



Opening the doors to the disciplines: developing curriculum-integrated academic literacy instruction

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All students new to university need to acquire academic literacy, which encompasses reading, evaluating information, as well as communicating through the written and spoken genres used in their academic discipline. Although it has long been argued that these abilities can only be developed within academic disciplines, explicit academic literacy instruction is rarely offered as part of the curriculum. Difficulties that students encounter are commonly diagnosed as language or writing deficiencies, for which many universities offer remedial courses outside the curriculum.

Over the last decade, there has been a growing number of universities, most notably in Australia, where English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or learning specialists have collaborated with subject lecturers to integrate academic language and literacy instruction in the curriculum. However, the related publications do not provide a sufficient account of the instructional methods, underlying theoretical frameworks, and the exact nature of the collaboration. More comprehensive information is needed for managers and practitioners who want to initiate change in universities where curriculum integration of academic literacy instruction does not exist or is resisted.

In this paper, I discuss a series of projects that we carried out at King's College London with the aim to initiate collaboration with subject lecturers and develop examples of discipline-specific and curriculum-integrated academic literacy instruction. The projects involved different levels of collaboration, and the instructional approach was based on genre theory. As these projects were driven by a small number of practitioners and reached only a few academic departments, we took further 'bottom-up' initiatives, for instance by including training in academic literacy instruction into staff development programmes, and by training graduate students to support novice students in their disciplines. As a result, practices are gradually changing in several departments. I will present data gathered in these projects to demonstrate the impact of the instructional methods on students' development of academic literacy. I will also present a number of changes in lecturers' teaching practices that result from the staff development initiative. Finally, I will consider the feasibility of these initiatives and their potential to bring about change in other contexts.