

From the Margins to the Centre: Reflections on the “Past-Present-Future” of Literacy Education in the Academy

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Abstract: This paper engages with the central theme of this special issue, “From the Margins to the Centre,” as a particular kind of narrative that occupies the imagination of literacy educators in the academy, particularly those who are located in the “centre,” but whose experience ironically finds them “pinned to the margins” (Stevenson & Kokkin, 2007) of mainstream teaching and learning. Writing primarily from an Australian perspective as an educator experienced in attempting to embed authentic literacy education into the curriculum (from the centre) (Skillen, Merten, Trivett, & Percy, 1999), as a researcher attempting to make sense of the nature of change agency this requires (Percy, 2011a, 2011b), and as an academic leader developing policy at the institutional level in an attempt to legislate embedded practices into existence (Percy & Taylor, 2015), in this paper I briefly explore the seduction and frustration of the “margins to centre” narrative and provide an overview of a selection of literature that illustrates the ways in which we have imagined this trajectory. I then discuss how these narratives can be seen to be bracketed within an era where the discourses of standards and skills became privileged over other ways of thinking about education, and on the one hand created a space for the literacy educator to emerge, but on the other hand tended to derail our more progressive desires by their capacity to invoke their twin discourses of decline and transparency. The paper ends by providing one brief and new example of how we are attempting to put the discourses of standards and skills to work through policy and course review procedures at one Australian university.

Introduction

This paper engages with the central theme of this special issue, “From the Margins to the Centre,” as both a seductive and frustrating narrative that has occupied the imagination of literacy educators in the academy, particularly those who are located in the “centre,” but whose experience ironically finds them “pinned to the margins” (Stevenson & Kokkin, 2007) of mainstream teaching and learning. As an educator who has been working for two decades to embed literacy education into the curriculum, I begin the paper with a personal reflection on change agency when working from the “bottom up.” I then provide an overview of a selection of historical analyses that, on the one hand, helps us to imagine how we are moving from the margins to the centre, but on the other hand,

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helps to illustrate the various historical differences in thought and practice within our fields that continue to repeat on us in varying ways today. The paper then moves into an account of how these historical analyses can be bracketed within a particular kind of political and regulatory era in liberal society that privileges the discourses of “skills” and “standards,” which, while providing a clear mandate for literacy education and offering the promise of greater inclusion and status, in an ironic double-move, reinvokes the discourses of “decline” and “language transparency” and relegate it once again to the margins. The final section briefly outlines how we are working at the University of Wollongong (UOW) to put the discourses of standards and skills to work to progress embedded literacy education through policy development and course review processes.

A Personal Reflection

I have attempted to connect the past/present/future in my title as a way of speaking to what I feel are the non-linear dimensions of space-time in the field of literacy education in the academy. I have done this because, while I am ever hopeful that we can mainstream the learning and teaching of literacy within authentic disciplinary contexts, the longer I am in the field within the Australian context, the more I experience the way the past haunts the present. Although at one point early in my career, I really did believe that literacy educators within the academy were on a linear trajectory towards the centre of mainstream academic practice, today I am much more attuned to the way that literacy educators occupy a multi-dimensional space in the academy which is “heavily inscribed with habit and layers of sedimented understandings” (Spivak, as cited in Lather, 1993, p. 674).

For me personally, the “margins to the centre” narrative was a critical aspect of my induction into academic language and learning practice in Australia when I began working in the field in the late 1990s. In my University at that time, academic language and learning (ALL) educators were actively encouraged to regard themselves as agents of change transforming the culture of the University by working collaboratively with discipline academics to integrate into mainstream curricula what was variously referred to as generic skills, tertiary literacy and/or academic literacy instruction (see Chanock, 1994; Golebiowski, 1997; Webb, 2001). At a sector level, this approach was fuelled at the time by government reports on the “lifelong learner” and the need to teach generic skills within courses (Candy, Crebert, & O’Leary, 1994; NBEET, 1990, 1996); within our institution, it was underpinned by a faith in progressive reason and the agency of the ALL educator to induce change in the “culture” of the disciplines and the University. On reflection, neither “culture” nor “organisational change” were particularly well-theorised. Possibly referencing the ideas put forward by Rogers in his book, *Diffusion of Innovations* (1983), it was predicted that working with “early adopters” and making victories visible would result in invitations from other academics who would see the self-evident benefits of these collaborative practices. Through this process of working from “the bottom up,” it was believed that the University would eventually come to its senses about the central role of language in learning, more explicit language development would become central to disciplinary teaching, and ALL educators would be full partners in the realisation of this goal.

Over the following two decades, however, my lived experience of this “agency” provided me with a very different picture. The theoretical logic of collaboration and expansion was displaced by the experience of collaboration and disintegration. Working with individual discipline academics on specific subjects or assessment tasks would often produce useful resources and experiences for the immediate cohort, but staff, subject and assessment turnover meant that there were significant issues around scalability and sustainability. Rather than linear progress, it felt more like the ALL

educator's trajectory was far more Sisyphean: marked by rupture, repetition, discontinuity and reversal – small victories, great disappointments, and an overwhelming sense of “groundhog day.”

Further, the role of change agent appeared to be in conflict with another prevailing and persistently expected role: the role of the ALL educator as the “agent of redemption” for the problem student, the under-confident, the poorly skilled and the linguistically under-prepared student “at risk.” For me, the lived experience of change agency and the contradictions in the identity of the ALL educator warranted further investigation. The exploration of the professional narrative provided in the following section is one aspect of this.

From the Margins to the Centre: Explorations of a Professional Narrative

There are many different ways we can characterise the shifts in research and practice relating to literacy education in the academy. Table 1 provides just a small selection of work from the United Kingdom, South Africa, and Australia. This selection is not intended to be comprehensive but is useful for a conversation about how we imagine ourselves moving from the margins to the centre. Drawing on the work of Appadurai (2000), I think of these four narratives as part of the professional imaginary, where imaginary refers to those representations that seek to work at the site of negotiation between agency and the broader fields of possibility. Table 1 also helps to illustrate the various historical differences in thought and practice that continue to repeat on ALL educators in varying ways today.

You will see by the format of Table 1 that I have tried to indicate loose alignments between the representations of shifts in thought and practice, but because each one is essentially concerned with different subjects and comes from different perspectives, these alignments are uneasy. They are again useful only as temporary comparisons for the purposes of this discussion.

Table 1: Various representations of historical thought and practice

Lea & Street (1998) Research into writing United Kingdom	McKenna (2003) Models of academic development South Africa	Webb (2001) Ontogenesis of learning advising Australia	Percy (2011) Historical ontology of learning advising Australia
Behaviourism Study skills	English as a second language (ESL)	Remediator	Counselling the academic casualty
Social anthropology Academic socialisation	English for Academic purposes (EAP)	Mediator	Compensating the social casualty
Cultural ethnography Academic literacies	Academic literacies	Integrator	Mobilising the lifelong learner
		Transformer	Quality assuring the graduate

The first column in Table 1 notes the work of Lea and Street (1998), whose seminal paper in *Studies in Higher Education* provided a useful analysis of three epistemological shifts in research into writing in the U.K. Their analysis has provided a sound basis on which to make arguments for rethinking the way that writing pedagogy is approached, deployed and positioned in the academy. Respectively, a study skills approach informed by behaviourism regards student writing as a

technical and instrumental skill – the problem to be addressed is one of student deficit – and the pedagogy involves teaching atomised skills and fixing surface-level errors. An academic socialisation approach informed by social anthropology regards student writing as a transparent medium of representation – the problem is one of acculturation into academic discourse – and the pedagogy involves an induction into generic academic writing principles and approaches to learning. An academic literacies approach informed by cultural ethnography regards student writing as a social and cultural practice – the problem is one of inferring and making-meaning within a context of contested and often conflicting literacy practices – and the pedagogy is concerned with the processes of meaning-making in authentic contexts. Rather than thinking in terms of pre-defined skills and deficits, the academic literacies approach is cognisant of the interminable variation of linguistic practices, social meanings and their implications for identity within and across disciplinary and institutional practices.

While Lea and Street's analysis provides a neat representation of the epistemological shifts in research and practice in relation to student writing in the academy, even they argue that one does not replace the other; rather, each one adds a new dimension to thinking and practice and all can be traced to aspects of literacy education today. It is arguable, however, that while the first two can be enacted in relative isolation to the disciplines, an academic literacies pedagogy does seem to pose the intractable problem of the literacy educator becoming a full partner in the mainstream education process – and I think that is where we continue to be challenged when attempting to implement literacy education from the margins of disciplinary practice.

From a practice perspective, McKenna (2003) outlines three cycles of “language intervention” at one university in the South African higher education context from 1991 to 2002. Each cycle represents a shift in the discursive practices surrounding literacy education. From 1991 to 1998, McKenna describes how language and literacy education was dominated by an “English as Second Language” (ESL) approach. This approach, she suggests, was grounded in a deficit discourse, and like the “study skills” approach outlined above, it was divorced from disciplinary contexts, targeted weak students, and focused on overt grammar teaching. The actual practice involved voluntary extra-curricular tutorials located in the ESL Unit. From 1997 to 1999, there was a shift to an “English for Academic Purposes” (EAP) approach and the creation of an annual academic course. This approach, however, continued to target “weak” students, but the focus of teaching shifted from surface-level grammar to generic academic skills. Similar to Lea and Street's “academic socialisation” approach, this approach imagined a general academic discourse that could be taught separate to the disciplines. The skills taught, such as note-taking and essay writing, were simply regarded as transferable. From 2001, however, the university in McKenna's study took an academic literacies approach to begin the process of integrating literacy education into disciplinary contexts. The practice involved collaboration between literacy educators and discipline academics. In these collaborations, they worked at the level of curriculum to make the disciplines' literacy practices explicit, and to improve all students' understanding of disciplinary discourse. McKenna highlights the difficulties of getting appropriate traction within the existing cultures of the disciplines to do this kind of work. She notes that at the time of writing, there continued to be a common call to hive off literacy education within disciplinary courses to first-year foundation subjects.

Moving into an analysis that focuses on the ontogenesis of the ALL educator in Australia, Webb (2001) provides an account of how the institutional identity of the ALL educator has shifted over time according to the prevailing political agenda in Australia. The shifting roles of ALL educators are identified as follows: the remediator, supporting minority groups in an elitist system against the backdrop of multiculturalism; the mediator, ameliorating disadvantage for “non-traditional” and international students against the backdrop of massification and globalisation; the integrator,

integrating skills into content against the backdrop of a new quality agenda; and finally, the transformer, transforming teaching and learning, where learning is recognised as reading and writing in an increasingly flexible and transdisciplinary educational context. While the remediator and mediator tend to focus on decontextualised teaching of skills through individual consultations and small group teaching, the integrator and transformer work with discipline staff on curriculum, similar to an academic literacies approach, to embed literacy education into mainstream learning and teaching practices.

Again, it is arguable that, while the first three identities repeat on us in various times and places and none are ever cast off for good, the transformer is more of an ideal whose relevance to our institutions is still highly contested. Within the Australian context, there are numerous examples of the kind of work that can be achieved when ALL educators work with discipline staff on academic and curriculum development projects (Brooman-Jones, Cunningham, Hanna, & Wilson, 2011; Chanock, 2007; Chanock, Horton, Reedman, & Stephenson, 2012; James, Skillen, Percy, Tootell, & Irvine, 2004; Skinner & Mort, 2009; Yucel et al., 2009); however, the possibilities for producing scalable and sustainable transformations in teaching and learning are rarely realised because too often the way in which literacy education is conceptualised resurrects older models of thought and confines the agency of ALL educators within a redemptive model focused on the remediation of an individual student or social group outside mainstream teaching and learning.

Finally, in my own attempt to make sense of the discursive and ontological complexity I was experiencing and observing in the ALL field, I developed an historical ontology of four shifts in the deployment of the ALL educator in Australian higher education (Percy, 2011a). My intention in doing this work was to deliberately disrupt the teleological narrative that literacy education is moving from the margins to the centre of mainstream teaching practice by demonstrating how older models of thought around literacy education repeat on ALL educators in the present. This historical ontology illustrates the complexification of ALL work as each set of incommensurable historical truths are layered over and folded into the identity, institutional deployment and practice of the ALL educator in the present.

In my analysis, which is shown in the final column of Table 1 above, the first two shifts in the deployment of ALL educators date from the 1950s, where the dominant psycho-social diagnosis of individual student difference (e.g. intelligence and personality) produced the ALL educator as a therapeutic intervention for the “academic casualty,” and the 1970s–1980s, where the emerging socio-cultural diagnosis of group difference (e.g. cultural and linguistic deficit) produced the learning advisor as an educational intervention for the “social casualty.” These first two represent the welfare model of student learning support and the notion of the learning advisor as an agent of redemption performing compensatory educational practices. This agency, however, made a discernible shift in Australia to a developmental form of change agency in the 1990s, when the market diagnosis of graduate employability (e.g. generic skills) produced the ALL educator as a curriculum intervention for the “lifelong learner,” and in the 2000s, the neoliberal diagnosis of organisational performativity (e.g. ranking and reputation) produced the ALL educator as a pedagogical and administrative intervention for the “graduate.” From both my research and experience, I would argue that although the ALL educator as an agent of change, as the “transformer” or “pedagogical intervention for the graduate,” captures the potential enterprising and proactive agency of ALL practitioners, this agency is rarely fostered in universities because of the prevalence of the redemptive model of student support.

My analysis demonstrates shifts in identity and practice as an effect of the discourses operating within a broader political landscape, and these are shown to be primarily concerned with standards and skills. For example, the ethical agency of the ALL educator is shown to have shifted from the

agent of redemption for the academic and social “casualty” based on the need to discipline difference in individuals and social groups (learning and literacy skills), to the agent of change concerned with mobilising the lifelong learner and quality assuring the graduate (generic skills, employability skills). So, while shifts in research and policy discourse might invite literacy educators to operate in quite different ways in the academy, at their core are the discourses of standards and skills which reinscribe the discourses of decline and transparency. This is discussed in the following section.

Standards and Skills, Decline and Transparency

While the previous section demonstrates the kinds of narratives that imagine literacy education as moving from the margins to the centre, and from a generic skills mentality to an embedded literacies perspective, they need to be understood within a broader political context. In this section, I want to draw attention to the way that Table 1 brackets a particular era in higher education governance where specific conditions provided the possibility for ALL educators to emerge and grow as a profession in Australia. Inherent to these conditions are the discourses of standards (on entry and exit) and skills, which I argue here invoke the discourses of decline and transparency.

So let me take you back to the 1950s and 1960s to a period in history that I suggest brackets the narratives of Table 1 within a broader geo-political agenda concerned with skills and standards. For liberal western democratic countries, particularly those who would become members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the 1950s and 1960s represent an era of post-war reconstruction operating against the backdrop of the Cold War, shifting international relations, the technologisation of industry, and intense competition between the United States and the Soviet Union for “economic, technological and military supremacy” (Georgiadis, 2007). This is a moment in history where the perceived shortage of qualified scientific and technical personnel became a driving discourse shaping the role of higher education (Godin, 2002), where Human Capital Theory consecrated the link between investment in education and economic growth (Marginson, 1995), and where it is argued that the instrumental role of the university began to take precedence over its espoused cultural role (Cowen, 1996; Readings, 1996; Wheelwright, 1965).

In this historical period, universities became harnessed to the political economy in unprecedented and uncomfortable ways. Public spending on universities for the purposes of massive expansion increased proportionally to public scrutiny of their operations and efficiency. Prior to the 1950s, the mantra of “50% must fail” was seen to demonstrate the university’s academic standards of only allowing the best students to graduate (Baxter, 1970, p. 153). And at the time of the Murray report in 1957, this mantra appeared to be working quite well – only 58% of students enrolled in Australian universities completed their degrees (K. Murray, Clunies Ross, Morris, Reid, & Richards, 1957). However, with increased public spending on higher education and the political and economic imperatives of producing employable scientific graduates, this quickly became cast as “a national extravagance which can be ill afforded” (K. Murray et al., 1957, p. 35). Once a sign of academic standards, student failure became an economic measure of “academic wastage” (Baxter, 1970), a sign of inefficiency and an unnecessary burden on the public purse.

Enframed by the social liberal discourse of the democratisation of university education (Partridge, 1963), a growing concern for the perceived lack of human resources in science and technology during the post-war era (Godin, 2002), and a public intolerance of gross student failure (K. Murray et al., 1957), universities found themselves responsible for the mass production of a scientific and technical workforce. It is in this period that the issue of standards and skills become critical aspects of the debate about the purpose and role of the university and set in train the twin discourses of

decline and transparency that both enable and derail our more progressive desires in literacy education.

It is arguable that the discourse of a decline in the standard of university students' literacy has been an ever-present aspect of the sector. In the U.S., Rose (1985) made this apparent in his article, "The Language of Exclusion: Writing Instruction at the University," when he suggested that freshman composition courses emerged in the late 19th century out of a concern for "the poor writing of *upperclassmen*" (p. 342). Rose's article is seminal work that resonates with the analysis of the previous section, but it also provides an erudite explanation of conditions within the U.S. context. Like the analysis above, he points to the issues surrounding the dominant belief that language can be treated as mere skill, the emphasis on remediation, the need to think in terms of cultural literacy rather than illiteracy, and the powerful "myth of transience." (Rose, 1985, p.355). This myth of transience is a critical aspect of what still needs to be overcome in universities today. Despite the now extensive experience of the university sector with the effects of widening participation (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008) and internationalisation (Marginson, 2008), the idea that we just need to solve the problem of the student rather than what and how we teach is still a fairly dominant mindset. In Australia, this mindset can be traced to what was referred to as the "higher illiteracy crisis."

During the 1960s and 1970s, Australian media highlighted these issues with headlines that represented the higher illiteracy crisis, including "Graduates Semi-Literate" (*The Age*, 1974), "The Great Illiteracy Gap: Our Educated Illiterates" (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 1975), and "Uni 6000 Need Extra English" (*Melbourne Herald*, 1977). On the one hand, this so-called crisis had the benefit of putting literacy education on the academic agenda; it was in response to this crisis that ALL educators began to find gainful employment within the university (for an example of seminal work produced by these educators in Australia, see Taylor et al., 1988). On the other hand, it was also a crisis that reinscribed notions of language as skill and demanded "back to basics" literacy education (Clanchy, 1976). Attempting to provide a counter-narrative to the discourses of decline and transparency as early as the 1970s, ALL educators in Australia argued that,

when we talk about the reading and writing failures of tertiary students, we are dealing with a complex set of phenomena which we cannot begin to understand unless we consider the total learning and language environment in which those failures occur. (Clanchy, 1976, p. 20)

The danger lies not in directing the student's primary focus of attention to those forms of his language which are unacceptable in the tertiary setting, not in asking him to practise certain skills on which those forms are based; it lies rather in the mistaken belief that there is any point in doing these things in complete isolation from considerations of content and context, the motivation and purpose for which the student is communicating, and without regard to the audience he is addressing. (Clanchy, 1976, p. 21)

The concept of language on which most academics operate is fairly primitive . . . "tools with rules" is inadequate. It entirely begs the question of the interrelationship between language and learning. (Clanchy, 1978, p. 21)

[A] writer's poor English is often bound up very closely with his confusions about the content and rhetoric of his various disciplines. And, as a consequence, no English expression programme can really succeed unless we create conditions under which

subject specialist and English specialist are encouraged to cooperate. (Taylor, 1978, p. 34)

What I find most interesting is that these pioneers of the field of academic language and learning (ALL) back in the 1970s were making the same arguments we are making today, and that this has essentially been the state of play for over forty years.

I argue that this is the case because the dominant discourse of a “decline in standards” grounded in normative assumptions about a student’s identity, background and capacity tends to invoke the discourse of transparency and continues to pull attention away from other ways of thinking and talking about the problem of literacy in higher education. When we talk about a discourse of transparency, we are referring to the powerful scientific rationalist conception of language as a transparent, transferable, pre-tertiary skill, which Lillis and Turner (2001) explain is a conception we have inherited as academic descendants of French and British scientific and philosophical traditions. This discourse, they suggest, has led to the reification of particular forms of writing in the academy and continues to allow contested and often highly specific concepts, such as structure, argument and definition, to be considered self-evident and therefore unexplained. They go on to say that when a student’s writing is meeting the expectations of the marker, the language remains invisible – it is only when the writing is not meeting expectations that it becomes visible and is frequently interpreted, not as a problem with clarity of thought or control over the disciplinary discourse, but as a problem of skill that may be remedied by consulting a writing expert. This writing expert sits at the margins of the academy – and ironically – is most often located in the “centre.”

Come forward to the present and although we may be living in a different space-time, and our cohorts have changed, the discourse of declining literacy standards stays largely the same: “Declining University Academic Standards Need Examination” (Fitzgerald, 2015); “Education System to Blame for Workers’ Poor Level of Numeracy and Literacy” (*7 News*, 2016); “Literacy, Numeracy Skills Below Minimum Standard” (*The Australian*, 2016); “One in 10 Australian University Graduates is Semi-Literate and Would Fail to Interpret the Instructions on a Box of Headache Tablets, an International Study Shows” (*The Australian*, 2016). So while I agree with Hyland (2013) that our universities need to begin to see “literacy as embedded in the beliefs and practices of individual disciplines, instead of a generic skill that students have failed to develop” (p.53), the question is really, how do we change two thousand years of thinking about language as a transparent medium and blaming the student for not being properly prepared for academic study (Taylor, 1990)?

Putting Standards and Skills to Work

In this final section, I would like to provide an example of how the various discourses of standards and skills are playing out around the development and implementation of an *English Language Policy* at the University of Wollongong (UOW). In 2014, the need to develop an *English Language Policy* came as a directive from the University Executive in response to various drivers at the sector level: alarming reports and media coverage making the link between English Language Proficiency (ELP) and the lack of employment of international students graduating from Australian universities through the skilled migration process (e.g. Arkoudis et al., 2009; Birrell, Hawthorne, & Richardson, 2006; Harvey & Mestan, 2012; Lane, 2012); the suggestion in 2013 by the Australian Government Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) that it would be conducting a quality assessment of all Australian universities to “investigate and report on higher education provider approaches and practices relating to ELP” (TEQSA, 2013, p. 4); and the consideration being given to

including items related to ELP in the revised *Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF) (Threshold Standards)* (Department of Education and Training [DET], 2015). Although the quality assessment was never conducted and ELP barely rates a mention in the revised *HESF* (DET, 2015), this period saw a great flurry of activity across the sector to develop policies, strategies and practices that attended to the language needs of all students. Between 2010 and 2016, at least six government-funded sector-wide grant projects related to language development in universities had been completed in Australia (Arkoudis, 2014; Arkoudis & Doughney, 2014; Arkoudis, Harris, & Kelly, 2014; Briguglio, 2014; Dunworth, Drury, Kralik, Moore, & Mulligan, 2013; Rochecoste, Oliver, Mulligan, & Davies, 2010).

As the Head of Learning Development in 2014, I was asked to Chair the English Language Policy and Practice Working Group, where we engaged in a sector-wide scan, a literature review and the development of an *English Language Policy*. The dominant practice across the sector at the time was the use of some form of Post-Entry Language Assessment (PELA) to identify students' language weaknesses and address them through various extra- or co-curricular activities (Harris, 2013; N. Murray, 2010, 2011, 2013; Read, 2015). This particular approach reminded me of the diagnostic assessment of all enrolling international students I was responsible for managing over a series of years in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Percy, 1998). We had abandoned this approach around 2003 due to its lack of efficacy. We found that while it was useful for providing data on students' language standards on entry, in spite of our best efforts, we could not compel the students to attend the seminars and workshops that sat outside and competed with the demands of their discipline studies. And for those who did attend, our time with them was so relatively short that it was impossible to gauge whether it made any difference at all.

When I was given the opportunity to lead the development of the *English Language Policy*, it was important to me that we did not take language education in the University fifteen years backwards. Not surprisingly, there was significant pressure from various quarters to implement an extra-curricular University-wide PELA as part of the Policy, but for over fifteen years the Learning Development team had been developing a curriculum-embedded and professional development approach to language and literacy education, and it was this approach that I sought to consolidate in policy. While I did try to advocate for an academic literacies policy, I also understood that it was important to the University that we used the language reflected in the regulatory documents to which we were seen to be responding, and so the terms Communication Skills and English Language Proficiency (ELP) were agreed upon. This is where we often find ourselves as ALL educators – working in the uncomfortable space between the desire to progress an understanding of language as a central consideration in learning, and the need to work with the practical exigencies of the university. In this space, it is necessary to work tactically to put the discourses of skills and standards to work.

For us at the time, this tactical work was enabled by two corresponding agendas: one at the sector level, and the other at the institutional level. At the sector level, the revised *HESF (Threshold Standards)* (DET, 2015) and the *Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)* (Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2013) both focused attention in an unprecedented way on whole-of-course design and the assurance of learning throughout a degree. When Australian universities undertook compliance activities with these revised frameworks, many were writing Course Learning Outcomes and mapping these to Subject Learning Outcomes and teaching and assessment activities for the first time. Within the *AQF*, the standards for each level of qualification are divided into five broad categories: purpose, knowledge, skills, application, and volume of learning. In the skills component, written and oral communication skills, as well as literacy and numeracy, are identified as key learning outcomes. How these are interpreted in each degree

program, however, is left to the institution and the disciplines. This skills-focused outcomes-based approach to course design came as an opportunity to talk about language standards – not simply as standards on entry to university, but standards on graduation. In this way, it enabled a conversation about language education in terms of assurance of learning across a degree program.

At the institutional level, our university was, and still is, in the process of designing and implementing a *Curriculum Transformation Model* and process which took the *HESF* and *AQF* whole-of-course lens, focused attention on quality enhancement practices, developed a procedures and standards framework for the transformation, and began a five-year cycle of course reviews starting in earnest in 2016. And while English language development is not central to the *UOW Curriculum Model* (UOW, 2016c), it is a recognised part of the course review and development process.

Harnessing the opportunity presented by the sector and institutional-level focus on whole-of-course design, we have produced and socialised an *English Language Policy* (UOW, 2014) that requires course design to attend to progressive language development throughout a degree program. As such, Section 4, Policy Principles (UOW, 2014) highlighted the development of communication skills and language proficiency within all levels of an education program:

1. Responsibility for the ongoing assessment and development of students' communication skills, including English language proficiency, is shared between students, teaching staff and the University.
2. Undergraduate and postgraduate degree programs at UOW are conducted in upper intermediate, advanced and fluent levels of English and UOW students are expected to comprehend, learn and communicate effectively within this environment.
3. The quality assurance of students' communication skills development is most appropriately and successfully achieved as part of the assurance of learning within a *course*.
4. UOW students can expect appropriate access to facilities, resources and materials that help their development of communication skills, including English language proficiency.

And Section 6, Assuring English Language Development in Coursework Studies (UOW, 2014), states the following:

1. Consistent with the requirements of the AQF, HESF and the UOW Standards Framework, all UOW courses will be designed to explicitly foster and assess students' development and achievement of the communication skills embedded within the course learning outcomes, including English language proficiency. This will be achieved through the following measures:
2. Students will be provided with the opportunity to obtain feedback and further develop their communication skills across a wide range of purposes, audiences and contexts relevant to the discipline by ensuring variety in communicative assessment tasks.
3. Course Learning Outcomes will clearly articulate the development and achievement of written and oral communication skills, including English language proficiency, appropriate to the level and qualification type.
4. Core subjects within a course of study will explicitly foster and assess students' development and achievement of specific aspects of the Course Learning Outcomes pertaining to communication skills, including English language proficiency, through the design of the learning environment, assessment activities, and teaching strategies and resources.
5. Early assessment within a course will be used to identify students at risk due to English language proficiency.

6. Students identified at risk due to English language proficiency will be provided with additional support.
7. Additional support for students will be negotiated between the Faculty and Learning, Teaching and Curriculum (LTC) staff.
8. A capstone or equivalent final year subject within a course will assure students' achievement of communication skills, including English language proficiency.

To implement this across the University, we have embedded attention to these principles into the University's mainstream course design and review process: the University's *Quality and Standards Framework for Learning and Teaching* (UOW, 2018), *Course Design Procedures* (UOW, 2016a), *Course Review Procedures* (UOW, 2016b) and *Course Review Checklist* (UOW, 2018). For example, Section 17, Academic and English Language Skills of the *Course Design Procedures* (UOW, 2016a) states the importance of communication skills for future employment:

1. To ensure UOW graduates have the communication skills to be competitive for future employment, all UOW courses will explicitly enable and evidence communication skills development as part of the assurance of learning within a course consistent with the *English Language Policy* and *UOW Curriculum Model*.

And Section 6 of the *Course Review Procedures* (UOW, 2016b), Initiation and Conduct of a Course Review, ensures that the expertise of ALL educators is included in the course review process:

8. As part of each course review process, at least one course review meeting will be held with a LTC representative, and other relevant parties as needed, to discuss issues of curriculum design and quality. For example: embedding the UOW Curriculum Model, the English Language Policy and the Assessment and Feedback principles; the Student Career Development and Employability Strategy; or areas arising from the course analytics.

By embedding the requirements of the *English Language Policy* into the mainstream course design policy, process and paperwork, all course design teams are required to speak to it in their course review reports, and ALL educators are more likely to play a role in advising course teams, identifying appropriate language-related curriculum-embedded projects, and also providing feedback on the final Course Report. The whole-of-University course review process for curriculum renewal is only a recent development at the University, so it is still too early to report on outcomes; however, our experiences in the course review panels and as reviewers of the final Course Reports suggest that the faculties and course teams are taking embedded language development more seriously than they have in the past.

Having said this, and while we travel hopefully, I also recognise that the development of policy, even one that locates attention to language as a central consideration in course design, can never pretend to be a final solution to moving ALL educators from the margins to the centre. If anything, today I think of ALL work as the continual (re)negotiation of opportunity and risk. Literacy and language education will always be a highly contested space within the academy because of the multiple and competing historical discourses with which it intersects. The remedial framing of our work will never fully be cast off, and the transformative framing never fully secured. As ALL educators, our only tactical move is to continue to find opportunities to raise awareness, change practices, challenge the status quo, and educate others within the academy. This work is never done.

Conclusion

This paper began by exploring the seductive and frustrating nature of the “margins to the centre” narrative and explored a selection of professional narratives that have imagined this narrative for us. This exploration identified the difficulties in conducting an academic literacies pedagogy, becoming “transformers” of teaching and learning, and identifying as a “pedagogical intervention” for the graduate, not simply because of our physical location within the academy, but because our very emergence as literacy educators within the sector is bracketed within a broader economic and political context where standards and skills dominate the way in which higher education is framed. I argued that the discourses of standards and skills are both enabling and constraining, because on the one hand they legitimise literacy practices within the academy, but on the other, they invoke the twin discourses of decline and transparency. I have shown how at one Australian university, we are attempting to put the discourses of standards and skills to work through policy development and course review processes that locate considerations about language and conversations with literacy educators at the centre of the course review and design process. While it is still too early to tell whether this will have lasting changes on how literacy educators are engaged and deployed within the University, the achievement of embedding literacy education into policy and procedure has been a significant milestone for the ALL educators at this University.

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