An exploration of how first year students are inducted into their discipline's academic discourses

ABSTRACT

The aim of this phenomenographic study was to investigate how first year students are inducted into the academic literacies of their discipline as this is often identified as a contributing factor to student experience. The study involved interviewing 35 students and five lecturers from a study program in an Australian university. The findings revealed: 1) there was disparity between different stakeholders' expectations about the learning and teaching needs of students in Higher Education; 2) not all first year students had the expected academic literacies to engage in the discourses of their discipline; 3) scaffolding of disciplinary literacies was not being undertaken consistently; and 4) lecturers were uncertain about the level of scaffolding that should be provided to first year students.

Keywords: induct; academic literacies; academic discourses; first year students; scaffolding

1. Introduction

It is generally accepted that in order to achieve positive learning outcomes in their study programs, students in Higher Education (HE) need to be proficient in the academic literacies of their discipline. However, proficiency in academic literacies varies amongst commencing students in HE as a consequence of the historical and social contexts of a discipline and academic abilities, language skills and cultural backgrounds of students (Elton, 2010; Goldingay et al., 2012). Studies undertaken in this field broadly confirm that academic literacies play a significant role in determining first year student's successful participation and engagement in their study program (Chanock, 2013; Walker & An-e, 2013; Wingate, 2012). Academic literacies are forms of "oral and written communication-genres, registers, graphics, linguistic structures; interactional patterns that are privileged, expected, cultivated, conventionalised, or ritualised" (Duff, 2010, p. 175). While studies have investigated the challenges first year students experience in relation to the acquisition these literacies (Buzzi, Grimes & Rolls, 2012; Hocking & Fieldhouse, 2011; Walker & An-e, 2013) and considered programs implemented to address them (Chanock, Horton, Reedman & Stephenson, 2012; Wingate, 2012), few have qualitatively examined how first year students are inducted into their discipline (Duff, 2010).

The preliminary qualitative investigation reported in this paper is thus important as it identifies lecturers and students' insights about how the development of academic literacies occurs in a study program. It has been argued that traditionally, research in HE generally focuses on the ways students can be trained to adjust to the practices undertaken by the institution (Gibbs, 1994). Investigations are often undertaken to examine how successfully students adhere to the conventions and principles that are already existent in their discipline and the university. These investigations generally do not explore lecturers or students'

insights about the experience and reflections about the process itself. Conversely, Lea and Street (1998) contend that it is important to examine staff and student perspectives about their own literacy practices without prior assumptions. It is these premises that directed the investigation reported in this paper.

2. Academic literacies and learning

The academic literacies approach emerged as an alternative to other approaches that perceived literacies as distinct skills that students could master devoid of "language and communication…that are privileged, expected, cultivated, conventionalised or ritualised" (Duff, 2010, p. 175). In HE, academic literacies are often associated with specific "genres, genre sets and registers, and often relatively formal register, with subject-specific (disciplinary) linguistic, discursive and multimodal conventions" (Duff, 2010, p. 175). They also include other capabilities such as "critical thinking, database searching, familiarity with academic conventions such as referencing, use of formal register and the ability to manipulate a range of academic genres" (McWilliams & Allan, 2014, p. 3).

Advocates of the academic literacies approach see student writing and learning as issues at the level of epistemology and identities. The institutions in which the practices take place are perceived as sites of discourse and power. Literacy is recognised as involving a range of communicative practices, genres, fields as well as disciplines and students are expected to alternate between one context and another using an array of linguistic practices suitable for each context and simultaneously deal with the social meanings and identities that each suggests (Lea & Street, 1998, p. 59). Writing [and learning] is seen as a social practice into which students have to be inducted. The academic literacies approach focuses on practices rather than texts (Lillis & Scott, 2007).

The induction of students into the academic practices of their discipline should not be perceived lightly. Duff (2010, p. 69) suggests that student induction into their disciplinary literacies is a dynamic process that involves, "modelling, feedback and uptake; different levels of investment and agency on the part of learners; … the negotiation of power and identities; and … important personal transformations for at least some participants". Effective acquisition of academic literacies occurs when the scaffolding and development unfolds over a course of a study program and is embedded in the content of courses (Lea & Street, 1998; Wingate, 2012).

The different ways students are inducted into their discipline's literacies have been investigated in many parts of the world. As early as the 1980s, researchers in the United States (US) such as Bizzell (1982) and Bartholomae (1986) were concerned about the ways students were initiated into the literacy practices of their institution and discipline. Similar to Bizzell and Bartholomae, but with an anthropological lens, Ballard and Clanchy (1988) in Australia suggested that often students were not aware or did not understand the conventions and practices employed in HE. Thus they needed to be instructed on what these concepts were. Ballard and Clanchy suggested that students' writing challenges could be addressed if the conventions and rules of a discipline's literacies were made clear. Accordingly, in the

United Kingdom (UK), Hounsel (1988) saw academic literacies as a 'code' that students could decipher if their inherent features are made explicit. Although in the US and UK the term 'academic discourse' was utilised instead of 'literacies', it was implied in all of these contexts that academic literacies comprise a set of practices that is employed by a community of practitioners. These practices are unique to the practitioners and context in which they operate. Some commencing students are challenged by these literacies. Therefore, students need to be made aware of what these practices are so that they are able to acquire and employ these conventions in their study program.

2.1. Academic literacies and first year students

First year students in higher education are often challenged by academic literacies (Chanock, 2000; Devereux & Wilson, 2008). This is progressively becoming a significant issue as there are more non-traditional students in universities today compared to the past. The National Centre for Education Statistics, United States (n.d.) defines non-traditional students as those who take a break from their studies after high school, study part-time and work full-time, have dependents, are single parents or have not completed high school. This category is further defined by the Department of Education and Training, Australia (2015) to include students who are Indigenous, have a disability, speak English as an Additional Language, from low socioeconomic backgrounds, from regional and remote areas or studying in non-traditional disciplines. Brady (2013) argues that non-traditional students ought to be taught the literacies of their discipline as they may be disadvantaged because of their economic, social and cultural capital. This is affirmed by Klinger (as cited in Klinger and Murray, 2012) who maintains that non-traditional students do not perform as well as their peers and Gale and Parker (2013) who suggest that the completion rates of non-traditional students are generally lower.

Some students, especially those from non-traditional pathways, may not be able to demonstrate particular behaviours expected in the study program without some form of scaffolding that makes the values and practices of their discipline clear and provides them "with the language, skills support, and opportunities they need to participate with growing competence in the new culture and its core activities" (Duff, 2010, p.76). The development of academic literacies should also be scaffolded so that students can meet the challenges of the classroom and be effective and productive participants in their study program, (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005; Ivanic, 1998; Macken-Horarik, Devereux, Trimingham-Jack & Wilson, 2006).

Furthermore, although a competent level of academic literacies is necessary for successful engagement and participation in the study program, the goal ultimately is for students to demonstrate their proficiency in the discourses of their discipline, first, during their professional placements and then in the workplace upon graduation. Ability to communicate both verbally and in written form is one of the core attributes listed in many universities' graduate qualities. In a study carried out by the *Collegiate Employment Research Institute,* Michigan State University (2007), it was found that one of the reasons new graduates were either reprimanded or fired was their inability to effectively

communicate both verbally and in writing. This finding was similar to another study conducted in the 1990s at the Johnson and Wales University. Similarly, in an investigation carried out by *Graduate Careers Australia* (2016), it was found that employers ranked interpersonal and communication skills (oral and written) as the topmost attribute they looked for in the selection criteria when recruiting graduates. What this highlights is that both academic literacies and professional communicational are important skills that need to be scaffolded and developed in study programs so that students will be proficient in their discipline's literacies.

3. Methodology

3.1. The research design

The research design that guided this investigation is Phenomenography. It is a qualitative research approach that is used to identify the different ways a group of people experience and understand a phenomenon (Marton 1981). This approach was chosen because it permitted the collection of insights about a phenomenon that was unfolding in a naturalistic context, which otherwise cannot be obtained. Phenomenography is not an investigation of the phenomenon itself but how people experience, understand or conceive a phenomenon (Larsson & Holmstrom, 2007; Ornek 2008). The group of people in this study comprised students and lecturers from the Bachelor of Teaching (MBET) program in the research context. Open-ended questions were asked in the interviews and participants were encouraged to speak freely and give concrete examples about their experience of the phenomenon which was: how MBET students developed their disciplinary academic literacies. The interview questions had the "What" (the subject's focus) and the "How" (the creation of meaning) aspects (Larsson & Holmstrom 2007). The main objective of this approach was to identify how the participants were thinking, interacting and striving to create meaning about the phenomenon (Larsson & Holmstrom, 2007). Although a phenomenon can be perceived in multiple manners, the meaning-making process can only occur two to six ways (Larsson & Holmstrom 2007; Marton, 1981). The meaning-making process in this investigation involved 1) selecting utterances from the transcript based on the criteria of relevance; 2) identifying utterances that were linked to the research questions; 3) interpreting these utterances in relation to the context in which they were made; 4) analysing the embedded meaning in the quotes; 5) focusing on the pool of meanings discovered in the data; and 6) classifying utterances together into categories based on similarities and differences (Marton, 1981).

3.2. Research context

Purposive sampling was used to select participants for this investigation as it is a common approach used in phenomenographic studies. This approach allows the selection of information-rich cases (Patton, 2002), which would enable in-depth understanding about how students were inducted into their disciplinary discourses. The MBET program was selected

for this study as records indicated that approximately 150 out of the 470 students enrolled in the program had sought learning support from the University's learning and teaching unit located on campus. One of the first year core courses in the MBET program was identified for collection of data. The course was offered in the first semester. Permission was sought from the Program Director and Course Coordinator. Ethics approval for undertaking this investigation was also obtained. An invitation to participate in the study was sent via email to all students from the program who had sought learning support from staff in the learning and teaching unit. An information sheet providing other details such as ethics approval and the voluntary nature of the study was also appended. Thirty-five students or approximately 23% of those targeted, volunteered to participate in the investigation. Although, there is no prescriptive sample size for a phenomenographic study, the selected number of participants simultaneously allowed for finding variations in conceptions while ensuring that the data from the interviews was manageable (Yates, Partridge and Bruce, 2012). An invitation was also sent to all the eight Course Coordinators (CCs) teaching in the program. Five out of eight course coordinators agreed to be involved in the investigation.

3.3. Data collection method and analysis

The students were interviewed at the end of their second semester by which point they had been studying in the MBET program for approximately one year. The lecturers were interviewed after the student interviews were completed. Both student and staff interviews lasted between 45 minutes and an hour. In order to address the main theme of this investigation, which is, how students are inducted into the discourse of their discipline, all the participants were asked specific questions about their academic literacy practices. The interview guide is presented in Table 1. The participants were questioned about themes that are often associated with academic literacies in HE (for example: genre knowledge, academic vocabulary, academic language, academic conventions, critical thinking and scaffolding).

The in-depth interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. In the data analysis phase, separate categories describing how different participants experienced the phenomenon were identified from the interviews. Particular processes were undertaken in the analysis of the data, namely, 1) reading the transcripts for familiarity; 2) compiling the responses for particular questions; 3) reducing the responses for emerging themes; 4) categorising similar answers; 5) comparing the various categories; 6) labelling the categories; and 7) contrasting the different categories (Ornek 2008). The use of this approach also allowed the collation of various kinds of evidence to identify how different people in the MBET program were making sense, understanding and conceiving disciplinary academic literacy practices. Furthermore, as the researcher was working in the context, she was able to benefit from the situated knowledge about the institution as this would have a lot of bearing on the academic literacy practices of both staff and students.

4. Results

4.1. Staff insights about their students' academic literacy practices

4.1.1. Genre knowledge

The lecturers specified that their students would not be able to produce the different genre types without some form of scaffolding as there is a range of writing types in their discipline. These lecturers also suggested that some of their students struggled with their writing even though they had been provided with explanation on how to produce a particular genre. It was agreed that high achieving students were able to produce the required genres without much assistance while those who lacked confidence required explicit instructions on what to do and say. There was a strong advocacy for high schools to provide training in academic writing before students progressed to HE as it was suggested that even though students were able to cope with the production of particular assignments like the essay, they experienced problems when writing reports, which was a common genre in the MBET program. One lecturer from the group was with the view that although initially students may not be able to produce the genres of their discipline, they would be able to do so as they progressed in their study program.

4.1.2. Academic vocabulary

When asked if students used the discipline's vocabulary in the production of their tasks, lecturers indicated that although all their students attempted to use them, they were not satisfactorily doing so. One lecturer stated that some students used the vocabulary more than others while the other lecturers suggested that students generally employed the discipline's vocabulary because lecturers advocated and encouraged their use throughout the course. It was highlighted that in some courses, it was compulsory for students to use the relevant vocabulary that had been introduced. Another lecturer identified that while students try to use the vocabulary of their discipline, as novices in the discourses, they do not always get them right. However, he suggested that this was okay as it was part of the learning process.

Table 1. *Student and staff interview guide*

Student interview	Staff interview
Genre knowledge • What do you understand to be the major differences in writing different assignments for your courses? • How have you developed your knowledge of writing different assignments for your courses? • What has been the major challenge in developing your knowledge of different assignment types?	**Genre knowledge** • Are your students able to produce the different assignment types without much explanation?
Academic vocabulary • How have you developed your knowledge of academic vocabulary for your area of study?	**Academic vocabulary** • Do your students use the academic vocabulary of their discipline in the production of their tasks?

• What have been the major challenges in developing your knowledge of vocabulary for your discipline?	
Academic language • How have you developed your understanding of academic language? • What have been the major challenges in developing your knowledge of academic language for your discipline?	**Academic language** • Do your students employ academic language in the production of their tasks?
Academic conventions • How have you learnt to use academic conventions in your writing? • What have been the main challenges in developing your understanding of academic conventions in your writing?	**Academic conventions** • Are you satisfied with your students' use of academic conventions in their writing?
Critical thinking and writing • What do you understand by the terms 'critical thinking' and 'critical writing'? • How have you learnt to write critically in your assignments? • What have been the major challenges in developing your critical writing skills?	**Critical thinking and writing** • Do your students know what 'critical thinking' is? • Do your students demonstrate 'critical thinking' in the production of their assignments?
Scaffolding • Do your lecturers show you models or examples of your assignments to help you? • Do your lecturers support you with your learning so that you are able to achieve the expected outcomes? • Do your lecturers help you develop the academic literacies of your discipline? • Are there enough resources to help you produce the different tasks?	**Scaffolding** • Do you scaffold your students' learning? • Do you show your students, models and exemplars of tasks they are expected to produce?

Conversely, his colleague highlighted that unless she insisted that they do, her students used a lot of everyday vocabulary instead of the discipline's terminology.

4.1.3. Academic language

All lecturers agreed that while most of their students demonstrate academic language in the production of their tasks, some do not. Those students who do not meet lecturers' expectations are usually asked to resubmit their work. The lecturers also indicated that students use academic language in the production of their tasks in varying degrees. Students who were able to use academic language very well in the production of their tasks were those who had a sound understanding and had mastered the content. These students obtained high grades. Some students continued to struggle despite lecturers providing feedback for improvement. These students, according to the lecturers, were those who failed to engage

with the feedback. One lecturer specifically indicated that her students would only use academic language if she explicitly specified that they do.

4.1.4. Academic conventions

All lecturers participating in this investigation stated that they were not satisfied with their students' use of academic conventions in the production of tasks. These participants highlighted that the use of academic conventions in student writing continues to be a substantial challenge. It was identified that although students were reminded in their first assignment about the importance of using academic conventions in their writing, there was "occasional transgression". The lecturers indicated that the teaching team were quite lenient with some conventions such as referencing because students were in their first year. Students were initially told to correct their errors. However, there was an expectation that students get the conventions correct in their second or third assignment even though these concepts were not explicitly taught. One of the lecturers stated that his students had to address specific criteria that he had specified about academic conventions. However, he claimed that not all of his students met the minimum standards. He thought that the main problem was, some of his students "write conversationally, use first person, very general language [and] don't actually reference" [sic].

4.1.5. Critical thinking

The lecturers stated that they explained what critical thinking was and students were encouraged to demonstrate this in their thinking and writing. They also indicated that although it was strongly advocated that their students demonstrate this literacy in their assignments, only some did. There was an implicit suggestion that some students were generally hesitant to demonstrate critical thinking in their tasks for fear of being penalised if they did not correctly do so. One of the lecturers suggested that generally 70 to 75% of his students did not know what critical thinking was. He added that if his students were provided with examples, they may be able to better understand and demonstrate this literacy.

4.1.6. Scaffolding of academic literacies

The lecturers stated that all teaching staff in the program scaffolded their students' learning. This could, for example, consist of processes related to formulating lesson plans, locating resources and writing essays. It was suggested that students were also advised to visit the learning and teaching unit on campus to obtain support for the development of academic literacies. It was found that although the scaffolding and development of academic literacies was promoted and practised in the program, it was undertaken in varying degrees. One lecturer indicated that lecturers would not want to start their instruction at foundation level as students were coming from high school. He was also concerned about giving students exemplars of tasks as this would reduce his students' creativity and problem-solving skills. Another lecturer was worried that the teaching team significantly scaffolds students' learning and that "we've dumbed it down, we no longer have students making inferences for themselves" [sic]. She added that lecturers were so explicit about expectations that it would

be quite shocking if students failed their assignments. She also highlighted that some students were rather uncommitted and did not meet lecturers' expectations. Her colleague implied that students were being consistently scaffolded with the genres of the discipline through the type and level of advice given, the way interaction was modelled, through feedback and everyday communication.

4.2. Student insights about their academic literacy practices

4.2.1. Genre knowledge

Not all the students who participated in this investigation were aware of the major differences in writing different genres for their assignments. Approximately 23 of the participants suggested that in each of the courses they were enrolled, there were specific types of assignments that they had to produce. These participants suggested that they knew how to write essays but were not really confident about writing other types of assignments such as reports, blogs and action plans. About 10 of the participants also indicated that the level of academic writing and expectations from their lecturers also varied for the different courses. Some lecturers were stricter than others. Nearly three thirds of the participants also suggested that they were required to do different things for different assignments such as discuss, argue, critique and reflect. These participants were not clear about the different types of writing that was required for each of these contexts. Most of the participants stated that they learnt how to write essays in high school and six indicated that they had attended academic literacies type workshops that were run by the learning and teaching unit on campus. Three others indicated that they acquired academic literacies from the resources that were available online. One participant who had attended a foundation program prior to enrolling in the program said that he learnt how to write most of his assignments while he was there.

Approximately half of the participants highlighted that the biggest challenge they faced in producing the different genres of assignments was the conflicting information that they received from their lecturers. These students implied that information on course websites conflicted with what their lecturers say in the classroom. Eight of the participants indicated that they did not know what was expected or required by their lecturers as they were not provided with examples of the tasks. These students suggested that often their lecturers told them "this is what you are required to do, now off you go and do it". The students indicated that only some of their lecturers helped them. These students were concerned that they did not know how to produce an action plan which was one of the tasks for a course in the program. Some of the participants stated that learning in the university was very different from high school, especially with regards to writing different types of assignments. These students suggested that they found it difficult to summarise and paraphrase evidence, be specific about what needed to be discussed and use the appropriate vocabulary to say it.

4.2.2. Academic vocabulary

The participants suggested that they developed their discipline's vocabulary in various ways. A majority of the participants indicated that their lecturers drew their attention to the

discipline's vocabulary when they used many of the terminology themselves. Lecturers also reminded students that they would be seeing a lot of new vocabulary which they should record and find meanings for. Some of the lecturers also provided students with a glossary of vocabulary that was associated with particular topics. However, students suggested that their lecturers did not necessarily explain how specific terminology should be employed in their writing or insist that they use them.

The participants of this study identified that, although most of them tried to use the vocabulary of their discipline in their writing, they found it challenging to process, understand and remember the amount of terminology that was present. These students also suggested that it was difficult to find and use the appropriate vocabulary to communicate their argument.

4.2.3. Academic language

The analysis also highlighted that participants' knowledge of academic language was developed through texts, tutorials, online resources, lectures, practice, feedback from their lecturers and discussion with their peers. The student participants stated that their lecturers drew their attention to academic language through role modelling (in their writing, when showing examples of differences between academic language and writing for everyday purposes, explaining how to complete an assessment task and verbal communication).

When asked about the challenges they faced in developing their academic language, the participants claimed that they sometimes struggled to understand terminology and use them in their pedagogical context. About 10 of the participants stated that it was difficult to comprehend the teaching style of different Course Coordinators and integrate these requirements in the production of assessment tasks as each lecturer had a particular style that they wanted students to demonstrate. Nearly three thirds of the participants suggested that they were struggling with the amount of time it was taking them to master their discipline's academic language. These participants also indicated that it was difficult to "understand, remember and use it appropriately in different courses".

4.2.4. Academic conventions

The participants in this study stated that they had developed their knowledge about the appropriate use of academic conventions from their lecturers, during orientation, their foundation studies, in high school, workshops run by the learning and teaching unit, online resources and the University's referencing guide.

Approximately 23 participants highlighted that they experienced significant challenges with regards to appropriately using the conventions, especially with regards to referencing. These students also implied that it was difficult to master these conventions within a short period of time as was often expected by their lecturers. A majority of the participants agreed that they struggled to remember all the rules associated with academic conventions and meet the University's standards. Nearly half of the participants also stated that not all lecturers drew students' attention to the discipline's academic conventions.

4.2.5. Critical thinking

Nearly three thirds of the participants indicated that they did not know what critical thinking was and had to find out by attending workshops during orientation week. When these students were asked if their tutors showed them examples of critical thinking, the participants said that they did so "in context, on site and how they write. A lot of times, it is concerned with the text we are reading, they will often target the whole class" [sic]. Approximately 15 students also said that they have not seen explicit examples of critical thinking and that their lecturers talked about it and have suggested instances where students needed to demonstrate this literacy but that was where it ended. Five of the participants stated that while they had learnt about critical reflection, they had not learnt about critical writing. These students specified that they found it difficult not to include their own opinion when they write or apply critical thinking in the production of their assessment tasks. Approximately a third of the students also suggested that they found it difficult not to copy the notes they took from their lectures and readings, "word for word". Ten of the participants implied that it was sometimes difficult for them to be critical in their writing as "it was a different kind of head space; you have to think of things differently compared to how you would, normally".

4.2.6. Scaffolding of academic literacies

The findings suggested that some lecturers supported and scaffolded their students' learning more than others. There were lecturers who ran extra lectures about assessment tasks and uploaded presentations with clear explanations on what was expected. Participants found this to be very useful. Six of the participants highlighted that their lecturers provided them with models, examples and a lot of information about the assessment tasks that students were required to produce. A few other participants suggested that although some lecturers showed them models or examples of the task, they changed the requirements towards the end when some of the students had almost completed their tasks. This, according to the participants was frustrating. Eight other participants complained that the support provided by some lecturers was quite misleading in that they would show an example of a 45 minute oral presentation video but in contrast would ask students to produce one that was 10 minutes long.

The participants agreed that to an extent there were enough resources to help them with their tasks. These students indicated that they found the orientation sessions that were run at the start of their study programs, very useful. Nearly half of the participants indicated that their lecturers generally directed students to the resources produced by the learning and teaching unit. Twelve students suggested that they would have probably withdrawn from their studies if not for the academic preparation workshops that were run by the learning and teaching unit. A few students complained that although there were enough resources for their learning, there was an overwhelmingly significant amount of information disseminated at the start of their study program.

5. Discussion

The findings indicated that not all lecturers were showing students models and examples of the writing types that they were required to produce, although lecturers were aware that their students would not be able to produce the different genres of their discipline and that some students continued to struggle with their writing even though they were provided with detailed explanation about the genres. This study has highlighted the importance of inducting students into the academic literacies of their discipline as the "genres, registers, graphics, linguistic structures and interactional pattern…are usually connected with specific disciplines or professional areas and is embodied in both texts and in other modes of interaction and representation" (Duff, 2010, p. 175). Without some form of scaffolding and conscious effort to introduce students to the genres and literacies of their discipline, some students, especially those who have come from non-traditional backgrounds, would continue to experience learning challenges, which would ultimately impact on their retention. Statistics indicated that from 2005 to 2010, only 85-87% of students in Australia progressed to second year. From 2014 to 2015, 94% of students in the UK and 72% in the US progressed to their second year (Gale & Parker, 2013; Higher Education Statistics Agency, 2017, National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017). Inability to demonstrate academic writing skills to meet their lecturers' expectations was often cited as one of the challenges commencing students faced in higher education which also impacted on their overall workload (Goldfinch & Hughes, 2007).

There was a mismatch between staff and students' insights about the use of academic vocabulary. Lecturers claimed that despite advocating, encouraging and in some instances making it compulsory in some courses for students to use the discipline's terminology, not all students adhered. Conversely, the student participants indicated that although lecturers drew their attention to the vocabulary of their discipline and reminded them of being aware of these words and their meaning, they seldom insisted that students use them. This study has highlighted that first year students were challenged by the amount of vocabulary they had to remember, understand and process. It was possible that some students were not using academic vocabulary in their tasks because of the amount of terminology that they had to acquire, understand and use. It is also conceivable that students were anxious about incorrectly using these words in their tasks. This issue could be addressed by providing students with a glossary of terms at the start of each lecture or course. Furthermore, lecturers could also consistently use these terminology in their speech and writing so that students can see how they operate in the discourse and eventually become confident themselves of using them.

The investigation also suggested that students' use of academic conventions in HE was a significant challenge for both lecturers and students. The findings of this study highlighted that often lecturers did not explicitly teach these conventions but expected their students to master and demonstrate them relatively quickly in their study program. It was also found that students were anxious about aspiring to meet this expectation. What this investigation highlights is that not all high schools prepare students with the academic literacies and skills that are required for successful engagement in HE and even if they did, the literacies that are required in different disciplines may not exactly match those that first

year students already possess (van der Meer, 2008; Barrie, 2007). A study of first year Australian students found that schools did not adequately prepare students for university and that approximately 60% of the respondents indicated that they were not prepared to commence in their study programs (Brinkworth, McCann, Matthews & Nordstrom, 2008). Students, especially those from non-traditional backgrounds, may not be able to satisfactorily engage in the discourses of their discipline if lecturers do not teach them the relevant academic literacies. This may ultimately impact on their decision to either stay or leave

The findings of this research study also indicated that although students generally utilised academic language in the production of their tasks, some did so better than others. It is possible that students who were not as successfully demonstrating academic language in the production of their tasks were those who were not familiar with the target discourse or with the genres required for the different assignments as the attributes and criteria for evaluation may greatly vary from one context to another (Haneda, 2006; Zappa-Hollman, 2007b). The study also found that for some students, the development of academic language occurred through their lecturers whom they saw as role models. This happened when lecturers explained tasks, wrote to exemplify a concept or spoke to their students. The findings also indicated that the feedback students were obtaining from their lecturers was also instrumental for the development of academic language. Therefore, lecturers should ensure that the feedback they provide for assessment tasks motivates and encourages learning. With students coming to HE from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds as well as having disparate levels of learning experience in their previous context, it is truly important for all lecturers to clearly explain and demonstrate the values and practices that are inherent in the discipline so that students are aware of the language and skills that they need to acquire in order to successfully participate in the discourse of their discipline (Duff, 2010; Hawkins, 2005; Moriata, 2005). Lecturers should never assume that their students would be familiar with the discipline's target discourse.

It was also found that despite lecturers explaining what critical thinking is and strongly encouraging their students to demonstrate this in their writing, many students continued to be challenged by the ability to demonstrate this literacy in their assessments. Both staff and student interviews confirmed this. This was attributed to a possibility that students failed to demonstrate critical thinking in their writing for fear of getting the concept wrong and being penalised. The findings also suggested that students were not able to acquire this literacy as they were not shown explicit examples of what it is or how it could be employed in writing as lecturers were only implicitly referring to critical thinking through various activities in their teaching process. What this suggests is that critical thinking skills should be developed more explicitly and rigorously in first year study programs so that students are able to demonstrate this literacy in the production of their assessment tasks (Fenton-Smith, 2012; Paul & Elder, 2004). The findings of this study has confirmed that as in other parts of the world, there is an ambiguity that surrounds the development of critical thinking, for although this literacy plays a significant role in the curriculum of many countries (Australian Curriculum Assessment Authority, 2011; United Kingdom Department of Education, 2013), it is not clear how it is acquired or measured (Agnew, 2002).

Accordingly, studies published in the US have highlighted that many students graduate from high school without critical thinking skills and only a third of the students were college-ready (Pittmann, 2010).

This study also suggests that there is some uncertainty surrounding the concept of scaffolding as lecturers' insights conflicted with those of the student participants. It is possible that there was a mismatch between staff and student observations about the level of scaffolding needed. While lecturers believed that all lecturers in the program were scaffolding the development of academic literacies, the student participants observed that only some of their lecturers supported their learning. It is possible that lecturers were providing students with technical skills to complete their assignments rather than making instructions and intent about the tasks clear, thus creating opportunities for their students to access, engage and participate in the completion as well as motivate their confidence to produce tasks even though they may be imperfect (Devereux, 2014). These findings reiterate the need for consistent scaffolding of academic literacies by all lecturers, especially those teaching first year students. While it is possible that everyone in the study program attempts to make the learning and teaching process as positive as possible for their students, some lecturers may forget that not all commencing students have the capabilities to engage at a competent level, in the discourses of their discipline. The findings also suggest that more consistent measures need to be put in place in HE for the scaffolding and development of academic literacies in study programs as Axford, Harders and Wise (2009) argue that often there was not enough scaffolding in the learning and teaching context.

Concurrently, it is also important for lecturers to be clear about their instructions, intent and expectations when setting assessment tasks. Often lecturers, who are experts in their discipline, specify assessments in a manner familiar to them or take things for granted when articulating the requirements. This may not always come across clearly to the novice student who is trying to become a member of their community of practice. It is pertinent that lecturers recognise the complexity of communication that directs assessments (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004; Emerson, Reese & McKay, 2005). First year students have to acquire new skills, adapt to a new learning style, have different learning needs as well as experiences and come from different backgrounds. Often these aspects along with poor academic literacies are cited as factors that contribute to first year students' attrition (Goldfinch & Hughes, 2007).

Similar to previous studies, the findings of the current investigation has also found that lecturers often expect commencing students to have the ability to engage in their disciplinary discourses from the onset of their study program (Murray, 2010; Purser, 2008). Some lecturers assume that students who have completed high school would have acquired the academic literacies practised in HE. However, because of the 'unique' student profile in universities today, it is possible that not all students would have had this experience.

It was also highlighted that the learning and teaching unit figured rather significantly as a resource for the development academic literacies in both the lecturers and students' lives. While lecturers were directing students to this unit, students were attending workshops or using resources developed by learning advisers. Although, the significant role learning

advisers play in the provision of learning support cannot be refuted, this form of literacies development is strongly critiqued in the field as it sees students as "customers who can be advised on a range of services that are measurable but bear little resemblance to the fundamental understanding concerning the teaching and learning pedagogy" (McWilliam & Allan, 2014, p. 3). Buzzi, Grimes & Rolls (2012) argue that students can only be fully socialised and inducted into their community of practice if the development of academic literacies is undertaken by disciplinary experts who have the expertise and knowledge of what these practices comprise in their discipline. However, discipline experts could expand on the expertise of learning advisers by collaborating to work towards the development of their students' academic literacies.

6. Conclusion

The study reported in this paper raises valuable insights about how first year students are inducted into the academic literacies of their discipline. The findings have highlighted some significant themes, namely: 1) the disparity between different stakeholders' expectations about the learning and teaching needs of students in HE; 2) not all first year students have the expected academic literacies to engage in the discourses of their discipline; 3) scaffolding of disciplinary literacies is not undertaken consistently; and 4) the uncertainty about the nature and level of scaffolding that should be provided. In the workplace, employers would expect graduates to be competent and proficient in the discipline's genres and practices, rhetoric and linguistic processes, vocabulary, writing styles, conventions and critical thinking. Hence, lecturers should ensure that students who graduate from their study programs can demonstrate this. The scaffolding and development of academic literacies within a study program should be consistently undertaken by the teaching team. It is important that lecturers recognise that scaffolding does not mean providing answers to complete tasks or simplifying requirements. It is about creating opportunities where students themselves are able to confidently complete their assessments because they understand the tasks and their intent as well as have sufficient access to resources. The scaffolding of academic literacies can unfold when lecturers provide clear instructions about assessment tasks and requirements, good examples or models of tasks, communicate the processes, values and contexts that are associated with the conventions and language of the discipline as well as consistently provide detailed feedback for improvement.

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