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Developing and sustaining new pedagogies: A case for embedding language, literacy and academic skills in vocational education curriculum

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Developing and Sustaining New Pedagogies: a Case for Embedding Language, Literacy and Academic Skills in Vocational Education Curriculum

Key Words: Literacy; Pedagogy; English language; Curriculum; Vocational Education; Collaboration

Abstract

This paper reports on a collaborative project aimed at addressing the learning challenges faced by non-traditional students at the interface of TAFE and Higher Education. Our pedagogy is informed by engagement with a critique of competency-based education that espouses 'bringing knowledge back into' the curriculum (Wheelahan, 2009) and a critique of progressivist language pedagogy that calls for explicit instruction about the distinctive language features of disciplinary knowledge (Martin and Rose, 2008). We describe how we have used the concepts of 'discourse community' and 'discoursal identity' to construct a pedagogy that enables students 1) to learn the 'knowledge' and 'language' of their course, both for work and further study; and 2) to begin to develop a critical perspective on the discourse community into which they are being inducted. We also illustrate why close collaboration between discipline teachers and teachers with language and learning expertise is intrinsic to the successful design and enactment of this pedagogy.

At Victoria University a dual sector TAFE Higher Education institution centred in one of Australia's industrial and immigration heartlands the Australian Vocational Education and Training (VET) diplomas of Community Services and Community Development attract students from a wide range of backgrounds; students who have struggled against immense odds in their lives, and who seek out ways to make a contribution to the community in their working lives. Whilst their potential, given their life experiences, is enormous, Community Services teachers in VET are acutely aware of, and sometimes daunted by, the distance these students must travel in order to succeed in their VET diploma course, to take up expanding opportunities to enter Higher Education and to work constructively in the field. In enrolling in a VET community services diploma at VU, students are made aware that successful completion of the course also provides credit/advanced standing in a range of allied HE degrees. Whether students' destination be post course employment in community services or further study in Higher Education, we seek to demonstrate that complex writing skills are essential; and in fact, create the potential to move from one to the other. Squaring the diversity of goals, the pedagogy prepares students for work in the field and articulation to higher education.

Teachers of Community Services describe non traditional students (traditionally under-represented in tertiary education) as having both difficulties with the 'conceptual demands of the course' and 'difficulties in writing'. Indeed, the learning challenges, which exist not only for students for whom English is a second, third or fourth language but also for native English speakers, are most often expressed in difficulties meeting the complex reading and writing demands of the course – demands that are also real world industry essentials. For these teachers, however, the connection between the conceptual and the linguistic demands remain an unresolved area.

This sense of unrealised student potential inspired a project at Victoria University involving teachers in Community Services (CS) and specialist language and learning (LL) teachers. We have developed a pedagogy that has, at its core, collaboration between teachers in these fields, which itself evolved from reflections on the limits of our respective expertise. CS teachers recognised that they were not experts in language and learning development; LL teachers recognised that high level language and academic learning could not be learnt in isolation from participation in a discipline and that the language teacher could not substitute for the discipline teachers. Given this mutual recognition of each other's strengths and limitations, we collaboratively drew on and relied upon the expertise of the other to develop and teach a program that knitted together knowledge and language teaching, workplace knowledge and communication, the beginnings of critique and critical literacy, to support the development of critical agency. The program, while in its infancy, seems a promising step toward meeting the challenges faced by our students.

Although this paper does not apply a selected research methodology to contribute to the world of educational research, the practice that is the subject here does draw on scholarship in a number of adjacent and overlapping fields and uses that scholarship to improve pedagogic practice (Kemmis, 2010). In this discussion, we outline our pedagogy; provide some curriculum samples of how the different parts of our practice mesh together; and finally, report on some results in student writing and learning. Our hope is that this may be helpful to teachers working with similar students in similar settings. We suggest that this collaborative approach could be replicated with other disciplines across the spectrum of qualifications within the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF).

Links to Scholarship

The two emerging bodies of scholarship with which our practice most engages are to do with *knowledge*, on the one hand, and *language*, on the other. Wheelahan (2010), Young (2008) and Maton (2006) argue that current curriculum (Wheelahan, p158) and pedagogic practices systematically exclude working class students from disciplinary *knowledge*, thereby excluding them from access to disciplinary knowledge that makes up Higher Education (Wheelahan, L 2010). In terms of vocational education, Wheelahan advocates that ‘a vocational pedagogy needs to face both ways to occupationally recontextualise disciplinary knowledge and to the field of practice itself’ (p157). The ‘Sydney School’ of systemic linguistics similarly argue that much contemporary *language* pedagogy limits the repertoires of working class students, and it recommends a language pedagogy that makes the features of prestigious language explicit and available to students (Martin and Rose, 2008).

Is it the structures of curriculum that *excludes*, or is it the pedagogic practices of teachers or both? While these lines have some fluidity, given -teaching practices are significantly shaped by curriculum goals and structures, a crucial question remains: how much scope is there within existing curriculum structures, for pedagogic interventions that contribute to addressing these issues? The practice we report on here, framed as it is within the existing Australian National Training Packages curriculum structures, engages with the issues that is the subject of this scholarship. Further, in the context of this scholarship we offer a distinctive take on both *knowledge* and *language learning*. We frame *knowledge* and *language learning* as staged, ‘critical’ initiation into the privileged identities of a discourse community. In our view, ‘Language teaching’ makes available the common language affordances at critical junctions, during the process of such initiation. Further, we show that such a pedagogy is

made possible and effective through collaboration between discipline teachers and teachers of language and learning.

In the Community Services and Community Development diplomas, students undertake a year-long, first year unit in sociology (CHCLD514A Analyse impacts of sociological factors on clients in community work and services) that provides underpinning knowledge for application in the community services field and, in the context of a dual sector university, also provides foundational disciplinary knowledge for academic study in associated higher education degrees.

Typically, however, what generally goes unnoticed by teachers of the subject is that student understanding of such knowledge is both accomplished and demonstrated primarily through complex forms of writing. It is often assumed that through learning ‘the ideas’ students will also pick up the privileged medium – written text- through which the ideas are learnt and applied. Our view is that students undertaking such study, particularly the cohort of students we have described above, confront both the difficulties involved in grasping disciplinary knowledge and difficulties encountered in learning the new reading and writing demands involved in communicating that disciplinary knowledge. These difficulties are inextricably connected, but they also need to be addressed separately, and that calls for pedagogy that integrates two kinds of teaching expertise. It is around this unit then that a pedagogic ‘intervention’ could make a difference, setting students up to meet the challenges of the rest of the Diploma and beyond.

The Collaborative Model

Collaboration between ‘content’ teachers and ‘language’ teachers is not new. In the United States, adjunct writing units are attached to a variety of disciplines in universities (Jory, 2004)

and, writing in the ‘content areas’ is offered in secondary schools (Schleppegrell et al, 2008, 2004). In the global English as a Second Language (ESL) field, collaborations have been reported upon (Bruce, 2005) and theorised (Davidson, 2006). Language teachers across vocational education in Australia have also commonly used the materials from students’ vocational programs, around which to build language programs in an effort to make language and literacy learning relevant to students vocational aspirations. What perhaps is distinctive about our collaboration is that the LL teachers were not simply in a language *support* role to the discipline teachers (Creese, 2002). Instead, they were equally involved in the design of two units of the diploma – ‘Sociology’ (CHCLD514A *Analyse impacts of sociological factors on clients in community work and services*) and ‘Communications’ (CHCCD515A *Develop, implement and promote effective workplace communication* and CHCCD515A *Communicate effectively within a Community Development context*), including crucially, the construction and sequencing of assessment tasks in the sociology unit. Not only would the assessment tasks be the cornerstones of what counted as sociological knowledge, but as tasks that could only be undertaken through reading and writing, they would also shape the activities in the communication unit, combining disciplinary knowledge with emerging vocational practices in that field. In our design, therefore, the communications unit would draw on the sociology unit to model the reading and writing practices in the disciplinary setting. Conversely, the sociology unit would draw on the communications unit to enable students to successfully undertake the assessment tasks in sociology. In addition, an academic research unit (VBP714 *Research tertiary fields of study*) was imported into the diploma as a designated elective in the following semester to further develop students learning in this way.

Figure 1 - The collaborative structure

Community Service teachers

Language and Learning teachers

In constructing the curriculum, we re-imagined each assessment task from our collaborative angles: one the one hand, as a moment in students' development in the sociological discourse community and as that might apply to community service practice and on the other hand, as a particular kind of written or oral communication, yet each reinforcing the other as steps in students' development into sociological discourse in community services.

Table 1: Sequencing Development

Developmental steps	Kinds of writing
Understanding a theory through applying to biography and short story	Reflective writing pieces
Showing how different theories have different perspectives on an issue	A compare and contrast essay
Showing how theories are drawn upon in organisations	An oral performance
Drawing on theories to shape a collective course of action	An essay which involves critical evaluation

In doing so, our cautionary note to ourselves was that although we separated out 'developmental stages' and 'kinds of writing', this was not intended to reflect a distinction in *the world* between thought and language, between content and form, between some kind of prior 'cognition' and its 'expression' in language. Teachers and students are speaking and writing in sociology and students bring discourses, not mute experiences to the course; that is, everyone is always in language. In other words, we are not suggesting that academic

development is a cognitive process that occurs in the content class, which is then clothed in language in a communication class. Indeed, rather than understanding writing, as is commonly understood, as merely a medium for assessing understanding or knowledge, we see it as itself a medium of participation in a discourse community, a medium for ‘bootstrapping’ oneself into a new identity. The reason we separate out ‘developmental stages’ and ‘kinds of writing’ is because doing so is helpful for assessment task design. Essentially though, neither do we see the ‘developmental steps’ themselves as inscribed in concrete, nor do we see a one-to-one relationship between development steps and kinds of writing as if, for instance, the only way that one could compare different theoretical perspectives on the world is through writing a compare and contrast essay. Making a video, producing a mind map, or writing a blog might be used to realise a step.

Integral to the pedagogy outlined, is the sustainable collaboration between language and learning teachers and teachers in community services. This is not out of some abstract commitment to the virtues of collaboration. It is because it enables the values, essential terms and privileged identities of the discourse to be identified and put into curricular sequences. This enables students to appreciate the distinctive ways that these meanings are articulated in different kinds of communication – writing reading and speech. Similarly, through the adjunct cycle formed by collaborative design, students experienced a mutually reinforcing program, one which may significantly expand their development.

Disciplinary and Practitioner Knowledge

We framed the sociology unit as initiating students into ‘a sociological imagination’ in order to enable students to see sociology as a resource for application. This enables students, by

drawing on sociological concepts, to question situations or established courses of action that might seem natural, taken for granted, routine or beyond question, and then to place these situations in comparative cultural contexts. Within this overall approach, a range of theories including: functionalism, conflict theory, feminism, and symbolic interactionism, are introduced as rival perspectives on the social world, and so students learn that the world is open to competing interpretations. While this capacity for questioning, reflection and analysis is important for further study, it is also crucial for work in the community services field where policy and practice are constituted by such theories and where critical reflection is the stuff of working life. The aim is that students learn to access sociology as a resource to re-imagine and respond creatively and effectively to issues as community service workers. Sociology, as a collaborative unit to the communication unit, therefore constituted the 'knowledge' that students learn.

To illustrate the point, many in-class communication tasks that were done in preparation for the sociology assessment provided an opportunity to help students take the initial steps from personal reflection to exposition of a theory. In class, we use open-ended questions – “write about your experiences of change within your family” or “write about a situation where you needed to follow rules” - as a prompt. Students, so to speak, need to ‘climb’ into a theory, perhaps for the first time and use episodes from their lives to illustrate, thereby showing an understanding of the theory. In the student writing sample below, ‘Mia’ has made these moves in relation to her perceived role in the family. After describing challenges associated with motherhood, Mia reflects:

Those challenges changed my life in a negative way. I started to neglect myself and focus on other things of my life and all my attention was focused on my family.

Following 1) a series of reading activities inviting students to link their reflections to concepts in their sociology text and 2) writing activities showing students some uses of nominal forms, Mia re-drafted this sentence to produce a second draft:

The physical and emotional changes that come with raising children may have a negative effect on women's role in the family. ... child-raising is time-consuming, so that her former interests and hobbies are no longer a means to express herself.

Although writing activities were conducted in the communications class, when it came to the similarly open-ended question in Sociology (*Essay Question: Using functionalist theory, reflect on your own experiences of socialisation in your family of origin*), Mia used the same process of reconstructing a personal narrative as a sociological text:

Socialization is the process of becoming a member of a particular group (Bessant & Watts, 1999) such as family. Learning the norms, language, skills, cultural beliefs, and religion as children is an investment to the future for a family (Furze, 2007, p. 200) depending on how well they are socialized. In regards to my family, education was considered to be the key role to success. We were sent to school to get educated and get a good job and help our parents in the future. Religion was had influence to my upbringing. My mother was very strict with the norms that were set for us to conform to. Here functionalists would say that our family is functional because of the children were well socialized.

Notice she makes some general statements in the first two sentences using sociological concepts, divides her illustrations under two sub topics (education and religion) and uses episodes from her life to instance these concepts. A most important point to make here is that the reading and writing activities which facilitated these changes - on paragraph, sentence elaboration, lexical development and the use of referencing conventions - were not based on the notion that Mia lacked some grammatical 'basics', but that in the new world of knowledge she was entering she needed to learn the 'grammar' of that new knowledge. Essentially therefore, rather than originating from notions of a student language deficit, our pedagogy is grounded in the idea that students move into an emerging identity that has more to do with seeing themselves as part of a new discourse community rather than as people struggling with the lexical underpinnings of communication. In her text, therefore, Mia repositions herself; through a series of reading and writing activities, she moves from being an outsider to being a 'beginning member' of a *discourse community*.

Discourse Community

The metaphor of a discourse community, a term now widespread in the language and learning field (Hyland 2009; Ivanic, 2004; Martin 2005, 2008; McCormack, 2002), was introduced by LL teachers to the CS teachers as a means to encompass our common aim of introducing students to writing sociology. It productively reframed the issues thrown up by CS teachers about the difficulties students had in 'juggling concepts', in analysing situations and in doing these things in coherent written text. The metaphor reframes how knowledge is conceived and, therefore, how learning that knowledge is also conceived. Knowledge is framed as a cultural practice. Disciplinary knowledge in general, and sociological knowledge in

particular, is framed not as a mental representation of a world of facts, nor as just technical ways of expressing pre-existing meanings in technical 'jargon' and not even just as problem solving skills. Disciplinary knowledge is understood as participation in a discourse community. Knowledge is recast to include the shared values, identities, conventions, and practices of members of a discourse community (Hyland, 2009). *Learning* disciplinary knowledge is conceived in terms of an 'apprenticeship', involving a transition from novice to expert, within a discourse community (Bartholomae, 1986). The metaphor of discourse community also enabled us to reframe those writing issues that community services teachers had identified as a mix of the 'linguistic and conceptual' as an issue of identity within a discourse community.

The valuable thing about the metaphor, from the perspective of curriculum design, is that *learning* can be framed as a movement from the discourse communities that students previously inhabited to membership in a new discourse community, in our case, sociology. This way of framing learning enabled us to frame the curriculum as a process through which new identities are taken up, and the activities and assessment tasks students undertake, as the ways of performing in discourse community. Consequently, we have some basis for sequencing these activities in ways that students experience as developmental steps. We could design the activities and assessment tasks that would scaffold students into the central activities of being sociologists, as well as into the work of community service practitioners. In terms of the course structure, teaching in the sociology unit would enable students to progressively realise the identities of sociologists in *written and spoken text* occurring on the other side of our collaboration, in the communication class and the academic writing elective. Rather than framing the teaching and learning situation in terms of knowledge and language

that students have ‘missed out on’ in previous schooling, the metaphor of a discourse community allows a framing of the pedagogic context as new for all learners, requiring new understandings, skills, identities.

Further, by being explicit with students about this metaphor, questions can be raised with them about the relationship between the different discourse communities they inhabit. This provides a source for further reflection both on sociological knowledge and on the shifts of identity and compartment that students experience in the course. In class therefore, as in development, the term *identity* plays an important role, used by teachers and students alike to refer to the ‘who’ that is evoked by membership of a discourse community (Ivanic, 1990, p. 101); the ‘who’, in other words, that students experience emerging through their communication (Pennycook, 2004, p. 15).

As previously stated, the curriculum was designed so students were first given opportunities to understand the sociological theories through ‘trying on’ the identity of a sociologist; by applying them in various foci of analysis - in their own lives, in a short story, and in case studies. Later, they were invited to compare the theories and the theories’ different perspectives on sociological issues presented in their communities and in the media. Finally, students evaluated each theory in the light of the others. Note the close fit between the first developmental step (from table 1 above), and the kind of writing in the first assessment task:

Developmental steps	Kinds of writing
Understanding a theory through applying to biography and short story	Reflective writing pieces

Question: Using functionalist theory, reflect on your own experiences of socialisation in your family of origin.

You may choose to explore the development of your social and cultural identity in relation to any of the following aspects:

- a) Functionalists' views of the functions of family,
- b) Development of the "self",
- c) Social, cultural and gender roles.

Discourse Community and Communication

Once the metaphor of a discourse community was brought to bear on framing and sequencing the assessment tasks in sociology, it could also be drawn upon to make sense of the reading and writing activities in the communication unit. Not only did the texts that students were required to read and write in sociology become the primary texts for language teaching *in* the communication class, more fundamentally, drawing on the notion of a discourse community, we could view texts as realising the activities of members of a discourse community, the representatives of powerful discourses. This meant we could link text features to students' ways of participating in a discourse community.

A different light on student writing

This was significant in two ways. First, it meant that we could make sense of many language features for students where traditional grammar approaches could not. In class, students could make sense of rhetorical patterns, terms associated with the values of a discourse community and even paragraph structures as having functions in realising the new discursal identity in and through writing. For example, in the drafts below, despite the grammatical irregularities, we can see the student taking on the identity of a (functionalist) sociologist outlining the theory and transforming her family situation into a case study viewed through a functionalist lens.

Draft A: I come from family of three children. The parents are very strict when we grew up and we helped in the house chores at early stage ... and in our family we will look after the parents when they are old. Most families in my religion look after the old people so we have many children.

Draft B: Functionalists like Murdock believe that 'children are an investment in the future' (Furze et al 2007 p. 201). As children mature the economic value of a family is likely to increase. In my case, we were three in the family; we helped in the house at early stage. My parents have expectations that we will support them when they were old. Functionalists would agree with the idea of having children as a big incentive to a family. Thus, results to my parent view being functional in this scenario.

By taking her family as a case of the (functionalist) theory, the student, even if only to show she understands the theory, is also occupying a new identity as a spokesperson of the theory. This change occurs through the construction of an expository paragraph (with the first two

sentences stating the theory - *Functionalists believe...*) followed by illustrations (*In my case...*) and a concluding sentence attempting to link the illustrations to the terms of the theory (*Thus results to my parent view being functional*). The shift in paragraph structure between Draft A and Draft B, we suggest, is a tip of a shifting tectonic plate of identity. Further, we can also see the student is learning to be a member of the discourse community by deploying the conventions of referencing (Furze et al 2007, p.201) of a discourse community and, as a member of the social science, using carefully chosen words to avoid overgeneralising (*the economic value of a family is likely to increase*). In short, linking text features to participating in a discourse community opens up students' texts to a richer reading than a traditional approach focussed on mistakes allows (Shaughnessy, 1975) and so gives us a way of analysing language development as part of student development within a discourse community. This unsettles deficit discourses about students' literacy and language, to which Comber & Kamler (2004) refer, and develops a pedagogy to reposition non traditional students as emerging participants in a new (not necessarily 'better') discourse.

Secondly, within this perspective, even grammatical breakdowns can be interpreted not as gaps in some imputed basic grammatical competence, and for which students need to 'go back to the basics', but as part of a development process as students learn to write in new ways (Martin & Rose, 2008, p. 36; Paxton, 2007, Hood, 2004 p.37-42.). In the following example, the student's first attempt at writing about an out-of-the-workplace training course is a personal reflection, whereas the second was an attempt to use that the training course to illustrate the concept of socialisation.

Draft 1: *When I go to group training for a day course, I change how I behave from professional and productive to fun, representing my firm but then on an individual level wanting to learn for my own personal growth.*

Draft 2: *Successful socialisation ensures that people fill their social roles and realise functional needs essential to social order (Bessant and Watts, 1999, p.105). Employment training outside the workplace is a cross between two behavioural social groups, being professional and enjoying having the knowledge and support from the company, to the fresh environment and surroundings that promote excitement with peers and enhances personal growth.*

While the second sentence of Draft 2 is hard to follow, we can see how much work the student is attempting to do in the one illustrative sentence. She attempts to:

- create a virtual entity (Halliday, 2004) as the subject of the sentence by way of a nominalisation: *Employment training outside the workplace,*
- define this entity as involving two competing features: *a cross between,*
- construct a term to cover both features: *two behavioural social groups,*
- identify each feature and the values associated with each feature 1) *being professional and enjoying having the knowledge and support from the company* 2) *to the fresh environment and surroundings that promote excitement with peers and enhances personal growth.*

We can also see the pressure that condensing meanings into one illustrative sentence places on the student's linguistic resources, as required by complex paragraphing. In short, it is the

pressure that this new discursive positioning, this taking up of a new identity, places on students' linguistic resources that accounts for the difficulties in the second sentence. If this is right, then understanding this text feature in relation to student's development in a new discourse allows us to read the difficulty as a sign of that development and not as a mistake to be quashed. The flip side of being able to read students' texts as moments of development in a discourse community is that we can then develop the language tools to help students take up these identities.

The Seeds of Critical Agency

The approach we have taken, if effective, is a powerful means of shaping identities and we are acutely aware that it could simply be a powerful way of assimilating non traditional students to dominant discourses. Our approach to teaching sociology and communication then aspires to enable students to adopt a critical stance to the discourses in which they are learning to participate. This we believe is crucial given that the expertise students learn is not just a way of meeting its ostensible purposes but, inevitably caught up in systems, is also a way of exercising power. First, the notion of entering a new domain and a new persona gives students permission to 'play the game' without feeling that they should already know the new concepts and practices. In framing knowledge as a discourse community, our intent is that students experience that knowledge as something they can enter and leave, and so allowing them to retain some distance from that knowledge while they learn it. Second, the growing realisation by students that sociology is a discourse community encompassing competing perspectives enables them to appreciate that argument and critique, at the very least, is possible in this domain. Finally, students might begin to appreciate that learning new

identities does not annul (McCormack, 2002, Gee, 2009) but somehow enters into a complex relationship with the identities that students bring to the course. Lillis (2001) writes:

'non traditional students ...as participants who often most strongly experience a sense of dissonance with prevailing practices, ...are easily able to problematise the given status of such practices and make visible both the nature of such discourse practices and their ideological force' (p. 36).

We are not sure how easy it is for non-traditional students 'to make visible' these discourse practices – after all we need a language in which to do that (Martin and Rose, 2008, p.260). Nevertheless, we certainly agree that the dissonance that students experience is a place to start thinking about ways of developing a curriculum that helps students to transform the experience of dissonance and estrangement into a critical and constructive practice. Equally, learning how this knowledge is made and remade in language, and then being able to make and remake it themselves contributes to making the new discourse not a final authority but a resource always open to judicious use and further question. We think this approach tallies with the view of critical linguists who argue:

for a language education ... which aims to develop in pupils a discursive ability to reflect on discourse itself – i.e. the inculcation of an ability to question what the pupils encounter in the discourses of the society they live in (Hasan, 1999).

Sample Task 1 Comparing Theories in Writing

Our move into the critical approach began with the next sociology task, which required students 1) to demonstrate an understanding of a case from the perspectives of functionalism and another theory – conflict theory or feminism and then 2) to compare and contrast these views. After having interpreted a case from one perspective only, this written assessment task was the next important stepping stone to presenting and critiquing different views in academic argument.

Question: “*Social factors impact on health and employment opportunities for individuals in contemporary society*”

Using at least one ‘Big Issue’ case study, compare how 2 theoretical views might interpret this statement differently.

In the sample below, the student shows the differences between conflict and functionalist perspectives on the issue of school failure:

Conflict theorists go on to suggest that the lower classes are limited because they are less likely to remain in school if they have to support themselves and so are essentially set up to fail (Furze et al. 2008). Functionalists would suggest that this is due to a failure of the socialization process (Furze et al. 2008). According to Ryan (1971) individuals who fail to be socialized have a deviant value system and this is somehow the victim’s fault. Conflict theorists would argue however, that this blaming the victim only serves the interests of upper classes by maintaining the existing state and ignoring the unequal distribution of income and power (Ryan, 1971). Jo did not receive ongoing nurturing as evidenced by her multiple placements or the economic resources to support her educational endeavours...

We mentioned earlier that we drew students' attention to the distinctive features of particular kinds of writing, when useful, in the task inviting them to compare different sociological perspectives. We drew students' attention to the meta-discourse (Hyland, 2005; Martin & White, 2005) relevant to a representation of different positions, reflected in the student's paragraph with such wording as *Conflict theorists suggest; Functionalists would suggest; According to Ryan*. Drawing students' attention to such phrases, at this point, helps students understand that perspectives are things that can be compared (Halliday, 2004, p117), which simultaneously apprentices the student as the sociologist actively making the comparisons.

Sample Task 2: Advocacy in the Workplace

During the developmental phase in our collaboration, we had recognised the need to design a curriculum that would enable students to take up a critical stance in relation to their own formation in the discourses of profession and academia, but also one that would assist them to develop critical agency in the workplace rather than becoming unreflective instruments of the expertise they learn or the systems they unavoidably enter in their working life. An example of how we combine learning in an academic discipline with simulated workplace learning in a way which enabled students to develop a critical sense of both, was in an assessment task that required students to represent an organisation. The task requires students to speak on behalf on an organisation in a meeting context where there are different organisations present. As a developmental step, students would learn to draw upon theoretical knowledge when identifying and negotiating different ideologies or positions. As a dramatic simulation of a meeting, the task shifted the axis from written to spoken, and from an academic context to workplace praxis. In terms of our collaborative model (see figure 1) the sociology unit now

contributed to performance in the communication unit in what might be considered a 'role reversal'. Specifically, each student needed to present, listen to, question and evaluate each others' positions and strategies with an ultimate objective: to come to a consensus on four strategies they would implement to support disadvantaged communities in Melbourne's West. The assignment comprised two assessed components:

- Students prepared for and participated in a meeting in a Community Development context (the oral component) where representatives of different (invented) community based action groups would come together to decide upon an action plan for achieving positive community experiences in Melbourne's West,
- Students produced a written promotional document about the organisation (the written component) with a vision statement, strategy outline, goals and approaches. This was prepared before the meeting to be used as support material.

To reflect the two assessed components, we created two kinds of groups: a working party with each student sharing a common sociological theory, and a meeting group comprising members of the different action groups who would come together to address an issue of common concern. Over the two phases of development, students belonged to both types of groups, simulating practice in the workplace where a community service professional might move from working with colleagues to meeting with counterparts.

The first phase: research and discussion

First, students were assigned to one of four fictional action group working parties, for example *Job's West* or *Outer West Women's Health Centre*. Each action group was also assigned one of the four sociological theories with which it had a natural affinity. Using notes from the sociology class and the key text by Furze (2007) and conducting online research of real Western region action groups, students collected target language and allowed it to resonate statements within a hierarchical schema that contained five key areas of advocacy discourse: Vision, Goals, Approach, Past Performance and Strategies.

Students from the group named *Jobs West* focused on goals underpinned by functionalist theory for instance, and therefore they wrote texts (see below) and put forward recommendations that their counterparts would recognise as drawn from that perspective.

Figure 2: Advocacy Sample of Writing

- *VISION: To inspire individuals and organisations to work more effectively and to create choice in the work domain.*
- *APPROACHES: Developing systems that ensure flexibility and participation.*
- *STRATEGIES: Improving a network of employers and re-training options.*

We see in the student's text above the use of:

1. a hierarchical schema where values in the first statement are cached out in the statements beneath it,

2. nominal phrases - *to work more effectively, choice in the work domain, flexibility and participation, network of employers and re-training options* - read by fellow students as tokens of a functionalist perspective.

The Second Phase: Representation and Negotiation

The process of research and writing prepared students to represent their community action group's identity and served as support material for the second meeting in which members of each action group came together. As anticipated, students came to see that their counterparts from other action groups proposed quite different courses of action in regards to an issue: they discussed these diverse approaches, put forward their reasons for their recommendations and, despite their differences, attempted to arrive at a common course of action. Some of the spoken phrases, shown below, reflect the different perspectives of feminism and functionalism:

- “*We see lack of employment in the West as effecting women because ...*”(feminism)
- “*The job services network should be advertised so people know where they are, when they are open and how to get there...*” (functionalism)

The vocational nature of the task meant that students were able to discuss applications of a theory for their communities, but at the same time recognise the power the language confers to those in roles to critique, to change, to combat and to find consensus in the professional world.

Sample task 3: Scaffolding Argument

The developmental trajectory planned for the program culminated in the final sociology assessment task, which involved evaluating one or more sociological theory in the light of the others, and which took shape as an argumentative essay. The features of argument were identified and practised in the communication class with a topic that lent itself to sociological argument. Students started with a critical reading of a complex article on the value of gene testing for perpetrators of violent crime (Rose, 2007) and then evaluated the author's stance in the article. The article was chosen because it pitted biological explanations for criminal violence against sociological ones, and specifically over new research in gene testing for violent behaviour and the resultant issues surrounding deviance, crime and public safety and civil liberties (Rose, 2007), a topic that had been covered in sociology in the preceding term. Students could draw on their new sociological understandings to 'join the conversation' (Wheelahan, 2009) on a public issue (Moraitis and McCormack, 2001) which had obvious specific relevance to practitioners in community services. And whilst earlier assessment tasks alerted students to the fact there were distinct and conflicting perspectives on issues, adjudicating between positions, that is, presenting a written academic argument was a confronting, new experience for students.

Our first move was to provide an account of why argument takes place in discourse communities and in the public domain generally, that is, to provide students with an account

of the rhetorical context in which they would participate. While there is no space here to recapitulate our account (see McCormack, 2004; Moraitis and McCormack, 2001), the key points we made is that academic argument necessarily involves reasoning with and against other positions in the field guided by the goal of shaping a new consensus (Crosswhite, 1996). We also made the point that it also means taking up a powerful identity as someone able to critique powerful others and be such a new consensus shaper (Bartholomae, 1986).

This account meant we could describe the reading process as reading for the different positions in the field and so make up a ‘guided annotation’ to help students locate, describe and comment on those positions. Similarly we could describe academic argumentative writing as constituted by those different positions and show students how these positions, including the writer’s position, are commonly related to each other. In short, we could show students the interrelationship of academic reading and writing. Below are four active reading prompts to guide students’ annotation:

- *Give this paragraph a title that shows its purpose and central idea,*
- *Write a brief note of your response to what you have read,*
- *Say what the author is doing in this part.*
- *Do I need to cross check something in another text about this point? (i.e. dictionary, textbook)*

When it came to writing it was necessary for students to acquire a facility with new rhetorical patterns other than those covered in previous tasks. This was achieved through ‘templating’ (Graff, 2006) the structure of academic argument.

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Recent research in behavioural genetics has found that</i> |
|---|

- *This challenges the prevailing view which holds that*
- *Rose maintains that*
- *He writes “.....” (...) and therefore contends that*
- *Rose also describes ... which illustrates the view of*

Prior to writing the essay in class, students practiced fusing these templated leading lines to their own textual observations and views about the issue. One student writes:

(TEMPLATE) *On the basis of the research, it has been proposed that / (STUDENT) different systems should be designed to test people who are “at risk” for committing serious crime.*

Another uses generalised prompts to signal critique:

(TEMPLATE) *Although Rose... it still leans to...*
 (STUDENT): *Although Rose’s research is credible, he still leans to a radical approach by suggesting that we lock up adults who have the gene...*

Using, therefore, the guided reading and annotation strategies, the templates, and drawing upon previous steps in the scaffolding process, including explicitly taught techniques in academic writing, students wrote responses to an issue that highlighted an inter-disciplinary debate. The samples of writing illustrated that non traditional students were increasingly comfortable with adapting the discursal meta-commentary and were able to develop their argument beyond the templates. In design, as in delivery and outcome, the final phase of the course maximises inclusion of non traditional students (Rai 1994), highlighting the importance of making writing practices explicit. By being explicit with students, questions can be raised about the relationship between the different discourse communities students inhabit, and can more readily open avenues of access to this discourse. This provides a source

for further reflection, both on sociological knowledge and on the shifts of identity that students are required to perform.

Preliminary Indications of Student Success

As teachers in the course, there are multiple ways in which we evaluate students' learning, and hence the promise of our pedagogy, from the leaps in students performance over the year, from their willingness to tackle new complex tasks and from what students themselves say to us. More by accident than by design, we also have some 'hard' indications that our collaboration translates into student success. Students' results in the comparative essay in the sociology unit present a hopeful picture for participating students. Not all the students in the sociology unit were enrolled in the communications unit, which renders an anecdotal comparison between participating and non-participating students. From the sociology results, we can see that students in both embedded units were very well-represented in the *high distinction*, *distinction* and *credit* results, and all were able to achieve at least a *pass* result. Lower and 'not competent' results were present in the groups who did not participate in the project. These positive results require further longitudinal attention to make sense of student experience in these programs and how they improve student experience in professional and academic settings.

Sustaining a new expertise

Our use of the metaphor of a discourse community has enabled us to articulate why we think collaboration between language teachers and discipline teachers, in this case Community Development teachers, cannot be dispensed with if we are to develop a coherent approach to language development across the curriculum. Collaboration is essential: both language and discipline teachers have, so to speak, a piece of the puzzle that is vital to students, but it is a

piece of the puzzle that neither language and learning teachers nor community services teachers can hand over to the other. It is evident to us that a crucial factor in sustaining and indeed generalising the pedagogy we describe to other teaching contexts depends on the expertise of the language and literacy teachers in developing and using contextualised, scaffolded language and learning materials. This is itself a new expertise principally because the context of work is complex and new. The complexity can be summarised as follows:

- Students have diverse educational, linguistic and age backgrounds,
- Both course goals and student orientations vary between post-course employment in the field and preparation for Higher Education,
- Students must be initiated into identities that are new to them, that is, as both members of academic communities and as practitioners in a field, while crucially sustaining and developing a sense of critical agency with respect to both.
- Collaboration between language and discipline teachers is necessary to clarify these identities, the language essential to realise these identities, and to develop the pedagogic practices which empower students to take stands on the discourses they learn.
- The fields themselves are in constant play and hence the kinds of communication that makes them up is fluid.
- The various discourses of language learning to be drawn upon to inform pedagogic practice are themselves newly emerging.

Developing the expertise to meet the challenges posed by such complexity requires what perhaps can best be seen as an action research, continuous improvement, or a 'learning in the workplace' model of teacher development. Indeed lines between research, professional

development and teaching begin to blur in this context. Every occasion for teaching, as well as the deployment of expertise, is a learning opportunity and an opportunity to enrich learning materials. A central issue is how to nourish the learning gained and make it available to new teachers.

Conclusion

Critiques of competency (Wheelahan, 2009) and progressivist pedagogy (Martin & Rose, 2008) respectively espouse 'bringing knowledge back into' the curriculum and explicit instruction about the distinctive language features of such knowledge. This paper has reported on pedagogy in one particular course designed to meet the learning challenges of non traditional students at the interface of TAFE and Higher Education. It is a pedagogy that does not involve circumscribing or reducing the knowledge and language which non traditional students have access to in order for them to attain a credential and so connects to these critiques, though it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the commonalities and differences between our practice and these critical perspectives. In this paper, we have described *how* we have used the metaphor of 'discourse community', and 'discoursal identity' to construct a pedagogy which enables students 1) to learn the 'knowledge' and 'language' of their course both for work and further study, and 2) to develop a critical perspective on such discourse. We have also shown that identifying the privileged identities of a discourse (our way of framing 'knowledge') is, by nature, difficult and so collaboration between teachers with different but complementary expertise is intrinsic to the design, and enactment of this pedagogy.

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