, Boston, McGraw-Hill.

Available from Educational Media Australia at $3660.80 for the series, or $176.00 for a single video