

The proof of the pudding

Analysing student written texts for evidence of a successful literacy intervention

Linda Devereux l.devereux@adfa.edu.au

Kate Wilson kate.wilson@canberra.edu.au

Maya Gunawardena maya.gunawardena@canberra.edu.au

Anne Kiley a.kiley@adfa.edu.au

Graphic source: <https://warsawrichmondcountytriad.com/2015/11/02/join-us-dec-8-for-a-holiday-luncheon-and-festivities/>



Who we are, and what was our project?

- We are a group of teachers and researchers, with backgrounds in education, linguistics and literacy
- We have worked for the past few years on an **embedded model** of **academic literacy development** for first year undergraduate students
- From analysis of student output in 2016, we evaluated the success of our intervention, as evidenced in students' response to a formal written assessment task




Support students - especially those 'at risk'



- ▶ First year students are novices
- ▶ May not have experience of tertiary literacies, or the specific literacies of a new discipline
- ▶ Widening participation in tertiary education (eg Baik et al, 2015)
- ▶ A broad spectrum of students; some better prepared than others
 - ▶ International students
 - ▶ Students from non-traditional backgrounds
 - ▶ Rural and regional schools
 - ▶ Disadvantaged schools
 - ▶ Students who are *First in Family*

In-discipline approaches make sense

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- ▶ Generic literacy sessions → academic literacy
 - ▶ Embedded literacy interventions → academic literacies
(Lea & Street, 1998)

Student Writing in Higher Education: an academic literacies approach

MARY R. LEA

Institute of Educational Technology, Open University, UK

BRIAN V. STREET

King's College, London, UK

ABSTRACT *This article addresses the issue of student writing in higher education. It draws on the findings of an Economic and Social Research Council funded project which examined the contrasting expectations and interpretations of academic staff and students regarding undergraduate students' written assignments. It is suggested that the implicit models that have generally been used to understand student writing do not adequately take account of the importance of issues of identity and the institutional relationships of power and authority that surround, and are embedded within, diverse student writing practices across the university. A contrasting and therefore complementary perspective is used to present debates about 'good' and 'poor' student writing. The article outlines an 'academic literacies' framework which can take account of the conflicting and contested nature of writing practices, and may therefore be more valuable for understanding student writing in today's higher education than traditional models and approaches.*

Various models of embedding

▶ Adjunct

- ▶ “Pinned to the margins” (Stephenson and Kokkinn, 2007)
- ▶ Achievement-oriented students attend; sadly ‘at risk’ often do not

▶ Integrated

- ▶ ALL staff invited - but kept at a distance - may be at odds with lecturing staff

▶ Embedded

- ▶ ALL staff work closely with the whole teaching team; team-teaching

(Arkoudis, 2014; Harris & Ashton, 2011; Maldoni,⁵ 2017)

Evaluating the effectiveness of embedded literacy interventions:

1. Quantitative methods

- ▶ Retention and participation rates - but often the most instrumentally motivated (achievement-oriented) students attend - not those who are 'at risk' (eg. Dunworth and Briguglio 2010)
- ▶ Pre- and post- testing - but are we testing the same thing? (eg. Maldoni, in press)
- ▶ Pass / fail rates (eg. Kennelly et al, 2010; Maldoni & Lear 2010)
- ▶ Final marks (eg. Maldoni, in press)

Evaluating the effectiveness of embedded literacy interventions:

2. Qualitative methods

- ▶ Student evaluations/ interviews/ focus groups (but who gets to fill in the survey? Volunteers to be interviewed?)
- ▶ Staff evaluations
- ▶ Before and after drafts are critiqued

Harris & Ashton (2011); Mort & Drury (2012); Maldoni (2017)

Our approach: close analysis of students' writing



Research question:

- ▶ To what extent does the embedding of an in-discipline literacy intervention contribute to the quality of student writing?

Aims:

- ▶ To contribute further support to previous research on embedding - a form of triangulation
- ▶ To propose a methodology which can be used for future evaluations

Foundations of Management

- ▶ Intervention in **first year management** subject developed with management lecturer
- ▶ Joint tutorials and lectures, so that total staff message – ALL and management - was consistent
- ▶ **ALL staff delivered two lectures and two sets of tutorials:**
 - understand the **assumptions** of the expected **genre**
 - concentrate on key discourse features
 - develop a **critical orientation** for writing in the field
 - **Double marking:** by ALL staff on academic literacy **(35%)**, and by management staff on management concepts and argument **(65%)**



ALL marking criteria (see handout)

Criteria	Below 50% (fail)	50%-64% (pass)	65%-74% (credit)	75%-84% (distinction)	85%-100% (high distinction)
1 Structure The essay has a clear structure: -introduction has opening statement, link to question, thesis, essay map -body paragraphs are unified and contain a clear topic sentence. -conclusion restates thesis, summarises key points and has a relevant concluding statement.	Essay structure is poor. Introduction is inadequate e.g. lacks clear thesis and/or essay map. Paragraphs are not unified e.g. no clear topic sentences. Conclusion is inadequate e.g. fails to restate key points.	Essay structure is adequate. Introduction contains some key elements. Paragraphs sometimes lack unity e.g. more than one topic per paragraph. Conclusion is adequate e.g. restates some key points.	Essay structure is sound. Introduction contains most key elements. Paragraphs are generally unified e.g. limited to one main idea. Conclusion is sound e.g. restates thesis and some key points.	Essay structure is very good. Introduction contains all four key elements. Paragraphs are mostly unified and provide sound supporting sentences. Conclusion restates thesis and key points and provides a relevant concluding statement.	Essay structure is excellent. Introduction contains all key elements. Paragraphs are consistently unified and develop arguments with strong supporting sentences. Conclusion clearly summarises key points and provides a convincing concluding statement.
2 Written expression Language is appropriate for audience, context and purpose: -written expression is clear and concise -text is coherent (e.g. clear links/transition signals) -grammar is accurate (e.g. correct sentence structure).	Language is not appropriate e.g. is often informal; ideas and arguments are poorly expressed. Text lacks coherence (few links/transition signals). Many errors in grammar e.g. verb use and sentence structure. Meaning is often unclear.	Language is adequate; occasional use of informal language. Text is reasonably coherent-some use of transition signals. Some errors in grammar/sentence structure. Meaning is occasionally unclear.	Language is generally appropriate e.g. sufficiently formal. Text is coherent-good use of transition signals. A few errors in grammar/sentence structure. Meaning is generally clear.	Language is consistently appropriate. Evidence of developing fluency and accuracy in written expression. Good links within and between paragraphs. Negligible errors in grammar/sentence structure.	Language is highly appropriate. Written expression is consistently fluent and accurate. Ideas are expressed clearly and concisely. No errors in grammar/sentence structure.
3 Presentation and referencing Essay is presented at a professional standard. Sources are accurately referenced (either Chicago or APA), both in-text and in reference list.	Poor presentation; many errors in spelling/punctuation Sources are not accurately/consistently referenced in-text and/or in reference list.	Adequate presentation; some errors in spelling/punctuation. Some errors or inconsistencies in referencing, in text- and/or in reference list.	Good presentation; minor errors in spelling/punctuation. Generally accurate referencing, both in-text and in reference list. Beginning to integrate sources effectively into text.	Professional presentation; evidence of sound editing (negligible errors in spelling/punctuation). Mostly accurate referencing, both in-text and in reference list. 10 Sources are well integrated into text.	Very professional presentation; evidence of thorough editing (no spelling/punctuation errors). Referencing is accurate and consistent in style, both in-text and in reference list. Sources are very effectively integrated into text.

Method

- ▶ Ethics approval from University Human Research Ethics Committee
- ▶ A convenience sample was used to source 9 essays (**10% of cohort**)
- ▶ Close analysis for the key discourse features taught in the intervention (see Hyland 2009; Morley-Warner 2009)
 - ▶ Essay structure
 - ▶ Use of citations and referencing
 - ▶ Sentence structure choices
 - ▶ Vocabulary choice
 - ▶ Task fulfilment

Iterative process of analysis by individuals and by the team

The essay question

(based on a case study)



vs.



Using theory from the course to explain your answer, how was Toyota able to have such a significant impact on the demise of General Motors?

What we found: Introductions

- ▶ Most students attempted the four 'moves' of a classic essay introduction
- ▶ 8 of 9 students announced the topic of their essay in the first sentence - very similar to the model essay
 - ▶ *General Motors (GM) was once the biggest automobile producer in the world, however, due to a long range of management and financial issues, the company crumbled in 2009, 101 years after it was founded (Alam 2009, p.234). The Japanese brand Toyota quickly* (**Student G**)
- ▶ Only 2 of 9 mentioned management theories
- ▶ Most included a thesis statement (though some struggled to do this elegantly)
- ▶ All included some kind of essay map

What we found: Body paragraphs

- ▶ All students wrote in substantial, well-organised paragraphs
- ▶ Many used topic sentences to control their paragraphs.
- ▶ Only 1 of the 9 students organised his essay around a specific Management theory (unlike the model essay)

What we found: Conclusions

- ▶ All students summed up and closed their essays reasonably effectively
- ▶ Only two included management theories in their conclusions

For example **Student C**

In closing, Toyota was able to have such a significant impact on the demise of General Motors as it was already weakened by its own internal inadequacies as outlined in Deming's Deadly Sins: poor management; fixed obligations; uncompetitive cost structure; and a lack of corporate innovation and continuity....

Graphic source: <http://englishtutorhome2.blogspot.com.au/2013/05/how-to-write-conclusion-for-essay-for.html>



What we found: Use of references

- ▶ The average number of sources cited was 15. One student cited 33 sources; one cited only four - including a 1986 article from the magazine *Science*.
- ▶ All nine essays used a range of sources:
 - ▶ the case study itself (from Alam & Najumdar, 2009),
 - ▶ peer reviewed journal articles, articles from newspapers and magazines such as *The Economist*,
 - ▶ company websites,
 - ▶ other credible websites.
- ▶ The students were able to synthesize material from these sources into their writing, using a number of sources in a single paragraph. They generally achieved a good balance between writing in their own voice and using the voices of source authors.



What we found: Sentence structure

- ▶ Students showed that they were able to write using an appropriate mix of simple and complex sentences, echoing the style of the model essay
- ▶ In an attempt to ‘sound’ academic, some students chose to write longer sentences than they could effectively manage, which sometimes led to sentence fragments and a general lack of coherence
- ▶ Some students whose writing lacked coherence had perhaps not allowed sufficient time to complete the task effectively and edit their work carefully before submitting

However, in general, the students’ writing was impressively coherent, and there were relatively few errors at the technical level

What we found: transitions & coherence

- ▶ Students tried hard to link their writing coherently

Lastly, GM's relationship with the UAW was **another** added burden which Toyota did not face. As a unionised company. GM had contractual obligations through the UAW to all its past and present employees. **These obligations** included health care and pension funds as well as guaranteed jobs or compensation in the event workers were laid off. **These costs** were estimated to be over \$183 billion annually. Toyota did not face **such costs, nor** were its worker's [sic] paid 'pay for knowledge' scheme as most of GM's workers were (Holden, 1986, p.274)

What we found: word choice

- ▶ Impressive use of management jargon
- ▶ Good use of academic vocabulary
- ▶ Some misuse of vocabulary as students tried out new voices in academic discourse



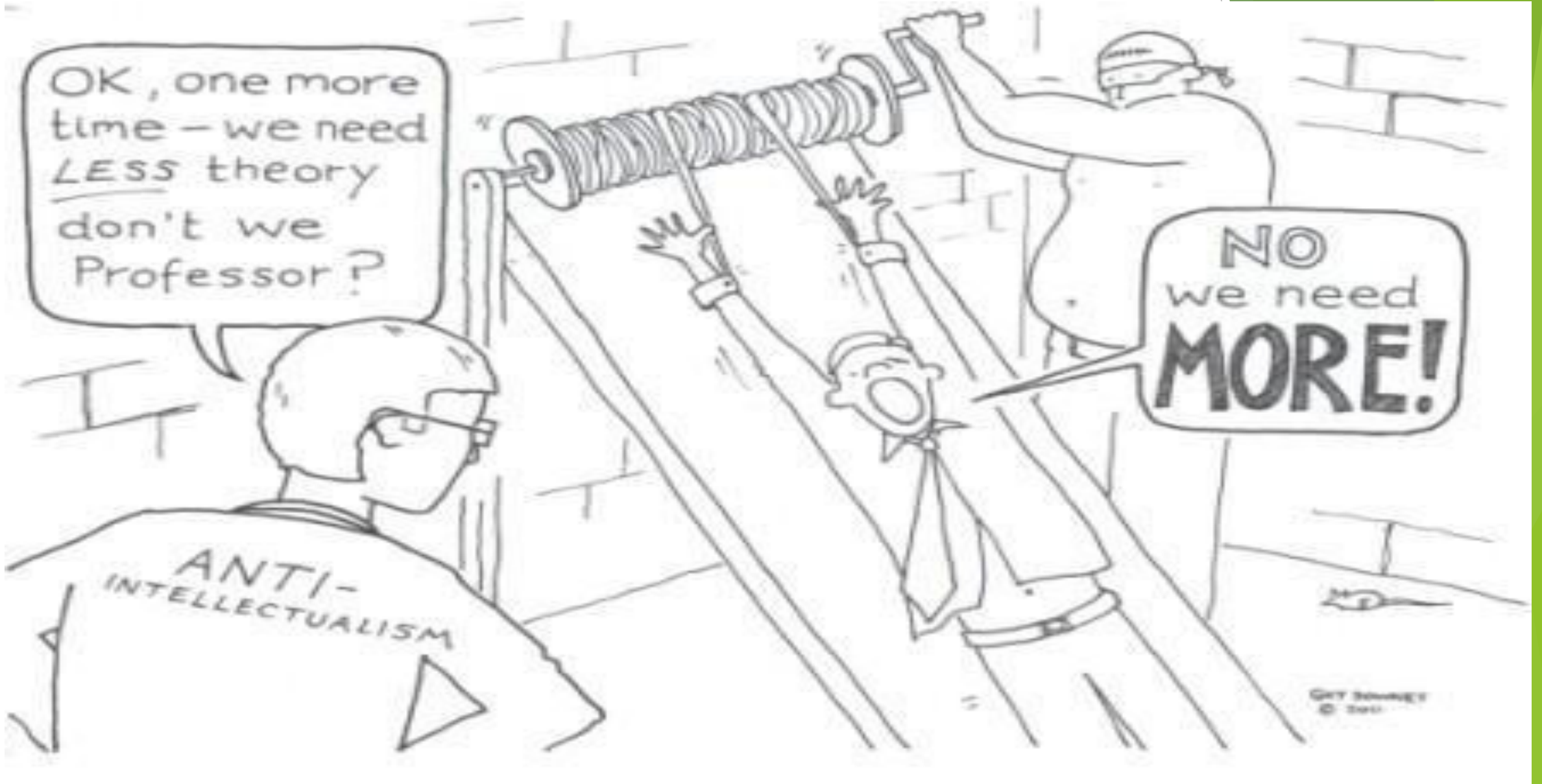
*“This **admittance** of inferiority is an example of how Toyota had a significant impact on GM’s demise” ... “It has **been researched that ...**”*
(Student F)

*“This forward thinking nature of Toyota was **dichotomous** to GM’s practice of ...”* **(Student I)**

*This “... acts as a further **diseconomy** to productivity and innovation.”*
(Student G)

What we found: Task Fulfillment

- ▶ The students all attempted to answer the question
- ▶ BUT many of them failed to recognize the need for **THEORY** and **THEORISTS**
“Using theory from the course to explain your answer, how was Toyota able to have such a significant impact on the demise of General Motors?”
- ▶ Rather they used multiple management concepts (eg *strict, highly bureaucratic, rigid structure; Just-in-time management; a lean manufacturing process*)
- ▶ Failed to move between theory and exemplification
(“semantic waves” Maton, 2014)
- ▶ Why?
 - ▶ Not the lack of focus in class
 - ▶ The question? - No specific theories were proposed
 - ▶ The case study? - full of management jargon - but no specific theories
 - ▶ Lack of familiarity with the social practices of tertiary study (especially in Management)²⁰



To sum up

Students' writing showed that

- ▶ All except one had made considerable effort to adopt the social practices of the discipline of management
 - ▶ They understood the essay structure required and attempted to answer the question
 - ▶ They understood how to research the relevant literature and incorporate citations into their writing
 - ▶ They were attempting to write in a new 'voice' – the voice of management
- ▶ Nevertheless, they were still learning how to move between theory and exemplification
 - ▶ Academic literacies develop over time (and so do effective in-discipline interventions)
 - ▶ Teaching is always a 'work-in-progress' (and a continuous cycle of improvement)

Conclusion(s)

- ▶ Embedding literacy into the discipline can assist students to get up to speed quickly
 - we have the **‘proof of the pudding’**
- ▶ Discourse analysis offers a potential means of evaluating the effectiveness of embedding literacy into the disciplines

Graphic source: <http://www.taste.com.au/recipes/steamed-christmas-pudding-2/f018b053-9358-475b-a4c6-8133301e57f9>



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Any Questions?

