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Article

Critical hope: Interplay of brief academic literacy workshops and individual consultations in the Clemente program

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The Clemente Australia program (Clemente) aims to disrupt cycles of inequity and social injustice by providing access to university education for individuals facing complex life challenges. Central to this program is facilitating the students' academic journey by offering academic literacy resources to navigate their educational journeys. In this paper, we examine the interplay between a series of brief academic literacy workshops, introduced as an initiative, and subsequent individual academic literacy consultations within the Clemente program. Drawing on an autobiographical approach, we, the academic literacy advisor and the program site coordinator, share our narratives, discuss our lived experiences, what we learned, what we observed and the possibilities and challenges we encountered. From the critical perspectives on emotion and academic literacy theories, we then reflect on the extent to which offering brief workshops (BWSs) to Clemente students impacts their approach towards and engagement in individual consultations (ICs). Our findings suggest that offering these BWSs not only facilitates the process of ICs, and student involvement, but also the development of "critical hope" (Zembylas, 2013), leading to a more inclusive and accessible academic context with possibilities for "critical engagement" (Janks, 2012, p. 159).

Key words: Critical hope, Clemente program, brief academic literacy workshops, academic literacy consultations.

1. Prelude: A 'taste'

Our collaboration began when Leila, the academic literacy advisor, approached Youssef, the Clemente course coordinator at the Australian Catholic University (ACU), to explore ways to facilitate the Clemente students' academic literacy journeys within a unit of work. The Clemente program aims to disrupt cycles of inequity and social injustice for people experiencing complex life challenges through access to university education. The collaborative initiative that is our focus here held the potential to facilitate Clemente students' academic experiences and their progress. However, Youssef's experience highlighted a common challenge: While academic literacy resources are available for these students, their engagement with ICs, if not non-existent, is significantly low, compared to students from other university degree programs at ACU.

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Youssef suggested the possibility of running BWSs at the beginning of each session, immediately before the lecture. Through dialogue and exploring the possibilities of such an initiative at one of

ACU's campuses, we agreed that BWSs introducing the academic literacy resources, and the key concepts of academic literacy could lead to visibility of the resources and gradually develop students' familiarity with, and willingness to take up the more personal feedback and guidance provided in ICs. This was how our collaboration started and then sparked a series of ongoing extended dialogues which led us to the central questions examined in this paper: How does the interplay of BWSs and ICs impact Clemente students in the Global History unit? And how do these BWSs influence the ICs?

2. Overview of the Clemente program

The Clemente program is delivered in partnership with community organisations. The program seeks to benefit lives and communities by making higher education accessible to people (Howard et al., 2008) with limited or no access to it. Founded in 1995 in the United States by Shorris (2000), the program was adopted by ACU in Australia with the aim of encouraging students to make increasingly informed decisions about their lives (Yashin-Shaw et al., 2005).

The Clemente program gradually introduces students to academic contexts and essential skills in reading, writing and critical thinking. The units are designed and assessed according to the quality and standards expected of a first-year bachelor's degree (Howard & Butcher, 2015). The only selection requirements for applicants are those which facilitate their participation in the program, including a commitment to learning, the ability to commit to the program, a foundational level of English literacy (ability to read and discuss a newspaper article) and housing stability (Howard et al., 2010).

Clemente students who complete the program graduate with a Certificate in Liberal Arts at ACU which is lower than a diploma. This certificate enables them to pursue various pathways such as a university degree, vocational studies, or employment. The transitional function of the Clemente program also tends to provide these students with access to a university education, they may not have otherwise had.

Clemente students engage with a range of humanities disciplines, including history, philosophy, sociology, literature, and political science. A key benefit of studying humanities subjects is that it can encourage students to critically reflect on the world around them. Consequently, this process allows them to examine ideas, question assumptions, and engage intellectually with others (Shorris, 2000).

The Clemente program at ACU has been a key part of efforts to challenge educational inequity by providing people who experience disadvantage to access university-level education. This program seeks to create an inclusive learning space where students engage with resources such as academic literacy resources to facilitate their academic journey despite the challenges they may face.

3. Literature review

Academic literacy has long been examined by scholars through a power-oriented lens that considers meaning-making as a socially situated process, where students' identities play a central role (Benesch, 2001; Canagarajah, 2002, 2024; Lea & Street, 1998; Starfield, 2002; Starfield, 2012). For these scholars, language goes beyond mere skills and socialisation; it is also imbued with power, contexts and carries complex meanings. Learning a language then is a meaning-making process drawing on multiple resources that students bring to their academic contexts (Canagarajah, 2024) where "critical engagement" (Janks, 2012, p. 159) invites students to question and challenge existing power structures, language ideologies, and social norms, ultimately

encouraging them to use language as a tool for action in both educational and broader social contexts.

Accordingly, Janks' (2012) idea of "critical engagement" (p. 159) involves a deep, reflective interaction with texts, discourse, and societal practices, which exposes and interrogates power imbalances, privileges, and inequities. It goes beyond surface-level comprehension to build critical literacy − the ability to read, write, and engage with texts and discourses in ways that recognize and challenge social injustices. For Clemente students, this form of engagement may serve as a lens for exploring their worlds and considering possibilities for (re)shaping them.

The Clemente program serves a diverse cohort, with students from varied socio-cultural backgrounds, including those who arrive as refugees to Australia as well as Australian-born participants. This diversity enriches the dialogic and critical space, offering a powerful example of academic literacy framed as a process of "critical engagement" (Jank, 2012, p.159). Research within the area of critical academic literacy highlights the importance of addressing students' complex social identities (see for example Olsson et al., 2024; Sun, 2024) within unequal power dynamics, such as those between university teaching staff and students in the Clemente cohort.

This present study examines how the academic literacy initiative in the Clemente program facilitates these students' transition into tertiary education, encouraging them to critically engage with academic discourse while encouraging educators to value their unique contributions. This critical literacy approach (Benesch, 2001) to English academic writing pedagogy underscores the need to address both skill development and contextual influences, emphasising the socially embedded and dynamic nature of language in academic settings. Additionally, it takes account of the emotional challenges of assessment in higher education and the unequal power relationships inherent in assessment (Iranmanesh, 2018 ; Lillis, 2011; Mirhosseini et al., 2024; Tuck, 2024).

Research on emotions in language assessment has predominantly concentrated on the cognitive aspects of emotions, separating positive and negative ones. This research typically categorises emotions as either facilitating or hindering the learning process (see for example Goetz et al., 2006; Pekrun et al., 2007; Weidlich et al., 2024). Such studies have explored how emotions impact learners' engagement and achievement, aiming to understand how specific emotional states can accelerate or impede language acquisition. Consequently, these studies suggest ways to cure or discipline these emotions. In contrast, Ahmed (2004) and Benesch (2012, 2016) critique the assumption that emotions are isolated, discrete entities, emphasizing their fluidity and contextuality within power dynamics. Furthermore, Benesch (2012) challenges hierarchical classifications and judgmental frameworks that label emotions as beneficial or detrimental to learning, highlighting their capacity to "shift and interact" (p. 8), resist static boundaries, and become entangled with power relations.

Ahmed's (2004) understanding of emotions provides a helpful framework for developing the academic literacy initiative in this study that Clemente students could find helpful, particularly in relation to the struggles and tensions that Clemente students may face with various aspects of higher education, including the emotional demands of working with academics, digital literacy (e.g., emailing), class participation and collaboration with peers, academic literacy and its assessment. Examining these emotions offers possibilities for exploring the pressures the Clemente students face, which may lead to delays or disappointment in their academic journey. This examination also contributes to creating spaces for the emergence of critical hope, as discussed by Zembylas (2013). According to Ahmed (2004) , hope arises as painful attachments are examined and acted upon, opening the process of reorientation toward new possibilities. The concept of critical hope is central to our exploration here.

For Freire (2014), hope is the essence of human existence; with hope being "an ontological need" (p. 2). Freire reminds us that hope is not "crossing one's arms and waiting" (p. 92) but action is interwoven with hope in the struggle to make the world a better place. The process of change

"always involves pain and hope" (Macedo, 2000, p. 12) and it is formed and reformed in each context. Such context-oriented hope also entails critical consciousness, which is a constant examination of oneself in a particular position in (re)formation of one's narrative (Cruz, 2013).

Critical hope (Zembylas, 2013), therefore, is deeply embedded in and shaped by the context and power dynamics. It is influenced by both the possibilities and limitations present within that context, making it inherently responsive to and reflective of the unique situations, challenges, and resources of the context. As such, it does not exist in isolation but is informed by the specific social, historical, and material realities surrounding it offering a space for resistance, critique, and new possibilities (Zembylas, 2013).

In the light of this understanding of critical hope in the Clemente context, our insights into the students' critical academic literacy journey – revealed through our narratives – are not merely descriptive but serve as a lens through which we interpret and understand the broader dynamics of academic literacy development. Consequently, our autobiographical inquiry is more than a recounting of experiences; it is an exploration of how BWSs and ICs can illuminate both the possibilities and challenges these students face in their educational journey. By situating our reflections within the specific contexts of Clemente students, we gain valuable insights into how their unique backgrounds, struggles, and aspirations shape their engagement with academic practices including their language learning, power relationships in academia and assessment. Therefore, this understanding of critical hope encourages us to explore how context can shape and reshape our broader perspectives of students' challenges, while also unfolding the possibilities for change.

4. Autobiographical inquiry

By adopting autobiographical inquiry as an ethnographic method to explore this initiative and our lived experiences with Clemente students and their academic literacy journey, we acknowledge the social nature of knowledge and change (Starfield, 2019). Our narratives reflect how the series of BWSs and ICs intersect with students' diverse backgrounds, identities and interactions in this context and the wider contexts. This approach, as a collaborative inquiry, allows rich insights into the complexity of experiences in discussing the interplay of the BWSs and ICs and how they impact each other.

Reflexivity and criticality are central to our autoethnography and provide us with the possibilities to explore how our experiences have been shaped and reshaped in interaction with Clemente students. According to Anderson (2006), autoethnography presents affordances to delve into lived experiences and emotions which are contextual and "to constitute the sociocultural contexts in which we live" (p. 390). This collaborative orientation to research facilitates plural understandings of a social experience and the process of change (Norris & Sawyer, 2016) to reveal "the meanings, understandings, and identities of the participants in communicative events taking place within these contexts" (Mahboob et al., 2016, p. 51).

Such insights emerged through dialogues, narratives and an exploration of the interplay between BWSs and ICs. Additionally, our collaboration facilitated the identification of students' areas of progress and struggle, while exploring the possibilities to address them. Hence, in this inquiry, we draw on our lived experiences through narratives, incorporating our observations and field notes. Our exploration reflects on shared experiences with Clemente students to examine if and how the interplay of BWSs and ICs contributed to their academic literacy development.

5. Setting and participants

Clemente students take four first-year humanities units over four semesters offered in all ACU campuses. Each unit includes a two-hour lecture and a two-hour tutorial led by volunteer learning partners who are professionals with university degrees. Classes typically consist of 10-15

students. Successful completion of the four units awards a Certificate in Liberal Arts from ACU, with some units potentially credited towards an undergraduate degree.

There were 11 adult students consisting of 5 males and 6 females in the current study. The students demonstrated varying levels of English literacy, which for some was limited. These differences were revealed through an initial evaluation that involved reading, discussing a newspaper article, and writing a paragraph about their lives. Some students had left school at an early age and had not participated in formal education for many years. Additionally, participants joined the Clemente program at different intervals, with some being in their first semester while others were in their third or fourth semester.

As such, this cohort faced challenges which may have been experienced differently than by students from other educational contexts. Many had not previously participated in academic discussions, particularly in English. They may have faced additional challenges arising from the assessment methods and the power relationships inherent in this setting. These challenges were further compounded by the struggles they experienced in negotiating their identities and drawing upon their rich background resources, potentially adversely impacting the critical hope essential to facilitating their academic journey.

All ACU students, including those in the Clemente program, are entitled to access academic literacy resources, which include 30-minute ICs. Students can schedule on-campus, online, or phone appointments through the Academic Skills Unit booking system and will receive confirmation via their ACU email. In ICs, students can discuss academic literacy-related challenges, questions, assessments and seek personalised feedback on their academic writing.

However, the Clemente students' limited or lack of engagement with these resources inspired Youssef and Leila, the two researcher-participants in this autoethnographic inquiry, to embark on this initiative. Leila, whose completed doctorate and ongoing research focus on the role of power and emotion in academic literacy and assessment, facilitated the BWSs and ICs as the academic literacy advisor. Youssef, a historian who completed his PhD in 2004 and has lectured in European and global history, is currently the Clemente Australia Coordinator and coordinated and observed the BWSs.

Over Semester 1, 2024, the 11 students in this study participated in BWSs, specifically designed for Clemente students and held prior to their Global History lectures. The BWSs introduced various aspects of academic literacy with the goal of demystifying academic writing, including research, citation practices, essay writing and the expectations of higher education for students with little to no prior experience. Additionally, the BWSs aimed to raise students' awareness of the potential value of ICs.

The brevity of the workshops highlights two key points: first, while typical academic literacy workshops often last an hour or more, these workshops were designed to be 10-20 minutes long. Second, the term 'brief' highlights the potential of small steps offered on a consistent, regular basis as part of this program, reflecting Cameron et al.'s (1992) notion that change, though small-scale and for a few, is both "imaginable and possible" (p. 130).

6. Design principles and impacts

The BWSs and ICs were designed to inform each other (see Figure 1) highlighting the dynamic interplay between them. The BWSs (see Table 1) introduced students to the academic literacy resources, components and concepts. Importantly, the BWSs provided students with the benefit of shared learning experiences and feedback on their responses to the academic literacy advisor's focused and guiding questions.

The focus of each workshop was collaboratively selected through dialogue among the program coordinator, academic literacy advisor, and lecturer, with the students encouraged and increasingly involved in these decision-making moments to shape the focus of the BWSs. Students were

encouraged to bring their perspectives and thoughts to the dialogues in the BWSs, partly through guiding questions posed by academic literacy advisor.

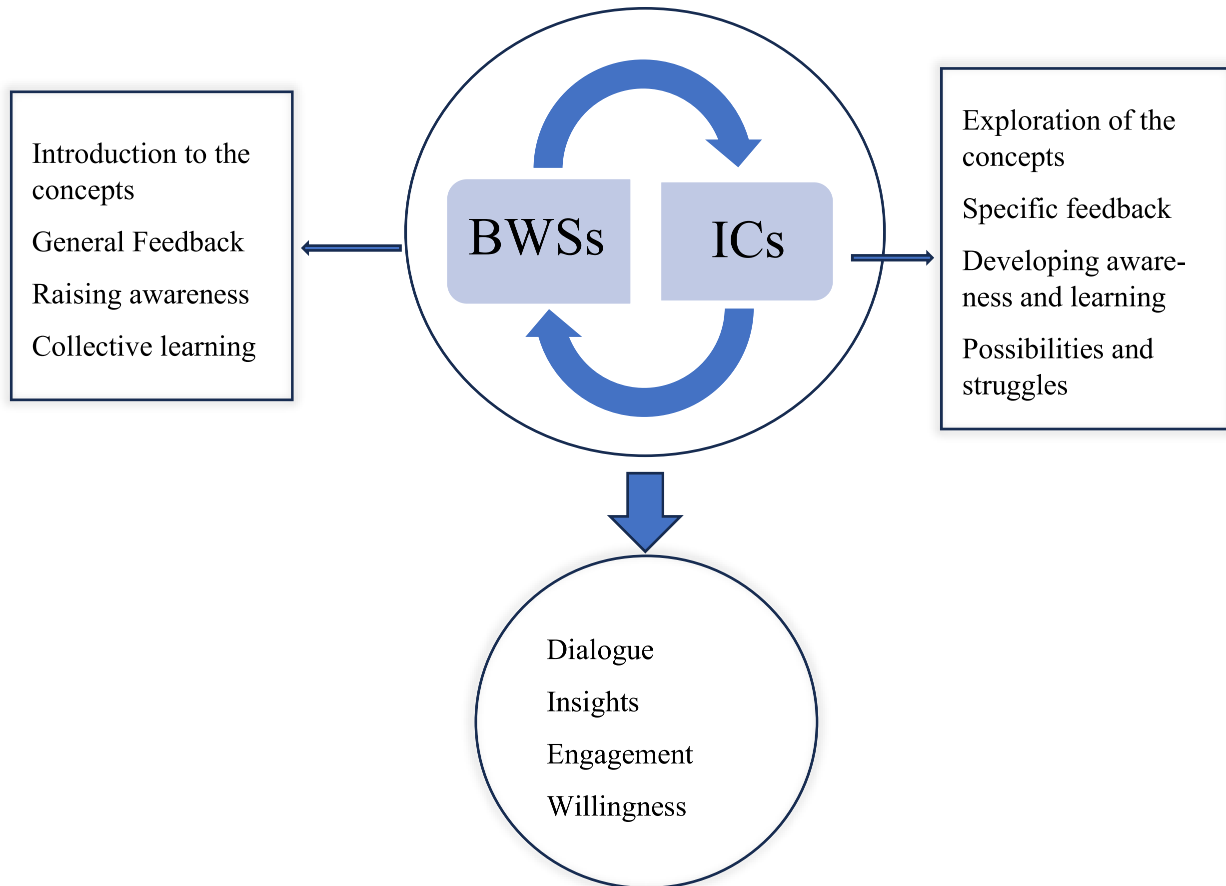

Figure 1. The interplay of BWSs and ICs.

Table 1. The foci of the BWSs.

BWSs	Focus
1	Introducing the Academic Skills Unit
2	Reading strategies: skimming and scanning
3	Reading strategies: specific information, keywords and an intro to critical thinking
4	Sentence writing
5	Essay writing
6	Referencing: In-text citation and reporting verbs
7	Referencing understanding of referencing, self-assessment on basics of referencing
8	Referencing: list of references
10	Referencing: secondary sources,
11	Review: Sentences: simple, compound, complex
12	Review and reflection

Student involvement, for instance, occurred in discussing referencing. We collaboratively engaged in an online self-assessment quiz on the basics of referencing. The academic literacy advisor (Leila) encouraged students to share their interpretations, reasons, perceptions and responses to the questions, promoting a dialogic space where they could articulate uncertainties, reflect on their understanding, and raise their awareness of how referencing is shaped in academic culture. Students expressed varying interpretations of referencing, with some unaligned with conventional practices, others struggled with citation styles, and some were unsure about integrating sources. These experiences illustrate how conventional referencing practices, along with the power dynamics they entail, can marginalize students, potentially reinforcing their exclusion and hindering their participation in academic discourse.

The BWSs also aimed at providing timely feedback for students as they progressed through their writing assignments. Importantly, the BWSs were aligned with the semester's course stages, providing feedback for students as they advanced through each phase of their writing assignments, such as research and essay writing. Additionally, ICs were primarily scheduled based on students' requests, usually communicated to the academic literacy advisor and occasionally to the lecturer. As the program progressed, the students seemed more willing to gradually book these sessions independently.

During the 30-minute ICs, tailored to student needs and extended, when necessary, students engaged in discussions about their challenges, uncertainties and struggles, particularly in understanding and applying concepts from the BWSs to their academic writing and assignments. They also sought targeted feedback on their drafts to refine and strengthen their work. While the feedback could focus on the immediate task, it was also designed to raise students' awareness of broader contexts as will be addressed below.

7. Our narratives

7.1. Leila's narrative

In the early BWSs in the Clemente program, a student greeted me at the beginning of the academic literacy workshop with a familiar smile, noting that my name is a popular name in their country. By mentioning that my name is popular in their country, the student was bringing a piece of their background context into the interaction. In exploring the BWS topics, I also shared with them the diverse contexts I have navigated as an English language learner, teacher, researcher and advisor. These contextual dialogues where we shared our diverse backgrounds and experiences were foundational in creating a space of mutual respect and collaboration. By breaking down power distances and developing trust, the students showed growing willingness to ask questions, express their understandings and uncertainties, and engage in ICs as we co-created a shared space – one that required trust and collaboration.

During the ICs, I further noticed how these students' diverse experiences, backgrounds and adulthood trajectories shaped a distinct path in their academic journey, influencing not only their approach to learning but also their capacity to engage deeply with the course material. Their narratives communicated in the consultations also revealed feelings of embarrassment at not being 'native' English speakers. This was compounded by the challenges of balancing hectic lives, passion to learn and navigating hardships, all of which were awakened by encounters with academic language and their performance in the academic context.

Paradoxically, the course on history they were enrolled in not only provided them with the terminology to express themselves, but it also created a hesitant context, as they struggled to articulate their rich understanding through the medium of English. I observed how their sophisticated real-life experiences of colonisation, for example – especially those who came from colonised countries – confined their native language. This trapped them on another level: linguistic colonisation, where the power of the dominant English language not only marginalises their native language

but also instils a sense of hesitancy in them, limiting their freedom to express themselves in academic and social contexts.

In an individual consultation with a student who was required to complete an argumentative essay on 'the impact of European expansion and colonisation on global social, ecological, and economic dynamics', I drew their attention to the wider context. I emphasised that while they might encounter challenges in writing, their deep understanding of the contexts of colonised worlds and the structures they were born into could significantly strengthen their arguments on colonisation, thereby legitimising the value of their lived experiences as valid and important, and offering a unique perspective to the topic.

Thus, while the BWSs gave the students a taste of the concepts of academic literacy, the ICs were more focused on deeper explorations of these concepts and highlighted the areas for further progress for each student's work. During ICs, students also began discussing their struggles with me more openly. Sometimes, it felt like they were whispering a secret: 'You know that my first language is not English,' as though admitting this was something they felt they should hide or be embarrassed about. I was happy that they did not feel silenced during the consultations and that they engaged with the skills being taught without passive acceptance. However, I was also saddened by their sense of being epistemologically confined due to having a different first language.

In those moments, I found myself reminding them to resist the ideology that seeks to fill them with English as if they were empty vessels, rather to recognise that their rich resources – including their linguistic, cultural, and semiotic perspectives – are not only vital to developing their own voices but also have the power to enrich English itself, changing it into a shared space for everyone. In those moments, I could also see the glow of hope in their eyes as they began to embrace this perspective – the potential for a more inclusive and authentic forms of expression.

The ICs further highlighted these students' challenges with digital platforms, not only in engaging with the topic and context but also in navigating the administrative aspects of university life, such as booking an individual consultation – challenges that might mistakenly be interpreted by some as a lack of interest or persistence. These difficulties included effectively using email for various purposes, such as communicating with academic staff, as well as navigating the internet and conducting research through search engines like Google. They also struggled with understanding the conventions and expectations of digital communication, including the appropriate tone and structure of professional and academic emails, efficient online search strategies, and discerning credible sources from unreliable ones.

It was interesting to see how students participated in defining and refining the topics for the upcoming workshop sessions. Negotiating their needs and rights – an essential aspect of greater student involvement in shaping the context, as argued by Benesch (2001) – facilitated students' development of academic terminology and activated their prior knowledge, allowing them to engage more critically with both the BWSs and the ICs and make meaningful connections between their existing experiences and the academic content. During the final session, one student asked about my reading interests before I became a teacher. When I replied to her that I had always been interested in literature, it was clear that the students were increasingly viewing me not as a detached advisor but as a person whose broader context continuously shapes and reshapes her educational roles. This also established a relationship between us, contributing to their willingness to meet me in the IC context.

The journey was neither straightforward nor completed, but the glimmers of hope − moments of "critical engagement" (Janks, 2012, p. 159) and awareness – became increasingly visible as the BWSs ended. The consultations extended beyond the 'Global History Course,' opening up 'future' possibilities. This was aligned with one of the aims of the Clemente program: to encourage students to look beyond their current situation and make informed decisions to shape/reshape their future.

One hopeful moment occurred when a student, who had previously expressed hesitation about their language background, demonstrated a significant shift by the end of the semester. This change was not only reflected in their renewed approach to writing an argumentative essay but also in their increased hope and engagement in seeking guidance for vocational writing, such as job applications. This illustrates how the role of an advisor can extend beyond the academic context, recognizing the ways in which education operates within systems of power and inequality.

For Clemente program students, the advisor's role needs to transcend academic skills support, embodying a praxis that actively challenges systemic barriers, encourages critical consciousness, and validates the lived experiences and emotions of these students. By engaging in this work, the advisor creates a dialogical space where learning becomes a collaborative process – one that not only shapes academic trajectories but also encourages students to navigate and resist oppressive structures. This dynamic approach redefines advising as an act of social justice, cultivating critical hope integral to contributing to a more equitable and interconnected educational experience.

The BWSs have granted me the privilege of gradually stepping into the students' world as a trusted educator – a trust that was not present initially but developed through the program. This has enhanced the potential of ICs as a shared space for exploring individual students' challenges, pains and the underlying reasons behind them. A student shared that they appreciated the inclusion of diverse resources and specific, individualized feedback. They found it helpful for their assignment and for developing their voice and agency. This feedback highlights that moments of dialogue, trust, and growth not only create opportunities for meaningful learning but also mirror the journey of change that many Clemente students are navigating. These experiences nurture a sense of agency and hope, encouraging students to envision and work toward new possibilities.

7.2. Youssef's narrative

Prior to enrolling candidates into Clemente, I meet with, interview and get to know them individually, gaining insight into the lives of all the students who join the program. For example, none of the students who were enrolled into the Global History course had written an essay prior to joining Clemente. Thus, the BWSs facilitated by Leila provided a new hope and dimension to students.

I noticed that the development of BWSs impacted the students more in terms of increasing their engagement with academic literacy resources, as evidenced by a growing number of appointments being booked for ICs and more students actively seeking academic literacy guidance over time. Prior to joining Clemente, most of the students considered that university was for the privileged and that they were not 'smart enough' to study at tertiary level. Most struggled with the sense of agency needed to navigate the tertiary system and engage with resources.

However, their experiences in Clemente tended to show a shift in these perceptions. One student told me that this was the safest space she had encountered in years. I was taken aback by the comment, but it highlighted how distant some students' previous lives had been from academia − not just in terms of academic knowledge, but also in terms of the seemingly mundane intricacies of university life, like booking ICs or sending emails. This comment was also an indication of how violence (later confirmed by the student) had been, or still was, intertwined in some students' lives, adding complexity to their academic journey.

Even though I usually outline the various resources, including the academic literacy resources, that are available to them as ACU students, Clemente students frequently remain hesitant to access these resources on their own. For example, students do not usually visit the library unless I personally go with them and introduce them to the librarians. Similarly, the students are reluctant to access other resources, such as Academic Skills Unit ones, even though I emphasise the value of booking ICs with the academic literacy advisor. My impression is that these resources are abstract ideas, unknown or completely unfamiliar to the students who have little concept of the process of accessing them or how the resources could facilitate their studies.

Having mentioned this, I consider that the BWSs served a dual purpose for the students. The BWSs gave them an idea of what academic literacy entails and introduced them in a concrete way to Leila who became the face of the academic literacy unit and academic literacy ICs. The BWSs therefore allowed the students to develop a dialogical communication with Leila and this was as important as learning about academic literacy. The development of this communication, coupled with the content that Leila was deconstructing about academic literacy topics in the regular BWSs, enabled students to take the step to book individual sessions with the academic literacy advisor.

This was a significant benefit because it changed the way students considered academic literacies. Although the students had been informed about and encouraged to book ICs, this only started to happen when they met Leila and became more familiar with some of the topics that she addressed in the BWSs. It also made a significant difference that they came to know Leila in the context which enabled them to approach her directly, rather than navigating the university system.

Later in the semester, a number of students began to book ICs with Leila through the booking system, and this illustrated the growth in not only their awareness of and willingness to engage with ICs but also in their sense of agency in using IT to access resources. Some students, particularly two that were new to the Clemente program that semester, took longer to start booking ICs with Leila. This delay likely stemmed from their adjustment to university life. As they became more familiar with the context, their engagement with ICs gradually increased, to which the BWSs could also contribute.

As the semester progressed, students began to ask Leila questions concerning topics she presented. These questions gave an indication of which academic literacy areas individual students needed guidance with. Questions and comments also indicated that students started to develop their own voices. There was an important shift in the way students started to express themselves at the end of semester compared with their hesitancy and uncertainty at the start of the semester. At the beginning, students asked few questions and made few comments. By the last week, students were not only asking questions relating to academic literacies, but also asked questions about Leila's teaching methodology and showing a keen interest in Leila's educational passions reflecting their appreciation for her approach as an academic literacy advisor.

One of the challenges was that it seemed the concepts of 'academic literacy' and 'academic literacy advisor' per se, and what they entail, was too abstract for the students to connect to. In addition, a significant number of students had limited digital literacy, which affected their ability to navigate the university website for research and booking ICs. However, by the end of the semester, there was noticeable improvement in their use of the booking system, reflecting progress in their digital literacy and increased engagement with the academic literacy resources.

8. Reflections and discussion

Our study illustrates an approach that draws on critical perspectives on emotion and academic literacy theories, as demonstrated through the interplay of BWSs and ICs. While each narrative unfolds in its own way, the emergence of two common themes is present in both: the interaction between BWSs and ICs, and the role of critical hope that emerged from this interaction and our deliberate engagement with critical literacy pedagogy.

8.1. The interplay of BWSs and ICs

One common theme in our narrative is the interplay of the BWSs and the ICs. Importantly, our exploration suggests that this interplay was made possible by our critical approaches to academic literacy pedagogy (Anson, 2024; Benesch, 2001; Canagarajah, 2002; De Silva Joyce & Feez, 2016; Lea & Street, 1998) wherein we and the students collaboratively engaged with and reflecting on not only the immediate context of the program but the broader contexts and the power relationships inherent in them. This design principle contributed to the shaping and reshaping of Clemente students' experiences. Leila describes how the design of the initiative, and the interplay

of BWSs and ICs, facilitated student engagement and created, as she puts it, "a shared space" built on "trust and collaboration". Youssef's perspective underscores the potential of the program to reframe education from being perceived as distant and exclusive – something "for the privileged" – to becoming accessible and possible for the Clemente students.

The students' initial hesitance was influenced not only by the abstractness of 'academic literacy' for them but also by their unfamiliarity with academic contexts. While our research did not directly explore the impact of trauma, it is important to acknowledge, based on broader contexts, that the compounding effects of trauma may have led some to miss out on academic opportunities entirely. These oppressive barriers could have collectively contributed to the extent to which higher education was inaccessible prior to students' engagement with the program. Both of us also highlight a critical challenge: limited digital literacy, which creates additional barriers and further restricts students' ability to fully engage with and benefit from the available resources.

Both our narratives also underscore the significant influence of the wider context beyond this program on these students' journeys. Referring to the experience of violence by these students, Youssef highlights how life can overwhelmingly impact these students' pursuit of education. Leila, on the other hand, directly addresses the notion of colonisation, as a real-life experience for Clemente students rather than a symbolic word entity (Tuck & Yang, 2012). By situating this experience within its broader historical and social context, she directly challenges the "deficit perspectives" (Mittelmeier & Yang, 2022, p. 87) suggesting pedagogies that actively shape and reshape learning contexts while encouraging students to engage critically (Janks, 2012) with them. This does not imply that the students are disengaged or apathetic; rather, the learning process in this area requires time and unfolds gradually. Thus, persistence (Schwittay, 2025) and flexibility are aspects of this journey. As Benesch (2012) argues, this pedagogical approach also highlights how such pedagogy moves beyond surface-level language proficiency to address the socio-emotional constraints tied to power structures in the English language.

Our study, moreover, reminds us that:

> what native [English] speakers get for free, apart from the linguistic advantage of being born into a powerful world language, is a language that is rich with meanings, filled as it is by words and nuances from all places that it inhabits and all people that inhabit it (Janks, 2009, p. 151).

This richness highlights the immense potential of these "resources for creative new forms and meanings" (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 2). For Clemente students, as our study has demonstrated, incorporating these linguistic and cultural resources enables them to navigate and reframe a language often perceived as inaccessible into a space for "critical engagement" (Janks, 2012, p. 159). Hence, beyond technical skills, academic writing is a space for students to negotiate varied resources to shape meanings, develop their voices, and embrace their identities.

The interplay between BWSs and ICs created a trusted space for discussing challenges and possibilities, enhancing students' familiarity with academic literacy concepts and making the advisor more visible and approachable. As students transitioned from silence to what Janks (2012) describes as "critical engagement" (p. 159), the power imbalance between them and the advisor was intentionally dismantled through the advisor's approach, creating space for dialogue. This approach could encourage students to raise questions, share their perspectives and unravel their uncertainties and emotions including their fears and hesitations, as they developed 'critical hope'.

8.2. Critical hope

Critical hope emerged as the second theme in both narratives. However, this is not a "naïve hope" (Bozalek et al., 2013, p. 2) built on mere optimism and unexamined realities. Rather, it reflects a deep understanding of both the immediate and broader contexts (Zembylas, 2013). Youssef's experience highlighted a significant challenge: while academic literacy resources can contribute to students' progress, their engagement with ICs remained minimal, reflecting broader issues of

accessibility and power dynamics that may inhibit participation. This is also evident in Youssef's account of these students' challenges with the concept of 'academic literacy' and what it entails in relation to its relevance to their study.

Similarly, in Leila's narrative, students expressed feelings of powerlessness as the English language constrained their ability to fully articulate ideas they understood deeply, particularly on topics like colonisation. By addressing these emotional challenges, the advisor examined the opportunities to facilitate the process for the students within this wider context. Exploring these emotions "in solidarity with [students'] emotions" (Benesch, 2016, p. 3) offered valuable insights into the broader contexts that have adversely affected these students' academic literacy journeys, and these were reflected in both BWSs and ICs.

From this exploration emerges a form of hope that is deeply contextual – one that acknowledges the limitations and possibilities imposed by the specific circumstances. In this sense, the critical examination of, and action upon, painful attachments pave the way for hope (Ahmed, 2004) . This change reflected a collective shift within the group in our program, as gaining critical hope enhanced engagement in navigating both the academic and professional worlds.

The student who initially spoke in whispers to one who now boldly seeks guidance in pursuing employment opportunities is an emblematic illustration of the impact of our collaborative efforts as the group developed critical hope and became more comfortable and engaged within the academic world. This change underscores the initiative's value, demonstrating its capacity not only to engage students with academic literacy but also to promote a dialogic context to reimagine and encourage broader possibilities beyond the classroom. This pedagogical approach also recognises the interconnectedness of historical contexts, present resources and possible futures, all in dynamic interplay. Thus, teaching skills alone cannot be the goal, as success is unattainable without a deep, contextual understanding of both the immediate and broader contexts that the students bring to their educational endeavours.

Leila emphasises the students' rich varied resources, highlighting how these diverse backgrounds not only help them develop a deeper "critical engagement" (Janks, 2012, p. 159) with the academic context but also enrich the English language academic context itself, changing it into a shared space for all. Leila reflects on the "glow of hope" that can emerge when these contexts are considered, suggesting that understanding and valuing these resources can contribute to developing 'critical hope'.

Critical hope is grounded in viewing Clemente students' backgrounds as assets rather than obstacles. Integrating these resources changes the academic context into a more inclusive space where students can envision progress beyond academic achievement, promoting a broader sense of engagement and possibility. Thus, nurturing critical hope becomes central to creating a more inclusive and accessible academic context for the students to navigate and critically engage with.

9. Conclusion and hope

In conclusion, this paper has explored our two narratives as the academic literacy advisor and the course coordinator of the Clemente program at our campus, focusing on the interplay of BWSs and ICs and examining how this interplay impacted Clemente students' experiences. Through a critical lens of academic literacy pedagogy and emotion, we explored how the interplay between the immediate and broader contexts mirrors the real-life complexities of Clemente students' academic journeys, accompanied by emotional challenges. In doing so, we challenged the exclusive, skill-based approach to academic literacy, instead highlighting the importance of acknowledging and building upon the richness of students' backgrounds and resources to contribute to developing critical hope and new possibilities.

The design principles that underpinned our collaborative work with the students in this study underscore the potential for change which, according to Cameron et al. (1992), is "on a small

scale, for a few people – imaginable and possible" (p. 130). The brevity of the workshops suggests that meaningful impact can also be achieved through small, consistent, and deliberate steps. However, this path forward is far from straightforward. It calls for a dialogical space where emotional challenges are explored in connection to the context in which students' experiences unfold, and where the power dynamics of language learning, its assessment, and academia remain central.

As we move forward, we hold hope that our discussions will emphasise the critical significance of the following questions for academic literacy education:

1. How can academic literacy resources continue to evolve in ways that honour students' lived experiences without reinforcing oppressive language practices?
2. How can we facilitate students' journeys in demystifying the academic world itself to navigate its unfamiliar demands, power structures, and potential trauma with agency and critical hope?

As we continue to push for more critical hope (Zembylas, 2013) in academic literacy education and its assessment (Iranmanesh, 2018), it is essential to prioritize nurturing students' awareness (Canagarajah, 2013) and "critical engagement" (Janks, 2012, p. 159) with the complex academic contexts they encounter.

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