



## **A cross-disciplinary approach to embedding: A pedagogy for developing academic literacies**

### **Abstract**

Over the last decade, the higher education sector has undergone considerable changes. With increased rates of access and participation in university education, a variety of entry pathways have emerged and led to a significant growth in the range of non-traditional students enrolling at universities, which now includes students with English as an Additional Language or Dialect (EALD), students who identify as mature age learners, and those from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. As universities continue to enrol students with greater diversity in their profile and capacity, there is concern about falling academic standards and performance due to a lack of key academic language and literacies to succeed in the tertiary environment. In more recent years, the provision of academic language and learning has moved away from generic models which focus on a deficit model of support for weak students to more collaborative and integrated approaches, which advocate a discipline or faculty-based model for all students. There is a growing body of research which supports the view that academic literacies should be embedded within discipline subjects rather than taught generically outside the subject area. This study proposes a unique model of embedding - the Unit Specific Model - an embedded, integrated and team taught model, that champions a collaborative and cross-disciplinary approach to teaching and learning within academic disciplines, and represents a model of best practice. Results from previous longitudinal studies (Maldoni, Kennelly & Davies, 2009; Kennelly, Maldoni & Davies, 2010; Maldoni & Lear, 2016) have demonstrated the positive impact of the Unit Specific Model on improvements in the English language capabilities of international students, the development of academic literacies, and student learning in the discipline. Using the Unit Specific Model as the theoretical framework, this study reports on the expansion of the Unit Support Program (USP) from first to second and third year units across two disciplines. Using a mixed-methods approach employing both quantitative and qualitative data sets, this study explores the impact of embedding the Unit Specific Model into the targeted disciplines beyond first year, and assesses the benefits of this intervention particularly in the areas of student engagement, the acquisition of content and the development of academic literacies, performance, and ultimately student success. In addition, the study explores the unique team teaching aspect of this cross-disciplinary approach to embedding as a model of best practice and seeks to examine the methods of negotiating the shared teaching and learning space both in and out of the classroom, model collaborative practices, and identify the associated benefits these provide to both students and academic staff. The research will argue for a more systematic and institution-wide approach to the development of academic literacies across the tertiary sector where content and literacy staff are integrated within disciplinary learning, teaching and assessment, and are repositioned as relevant to all students.

### **References**

Baik, C., & Greig, J. (2009). Improving academic outcomes of undergraduate ESL student: The case for discipline based academic skills programs. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 28(4), 401-416.



Beatty, S. E., Collins, A., & Buckingham, M. A. (2014). Embedding academic socialisation within a language support program: An Australian case study. *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, 5(1), 9-18. Retrieved <https://fyhejournal.com/article/view/180/225>

Briguglio, C. (2014). Working in the third space: Promoting interdisciplinary collaboration to embed English language development into the disciplines Final Report. National Teaching Fellowship.

Briguglio, C. & Watson, S. (2014). Embedding English language across the curriculum in higher education: A continuum of development support. *The Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 37(1), 67-74. Retrieved from <http://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=137632942318931;res=IELIND>

Brooman-Jones, S., Cunningham, G., Hanna, L., & Wilson, D. (2011). Embedding academic literacy— A case study in Business at UTS. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, 5(2), A1-A13.

Bury, S., & Sheese, R. (2016). Academic literacies as cornerstones in course design: A partnership to develop programming for faculty and teaching assistants. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 13(3), 2016. Retrieved from <http://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol13/iss3/3>

Chanock, K. (2012). Collaborating to embed academic literacies and personal support in first year discipline subjects. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 9(3), 1-13.

Kennelly, R., Maldoni, A., & Davies, D. (2010). A case study: Do discipline based programs improve student learning outcomes? *International Journal for Educational Integrity*, 6(1), 61-73. <http://www.ojs.unisa.edu.au/index.php/IJEI/article/view/671/501>

Lea, M. & Street, B. (1998). Student writing in higher education: An Academic Literacies approach. *Studies in Higher Education*, 23(2), 157-172.

Lea, M. & Street, B. (2006). The 'academic literacies' model: Theory and applications. *Theory into Practice*, 45(4), 368-377.

Liebel, G., Burden, H., & Heldal, R. (2017). For free: continuity and change by team teaching. *Teaching in Higher Education*. 22(1), 62-77.

Maldoni, A., Kennelly, R., & Davies, D. (2009). Integrating discipline-based reading to improve intercultural and international learning. *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*. 3(1), 1-18. <http://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/ij-sotl/vol3/iss1/8>

Maldoni, A., & Lear, E. (2016). A decade of embedding: Where are we now? *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 13(3), 1-20. <http://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/vol13/iss3/2/>

Murray, N., & Nallaya, S. (2014). Embedding academic literacies in university programme curricula: A case study. *Studies in Higher Education*, 41(7), 1-17.

Purser, E. R., Skillen, J., Deane, M., Donohue, J., & Peake, K. (2008). Developing academic literacy in context. *Zeitschrift Schreiben*, 6, 1-7.

Thies, L.C. (2012). Increasing student participation and success: Collaborating to embed academic literacies into the curriculum. *Journal of Academic Language & Learning*, 6(1), A15-A31.



Wilson, K., & Devereux, L. (2014). Scaffolding theory: High challenge, high support in Academic Language and Learning (ALL) contexts. *Journal of Academic Language & Learning*, 8(3), A91-A100.

Wingate, U. (2006). Doing away with 'study skills'. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 11(4), 457-469.

Wingate, U. (2011). Embedding academic writing instruction into subject teaching: A case study. *Active learning in higher education*, 12(1), 69-81.

Wingate, U. (2015). Academic literacy and student diversity: The case for inclusive practice. *YUK: Multilingual matters*.