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Section 1:

Embedding academic literacy in degree curricula

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An overview of the topic (up to 500 words):

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the notion of embedding academic literacy in university degree course curricula (e.g. McWilliams & Allen, 2014; Arkoudis & Starfield, 2007) rather than teaching it as an extra-curricula activity typically delivered via English language teaching units or cognate departments (e.g. TESOL and Applied Linguistics). This interest has arisen largely from a recognition of academic literacy as a pluralistic concept inasmuch as each and every academic discipline has associated with it a particular set of literacy practices through which it is expressed, explored, analysed, and contested. In this respect it embodies Halliday's idea, central to Systemic Functional Linguistics, that language develops to serve the particular purposes for which its users choose to employ it (Halliday 1985). Thus the academic literacies a Nursing student will need to learn will differ from those of a Business student, for example, and this argues against the kind of centralized generic academic English model often adopted in universities and which assumes that literacy practices are transferable between different disciplinary contexts. In their seminal 1998 paper on academic literacies, Lea and Street spoke of 'the requirement to *switch* practices between one setting and another, to deploy a repertoire of linguistic practices appropriate to each setting, and to handle the social meanings and identities that each evokes' (1998, p.159 [italics added]). These practices encompass

... not just concepts and associated vocabulary, but also rhetorical structures, the patterns of action, that are part of any tradition of meaning-making. They include characteristic ways of reaching consensus and expressing disagreement, of formulating arguments, of providing evidence, as well as characteristic genres for organizing thought and conversational action. (Rex & McEachen 1999: 69).

A discipline is effectively defined and differentiated by its literacy practices and it is through becoming conversant in those practices and learning how to be 'particular kinds of people: that is to write "as academics", "as geographers", "as social scientists"' (Curry & Lillis 2003, p.11) that students become socialized into the discipline and thus bona fide members of its community of practice.

The argument for embedding academic literacy within the curriculum is not only a response to disciplinary variation in literacy practices but also to the realization that all students – home and overseas, native and non-native speakers – stand to benefit from academic literacy tuition: given the diverse student demographic in most universities today, few assumptions can be made regarding their knowledge, upon commencing their degree studies, of those academic literacies pertinent to their discipline, particularly in the case of subjects not taught in secondary education. Furthermore, it supports the idea that language is best learned authentically, in precisely those contexts in which it is to be employed.

While there are sound arguments for embedding academic literacy, the process of doing

so can be challenging. Firstly, it requires buy in from various stakeholders including university senior management, Deans of Teaching and Learning, academic departments, and English language providers. These stakeholders need to understand the rationale and what 'academic literacies' means. Secondly, academics need to be able to identify the literacies of their disciplines, and the evidence suggests that making explicit what is largely implicit knowledge that they manifest procedurally every day in the course of their professional lives can be problematic. Thirdly, finding space in the curriculum can be difficult, especially where curricula are heavily prescribed and under pressure from other agendas such as, inclusiveness and employability. Finally, getting academics to understand that academic literacy is fundamental to the discipline and not an 'optional extra' can present major obstacles, not least because the natural corollary of this is that academic staff should be imparting the relevant literacies to students, with English language teachers contributing in a support role. However, while academics are best-placed to do so as they are most familiar with what is required (even if they require help in articulating it), they may regard language development as outside of their remit and area of expertise. This means that professional development needs to be a part of any initiative to embed academic literacies in the curriculum.

References

- Arkoudis, S., and Starfield, S. (2007). *In-course language development and support*. Paper presented at the National Symposium: English Language Competence of International Students, Sydney, August 2007.
- Curry, M.J., and Lillis, T.M. (2003). Issues in academic writing in higher education. In *Teaching academic writing: A toolkit for higher education*, eds. C. Coffin, M.J. Curry, S. Goodman, A. Hewings, T. Lillis, and J. Swann, 1–18. London: Routledge.
- Halliday, M.A.K. (1985). *Introduction to functional grammar*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Lea, M. R., and Street B. (1998). Student writing in higher education: an academic literacies approach. *Studies in Higher Education*, 23(2), 157-172.
- McWilliams, R., and Allen, Q. (2014). Embedding academic literacy skills: Towards a best practice model. *Journal of University Learning and Teaching Practice*, 11(3), 1-20.
- Rex, L. A., and McEachen, D. (1999). If anything is odd, inappropriate, confusing, or boring, it's probably important: The emergence of inclusive academic literacy through English classroom discussion practices. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 24, 65–129.

Section 2: The Research Questions (10 RQs)

1. What is academic literacy and how is it a pluralistic concept?
2. How can universities and their staff be persuaded of the need for and benefits of embedding academic literacy in the curriculum?
3. What particular literacies might you expect to need teaching to students studying (a) Nursing, (b) Engineering, and (c) Management?
4. What challenges do academic staff face in their attempts to embed academic literacies?
5. In what ways can English language teachers collaborate with academic staff most effectively to embed academic literacies in the curriculum?
6. How does one decide where in the curriculum different literacies are positioned?
7. How do academic staff feel about embedding and teaching academic literacy? Why?
8. How can English language teachers and academic developers support academic staff in their teaching of academic literacies?

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9. What are the advantages and disadvantages of embedded academic literacies being taught (a) by academic staff (b), by English language teachers, (c) jointly by academic staff and English language teachers?
10. What benefits does the decentralised/devolved model of teaching academic literacy within the department/discipline have over a centralized model where it is taught by an English language unit?

Section 3: Annotated Bibliography (Suggested Readings- Each suggested reading should contain a full citation and be described in 100-150 words)

Curnow, T. J., and Liddicoat, A.J. (2008). Assessment as learning: Engaging students in academic literacy in their first semester. In *Proceedings of the ATN assessment conference 2008: Engaging students in assessment*, eds. A. Duff, D. Quinn, M. Green, K. Andre, T. Ferris and S. Copland [Online]. Available from:
<http://www.ojs.unisa.edu.au/index.php/atna/issue/view/ISBN%20978-0-646-504421/showToc>.

In this article, the authors describe in detail the process of embedding academic literacies within the core courses of an applied linguistics undergraduate programme in an Australian university. Their starting point is the observation that while academic literacy has a 'core role' in the construction of knowledge in university settings, it tends to get ignored in teaching and assessment approaches in favour of a narrower focus on content. They argue that the first stage of embedding involves determining the academic literacy practices students would be expected to have developed upon completion of a programme and then distributing these practices between the different assessment items across those core courses in which they arise most naturally in terms of being a prerequisite to engaging with their content. In so doing, recognition is given to the symbiotic relationship between academic literacy and discipline content in course delivery and assessment. The article provides a clear articulation of the rationale at each stage of the embedding process and makes for interesting reading.

Murray, N., and Nallaya, S. (2014). Embedding academic literacies in university programme curricula: a case study. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(7), 1296-1312.

While there is a growing body of literature focused on the idea of embedding academic literacies in degree course curricula, there relatively few that report on case studies and describe in detail the actual process of embedding This article provides such an account and records the authors' experience in terms of the collaborative process, the resources employed to support academic staff through the process, and the difficulties encountered along the way. It focuses on an embedding initiative undertaken as a pilot study in an institutional context where the vision was to embed academic literacies in all programme curricula. The pilot was conducted in two first-year university programmes offered in the Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences, namely, the Bachelor of Teaching degree, located within the School of Education, and the Bachelor of Arts degree.

Murray, N. (2016). *Standards of English in higher education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This book places the issue of embedding literacies in the curriculum within the broader context of English language policy and provision within higher education. Specifically, it discusses it in relation to (a) the problematic notion of proficiency and the implications of how one deconstructs 'proficiency for determining which students need access to particular kind(s) of language development; (b) English language assessment pre- and post-enrolment; and (c) the notion of decentralization in the provision of English language services. While it makes a detailed case for embedding academic literacies within the curriculum, it considers some of the political, logistical and other challenges involved in doing so.

Nesi, H., and Garner, S. (2012). *Genres across the disciplines: Student writing in higher education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

In this book, using the Sydney School's approach to genre, the authors draw on faculty and student interview data and the British Academic Written English (BAWE) corpus of nearly 3000 positively-evaluated student papers across over 30 academic disciplines to categorize into 13 families the genres students are expected to engage in during their studies. These genres are grouped and then discussed in relation to the five social functions of university education as reflected in national (UK) education guidelines; namely, demonstrating knowledge and understanding, developing powers of independent reasoning, building research skills, preparing for professional practice and writing for oneself and others. The book makes very concrete and gives pedagogical currency to the notion of discipline-specific literacy by taking this approach and including authentic examples of assignment tasks, macrostructures, concordances and keywords, all of which can be used to inform course design, regardless of whether or not academic literacy is delivered via an embedded model.

Wingate, U. (2018). Academic literacy across the curriculum: Towards a collaborative instructional approach. *Language Teaching*, 51.3, 349-364.

This article describes an alternative, non-embedded model of discipline-specific language provision and teaching methodology, and its theoretical underpinnings (genre analysis, systemic functional linguistics / social constructivist theory) – aspects often missing from other accounts. Lecturers from four disciplines identified a genre for which they felt teaching support was needed, and provided text examples that were assessed and accompanied by feedback comments. Students received three high-scoring text examples with commentary; one high-scoring text example for which they had to write a commentary; a 'Notes' section in which to list their observations of expected features of successful writing; two low-scoring text examples with commentary, and a reflection section. Students then used what they had learnt from this process to edit peers' essays and subsequently their own assignments. Feedback on the model was very positive but lack of subject lecturer engagement suggested that top-down policies are needed if initiatives are to be truly collaborative. The author discusses some of the disadvantages of this kind of non-embedded discipline-specific approach and provides some useful suggestions for how to utilise Postgraduate Certificate of Academic Practice (PGCAP)-type programmes as mechanisms for developing lecturers' ability to deliver academic literacy tuition within their subject.

Section 4: About the Contributor

Neil Murray is Associate Professor at the Centre for Applied Linguistics, University of Warwick, UK and was previously Head of Language and Literacy at the University of South Australia. He has published widely on language assessment, academic literacy and pragmatics. His current research interests include English language policy and regulation in higher education, and English as a medium of instruction. While in Australia, he engaged with government-driven initiatives around English language provision in the tertiary sector, serving as consultant to a number of universities seeking to respond to such initiatives. His recent book publications include *Standards of English in higher education: Issues, challenges and strategies* (Cambridge University Press) and *Dynamic ecologies: A relational perspective on languages education in the Asia-Pacific region* (with Angela Scarino, Springer).