Scaffolding Diverse Learners in Tertiary Education: Educators' Experience of Inclusive Curriculum Design in Community Services

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a curriculum design project that aimed to effectively scaffold diverse learners into disciplinary knowledge in Australian tertiary education. Assumptions about "readiness" for tertiary education and deficit discourses are brought into question as the curricular design and related pedagogy are implemented. Drawing on socio-cultural theories of learning and the "academic literacies" tradition, the model mainstreams academic skills into discipline curricula and qualitatively evaluates these in terms of educators' experience and students' voice. The promising and heart-warming responses provide some impetus to consider its application to other tertiary education contexts. It is suggested that the curriculum design supports discipline educators in contemporary, "post-Bradley" tertiary education, as well as questioning assumptions about diverse learners' capacities.

INTRODUCTION

Unprecedented changes in Australian tertiary education over recent decades reflect global influences, national trends and pervasive ideologies in Australian social and education policy (Ball, 2007). Western economies, now characterised by globalised markets, contracting out, privatisation and the application of market principles to public and private systems, have tightened the connection between education, employment and productivity. Student outcomes are now focussed on employment-related skills and competencies, and education is opened up to market choice and reduction of education costs to the government (Carter & O'Neill, 1995). Lambert (2009) argues that these economic values, and the policies that embody them, reconfigure the role of universities in fundamental ways. Previously sites of inculcation and guardians of national culture through teaching and research, universities are now ensuring a greater number of people participate in a service focused on vocational skills' provision (Aronowitz, 2000). University funding tied to student choice is accompanied by the ideology of the student as the "paying consumer". This can impact on pedagogy by creating "consumerist levers" to facilitate and promote educational "choice" (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2005, p. 269), to the point where pedagogical choices can be driven by these levers at the expense of educational effectiveness.

In Australia, Bradley's (2008) government-supported *Review of Australian Higher Education* urged wider participation in tertiary education to promote a national productivity agenda and to secure Australia's economic position in a globalised economy. The Bradley review recommended an injection of funding to encourage enrolments in higher-level qualifications and retention initiatives to ensure the success of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Australian Government's explicit social inclusion policy to increase participation of less-represented students in post-compulsory education is an outcome of this review (Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR], 2009). Consequently, Australian universities have been attracting a much more diverse student population than previously (Gale & Trantner, 2011).

This paper reports on a curriculum re-design project undertaken in a Diploma qualification (Australian Qualification Framework [AQF)] level 5) in an Australian dual-sector university. As the entry level to the community service profession and a transition point to higher education, Diploma-level qualifications can be a strategic point for effectively bridging students to higher education qualifications in social work and community development. In the university in which the case-study is situated, this unsung space has been, for some time, the site of diversity and disadvantage, with a high concentration of "non-traditional" students (Moraitis, Carr, & Daddow, 2012). In the literature, non-traditional students refers to those who have not traditionally been represented in universities, such as students who are the first in the family to attend university, or who are from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds, of mature age, indigenous, or with a disability, but whose participation has been more recently encouraged through government policy (Bowl, 2003; Funston, 2012; O'Shea, Onsman, & McKay, 2011). The term has raised questions about the dominant groups who have constructed traditional beliefs and practices in universities, potentially "othering" students of difference, and reinforcing such constructions (Bamber & Tett, 2001; Leathwood & O'Connell, 2003). It is used in this paper with the term "diverse"

students, to consider established university curricula that might exclude the participation of students from socio-structurally disadvantaged groups, or those who have followed routes other than the more traditional linear pathway to university, that is, an uninterrupted progression from academic success at school to university.

IMPETUS FOR THE PROJECT

According to the community service (CS) educators, the learning challenges for non-traditional students were most often expressed in the difficulties they had in meeting the complex reading and writing demands of the Diploma courses. They described "a disjunct between what traditional curricula say ('non-traditional' students) should be able to do and where they are". This disjunct relates to not just students for whom English is an additional language, but also for native English speakers. It had become apparent through student progress, results, attrition and anecdotal feedback from both higher education and the CS field, that many of these students' successful transition from graduation into the workforce, as well as accessing higher education, was constrained. The educators suggested that tertiary education "expects 'non-traditional' students…to conform to a sort of middle or upper class sort of value system…in order to be successful", (Chenoweth & McAuliffe, 2012, p.45) which sits uneasily; particularly in a discipline that seeks to encourage the expression of less dominant voices and is sensitive to the equitable distribution of power in our community. This was seen as further dissonance between conventional curricular approaches and the discipline knowledge and practice into which the students were being inducted.

Scaffolding students from culturally, linguistically, educationally and socially diverse backgrounds into conceptually complex disciplinary knowledge located within a Western paradigm presents curricular and pedagogic challenges (Haggis, 2006). Among these is the risk of acculturating diverse learners into the dominant knowledge paradigms of university curricula without valorising the contributions of such students to that knowledge, resulting in inequitable cultural reproductions (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002; Grey, Coates, & Bird, 2008). Another challenge is to ensure that students, commencing from diverse starting points, are provided with the cultural codes necessary for their academic success (Devlin, 2011; Zipin, 2009). This study explores curricular practices primarily in terms of the latter of these challenges; identifying an approach that might inform "epistemological access" (Morrow, 1993) of non-traditional students, while recognising that more critical pedagogies might more explicitly interrogate the former (Hytten, 2006, pp. 229–230). The curricular practices in the study do not promote a "right" way of being in the world, but seek to provide opportunities for non-traditional students to genuinely participate in tertiary education so that, in addition to the transmission of discipline content, personal emancipation and participation in the public sphere are enabled (McArthur, 2010). Importantly, they turn the lens on challenges that non-traditional students might have with complex writing tasks away from perceived deficits located in the students, to the possible limitations of more typical pedagogy and curricula within tertiary education.

Traditional curricular support for students entering university through non-traditional routes has been to provide separate and de-contextualised language and academic support courses or services (Boughey, 2010; Lea, 2008). This approach has been challenged in more

recent academic literacies literature (Baik & Grieg, 2009; Street, 2004), which supports our local experience. While such services at times enabled students to pass at Diploma level, students relied on these to graduate, but did not necessarily have sufficient independent writing skills to function well in the workplace or in higher education. Many of these students did not have the academic discourse skills that people from more privileged educational or English-speaking backgrounds might have. Providing a realistic means for these students to meaningfully access this discourse, whilst learning the often demanding and challenging concepts integral to CS education, was the challenge for educators.

CROSS-DISCIPLINE COLLABORATION

Collaboration between language and learning (LL) and community services (CS) educators in the university resulted in obtaining establishment funds to re-design the curriculum to reflect more contemporary educational approaches. This close, cross-discipline collaboration embedded English language and academic skills in the curriculum to scaffold students into disciplinary knowledge. This built on the recognition of the effectiveness of such embedded approaches in promoting both academic success and language acquisition (Song, 2006), whilst also recognising that the approach has not had the uptake in Australian tertiary education that might have been expected (Baik & Grieg, 2009, p. 403). The curriculum design was then evaluated in terms of staff perceptions of its value in supporting them as educators to provide the necessary scaffolding of diverse learners. The findings are promising amongst the range of strategies to enable student retention and success, transition to higher-level qualifications and better graduate outcomes for entry level into the CS profession.

THE EVALUATION RESEARCH

The research was a qualitative study evaluating the applied curriculum according to staff perceptions of its value in supporting the education of diverse students. Students' formal evaluation was sought, but attracted a limited number of participants, partly because the study was undertaken before the students graduated (and dispersed), which coincided with a time when they were necessarily preoccupied with assessment demands.

The research sought to answer the following questions:

1. How have the educators experienced the program in teaching non-traditional students?

2. How have the students experienced the program in relation to their educational aspirations and goals?

3. How could the model be refined?

Method
These perceptions were researched using separate staff and student focus groups and individual, semi-structured interviews, for which ethics approval was obtained.

Participants

All educators and curriculum developers (LL and discipline) in the project were invited to participate in focus groups and individual interviews (six in total). Thirty-six students were enrolled in both the Communications and Academic Research units across the two years (other students were enrolled in only one of the units in those years for various reasons). These 36 students and the six educators who were involved in the program in 2010 and 2011 were invited to participate in the focus groups. The response rate for the student focus group was disappointingly low (five students). However, those students who did participate included non-traditional and one international student and were all female, reflecting the predominance of females in the CS field. All educators involved in the project participated except for one who had left the university. Five students attended the focus group and two of these responded in individual interviews.

Procedure

Two LL educators (one who taught and one who helped to design curriculum) and two community services educators participated in the focus group. All of these were individually interviewed as well as one other LL educator who was not available for the focus group. The focus group participants were then invited to undertake individual interviews, where issues from the focus group could be explored in more detail and individually.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Wheelahan (2010) refers to the socially differentiated access to knowledge and education that arises when some students have the privilege of congruence between their middle class home and education environments and others do not. Williams (2005/6) explores the challenges of non-traditional students by using Bourdieu's (1984) concept of habitus—the way that people internalise and normalise the beliefs and values of the community and social class to which we perceive ourselves as belonging. If we move from one habitus to another we have to learn new social practices, including discourses, and new values may conflict with the old. While there is considerable variation among these less representative groups, many have not had prior access to privileged academic discourses or literacies (Northedge, 2005). Drawing on Bourdieu's notion of "cultural capital" (1977, 1984), Devlin (2011, p. 2) argues that non-traditional tertiary students are educated and assessed on a set of assumptions, values and expectations that are not always made explicit; whereas students from higher socio-economic strata and more conventional educational backgrounds build implicit familiarity with these privileged assumptions, values and expectations over a lifetime. Delpit's (1993) exploration of the ways in which issues of power are played out in education added weight to concerns about reproducing social inequities, particularly in the light of the social justice values of the profession into which we were inducting these students (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010; Australian Community Workers Association n.d.). Delpit maintains that the learning environments enacting these power dimensions are supported by a "culture of power"—the codes inherent in linguistic forms—ways of talking, writing and interacting. Furthermore, success in institutions is predicated upon acquiring the culture of those who are in power. Non-traditional students have not necessarily come from backgrounds that carry the cultural codes that are required and perpetuated in the university system for success.

THEORY INFORMING THE CURRICULUM DESIGN

Embedding English language and academic skills in curriculum, and collaboration between language and content educators, is not new (Baik & Grieg, 2009; Davison, 2006). Embedded programs involve various degrees of collaboration between faculty staff and LL educators (Jones, Bonanno, & Scouller, 2002). Distinctive about the curricular and pedagogic intervention under study is that LL teachers were not simply in *support* roles (Creese, 2002) but were equally involved with discipline teachers in designing two Diploma units, including construction and sequencing of assessment tasks. This degree of collaboration was central to the theory underlying the curriculum design: that it furthers learning to identify, and put into curricular sequences, the values, essential terms and privileged identities of the discipline (Moraitis et al., 2012).

SOCIO-CULTURAL THEORIES OF LEARNING

Influencing the curriculum design were socio-cultural theories of learning, which see "knowledge" as that which is shared between knowledgeable people within their discourse (characteristic ways of using language, acting, interacting, behaving and believing). This knowledge is expressed and maintained within "discourse communities" (Bruner, 1996; Wells, 1999). Knowledge arises out of a process of discoursing and is situated within communities (Wenger, 1998). From this perspective, the primary focus of learning becomes the ability to participate within a chosen knowledge community. The pedagogic challenge is to ensure that the conventions and linguistic patterns inherent in the discourse are made explicit to students in order to enable them to participate in the discipline discourse and access the knowledge contained within it (Rai, 2004). Delpit (1993) points out that, if you are not already a participant in the culture of power, being told explicitly the rules of that culture makes acquiring power easier. Consequently, to teach effectively is to enable participation in these discourse communities, providing access to the intellectual and social power inherent in prestigious and powerful knowledge communities (Northedge, 2005).

The notion of discourse communities repositions non-traditional students as emerging participants in a new (not necessarily better) discourse, so they can choose to access it when they need to. The discourses in which students have participated prior to university entrance have shaped them, constructed their reality and formed their identity (Gee, 2008). Non-traditional students can be required to make greater shifts in identity than traditional students when entering new discourses at university. The relationship between the different discourse communities that students inhabit can be explored, exposing avenues of access to the discourse of choice. The new discourse is therefore not a final authority, but a resource always open to judicious use and further questioning. Students can appreciate that participation in the new discourse does not annul the identities that they bring to the course, but somehow forms a complex relationship with these (Moraitis et al., 2012).

This relationship between different discourses and shifting identities was illustrated in the evaluative research when one of the educators reported from her discussion with participating students that some of them found the program disorienting and very challenging. For some, it touched the raw parts of their fear of writing, and a few "dropped out in sheer horror that they had to do writing". Some students had the expectation that they would be

learning spelling and grammar in the program, "whereas the focus was on deconstructing and making the discourse explicit, writing exercises and discussions about text and identity and change. Sometimes grammar and the mechanics of language would be incorporated into this discussion, but it was not the primary focus." The students might have felt that they had not learnt much in the first few weeks, but according to the LL educator, by the end of the course:

…most of them said that they had transformed... the key phrase[s] from the students [were], "I feel different" … "I feel like a different person… I didn't think I could write like this, my writing looks different..." There was this sense of transformation and it was nothing about grammar, and I found that probably one of the best moments...was of going from just, "Oh now I [students] can do this on the page". [It moves from], "It's disassociated with me", to "This is inherently what I'm about". This was just really rewarding. Fantastic.

In addition, by linking text features to participating in a discourse community, students' mistakes could be seen as developmental—as part of student development within a discourse community (Shaughnessy, 1977). This unsettles deficit discourses about students' literacy and language, which focuses on "mistakes" and the need to "fix" these (Comber & Kamler, 2004). Cultivating a critical view of text can reinforce the intentional encourage-ment of students to become reflective participants of the expertise they learn and the systems they will inevitably enter in their working lives (Daddow, Moraitis, & Carr, 2013).

ACADEMIC LITERACIES

Lea (2008) outlines three streams of research and pedagogic practice in the language and learning area that have responded to student linguistic and cultural diversity since the 1980s. After the initial development of generic language and academic skills, it was argued that these do not cater adequately for university students, given that each discipline has its own conventions, values and practices (Baik & Greig, 2009). Ballard and Clanchy (1988) argued that, if academics made the culture and its implicit expectations of disciplinary writing more explicit, students could learn the literacy practices more readily. This was supported by "critical literacy" approaches which recognise that literacy includes learning how language works and applying a critical approach to text, given that language and text are not neutral (Lankshear & McClaren, 1993). Building on this work in the 1990s, Ivanic (1998), Lea (1994) and Lillis (2001) explored the nature of power and authority in academic writing. A focus on meaning-making, identity, and the power invested in parti-cular literacies and discourses now has some influence on the literature on learning and teaching in tertiary education (Lea, 2008). This more recent stream influenced our inclusive curriculum design, which was interested in the role of language and power in relation to non-traditional students and associated identity shifts as new language is appropriated.
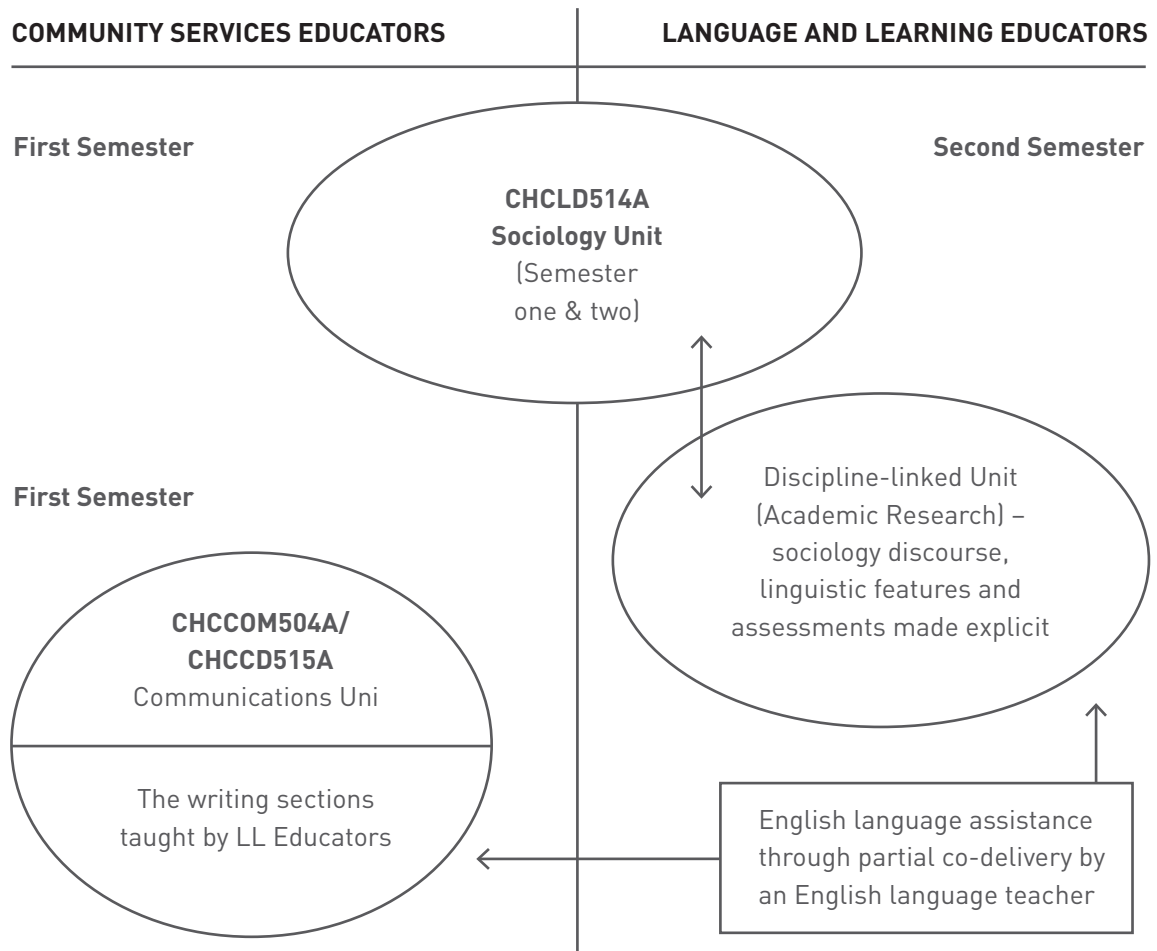
THE CURRICULUM DESIGN

The cross-faculty, professional collaboration between discipline educators and LL educators was undertaken at each stage of the teaching and learning process. This enabled careful design of a more inclusive curriculum with the following features:

- **Curriculum design:** LL educators and discipline educators collaborated extensively when designing the curriculum (assessments, sequencing of content, learning activities, text choice).

- **Embedding of language and academic skills into the curriculum design:** Academic skills were contextualised to make explicit the particular language features of the discipline. All language learning was contextualised, with real tasks from the discipline. In this case-study, a discipline-linked unit (Academic Research elective) was incorporated into the course design and separate, but inter-related teaching was done by discipline and LL educators. As it is not always possible to include discipline-linked units, subsequent adaptations to the curriculum design in the Bachelor of Social Work and other programs have included consultation with LL educators on curriculum design and co-teaching of the LL educator and the discipline educator, in first-year or conceptually demanding units. These are supplemented with optional, contextualised, individual consultations between the students and the LL educators.

- **Considered pedagogy:** Collaboration between the discipline and LL educators continued throughout the semester to ensure synchronous teaching and to reflexively consider pedagogy throughout the teaching.

- **Developmental curriculum design:** Resisting deficit views of non-traditional students, the model was developmentally applied to all students in the course.

- **Multi-modal texts:** A "writing for sociology" e-learning space was developed to enable interactive and multiple-text-related tasks, with ready feedback for students. This developed familiarity with digital text and contributed to the building of a learning community.

The curriculum design was applied to the first-year Diplomas in Community Services and Community Development in 2010 and 2011. The concepts of a core Sociology unit (CHLD514A) in both Diplomas, was utilised to provide the content for an imported Academic Research Unit (VBP714—Research tertiary fields of study), which became a designated elective in the second semester.

Figure 1. Embedding Language in the Curriculum

COMMUNITY SERVICES EDUCATORS | **LANGUAGE AND LEARNING EDUCATORS**

First Semester

Second Semester

CHCLD514A
Sociology Unit
(Semester
one & two)

First Semester

CHCCOM504A/
CHCCD515A
Communications Uni

The writing sections
taught by LL Educators

Discipline-linked Unit
(Academic Research) –
sociology discourse,
linguistic features and
assessments made explicit

English language assistance
through partial co-delivery by
an English language teacher

The Academic Research subject (discipline-linked) drew on content from the Sociology unit, and was taught by the LL educator. In the second iteration of the program, this was extended to the writing components of core Communications units in the Diplomas (CHCCOM504A and CHCCD515A) taught in the first semester. Additional English language assistance was provided through partial co-delivery by an English language teacher to further support students for whom English was not their first language. An interactive website was used to support the students' learning and use of multi-modal texts.

Student Selection

All students enrolled in the course participated in the Communications unit (unless they had prior credit or recognition), so this aspect of the embedded program was undertaken by all students. Students were expected to undertake the additional Academic Research elective in second semester, unless they had achieved higher than distinction in first semester (70% or above).

THE RESPONSES IN THE EVALUATIVE RESEARCH

Although challenging, the collaborative curriculum design scaffolded students' learning more effectively.

The educators experienced the inclusive curriculum design as: enabling more intentional and effective scaffolding; creating more realistic expectations of students, without altering

the ultimate standard of the discipline. It encouraged community services (CS) educators to reflect on the part that curriculum and pedagogy had played in the struggles the non-traditional students had experienced in the past. Previously, the educators had set the required standard and hoped students would pick up the assumptions, expectations and linguistic structures through osmosis and feedback on assessment tasks. This approach can contribute to students' learning, but is more likely to be understood by students familiar with the tacit expectations of tertiary education. It does not address the inherent inequities for students without this familiarity.

There was agreement from the CS educators that the collaborative design of the discipline unit assessments (in this case, sociology) resulted in much better designed assessment tasks that scaffolded the students throughout the unit and shifted their own teaching practice: "fine-tuning the assessment tasks so that they were more appropriate for the needs of the 'English as a second language' students...in terms of learning theory... That to me was very valuable". For example, over the year, students started their assessment with writing a personal reflection linked to one sociological theory; they then did an oral presentation on several related theories; they then deconstructed a case-study—applying theory to a "real world" situation and finally they prepared an argument essay where they evaluated competing theories.

Although ultimately constructive, the collaborative developmental stages of the inclusive curriculum were new and challenging for all involved. Intuitive teaching practices, "practices that are in your bones", had to be articulated to each other. They agreed that this was not always a comfortable process. One CS educator commented:

…this forced me to be…clearer about what I'm teaching, how I break that up, how I get across concepts, how …I present concepts and bits of information to build up to a bigger picture… other people [LL educators] … put words to what I was struggling with. I didn't know what the words were to explain that…

Another CS educator indicated that the early discussions were "crucial… we had to educate each other... it was two different frameworks coming together."

One of the LL educators also found the formative collaboration quite challenging:

we'd be talking about …the difficulties [students] have … you intuitively know there's something wrong with it but you can't say what it is. And if you can't say what it is you can't fix it. If you can't deconstruct it you can't reconstruct it.

As the LL educators undertook this "deconstruction", their challenge was:

How do I sift/extract/extrapolate the writing skills from this dense knowledge/discipline… to break down the parts of tasks rather than dumb them down?—it was vital to keep the integrity of what the students were learning [in sociology] …and deconstructing it without...watering it down and making it less difficult and less intense.

Teasing out these issues and articulating on both sides of the collaboration involved some long and intense conversations in the early stages, but when the groundwork was done, "there was a point where it just clicked...and a second go in the second semester...was a lot better."

The collaboration provided the necessary language and learning skills that were expected of the disciplinary educators, but were outside their expertise.

The CS educators expressed the tensions they had felt in trying to support diverse students toward success before the collaboration. One educator taught an induction unit early in the course (that included writing skills), and felt an expectation to accurately assess and address students' writing skills, as these had implications for students' progress and could contribute to future difficulties for students and educators down the track, but felt it was outside their expertise:

...that was all on me, it was literally all on me...and it just wasn't my role really...I felt like it was over my head ...I'm not pressured to do that anymore...because we collaborate and [the LL] educator has the skills to do that... [the collaboration] is now preventing some of the further-on problems that we then had to try to deal with..

The collaboration supported the CS educators' own professional development as they were exposed to the expertise of the LL educators and the reflection on their own teaching practice that was necessitated by the process.

The impact on student progress was significant.

There was general agreement amongst both the educators and students who participated that the program made a significant difference to the students' progress in the first year of the course and prepared them for the transition to second year. The CS educators said that the students' level of writing and results improved: "I was quite surprised...it made me realise what had gone wrong before... it was the tools of communication [non-traditional students] lacked rather than capacity". Educators also reported that students' feedback to them throughout the program was very positive, which was borne out in the student interviews in this study:

[student] *learning how to structure a sentence and paragraph toward an essay; learning academic writing—it's a totally new language—using the discipline text...[practising] reading and writing …I think it's fantastic...I couldn't have done my essays and [other] writing without it.*

Another student...

… to be honest ... I went from ... never getting good marks ever in school to getting … distinctions, high distinctions… and that to me was... a massive confidence boost.

The LL educator's experience in the classroom (as well as formal and informal student feedback) indicated that "the majority of the 'non-traditional' students in the group [about 80% of the 36 students] would have been assisted by the program". She commented that having a formal class to attend to strengthen academic skills dealt with the problem of

"over-assisting" students, as can occur in one-on-one support services. Another LL educator (curriculum designer) commented,

I've seen examples of students' writing, which showed huge development on the part of the students... This writing has reflected how students have been able to re-position themselves in the world...ontological transformation...has been detectable in [their] writing.

Both educators and students commented on the impact of the program on the students' confidence. As one (LL) educator put it, "it's confidence [they grew in]—they all have the ability".

Interviewed students echoed this:

I hadn't been in education for a while and just had no confidence at all to do anything so yeah, this was a bit of a stepping stone and it's been good. It's definitely made me more confident and...[given me] a bit more belief in myself...

And:

for me it's raised my aspirations that I can actually achieve...by jumping in the deep end... and getting the results and learning has given me a sense of my own abilities are proved [sic].

When asked how they felt the program impacted on students who might not be seen as non-traditional, one of the CS educators responded, "they loved it…students said, 'It was so valuable to know that you're on the right track—it clarifies and entrenches the knowledge'". Another CS educator responded to this question indicating that she was "not sure...but was not aware of anything negative... [and it was possible that] the level of discussion was higher [in the discipline unit—because you could focus on content and concepts] and was therefore a better learning environment". This flags an interesting area to explore in a more wide-ranging study.

Transfer of academic skills to other units in the course

The issue of transferring the reading and writing skills to other units in the course was of interest to the educators, and some modifications of the program took place in the second year to spread the support over more than one subject. The change meant that the curriculum included embedding academic writing preparation for students' first assignment in the Communications unit, also the first assignment for the course. The change in results as reported by the CS teacher of that unit was dramatic over the two years: there were 80% re-submissions (repeating the assessment to meet a pass standard) of that first written assessment in 2010, and, when it was supported through the contextualised academic writing components in 2011, there were no re-submissions.

Student responses varied over how successfully they were able to transfer the writing and academic skills to other subjects. Some indicated that they had difficulty applying the writing skills to other subjects while others were able to refer to their notes from the program and transfer the skills to other subjects and writing genres. One

student commented that it "assisted in drafting letters on placement", which indicates transferability.

Sustainable cross-discipline collaboration.

All the educators agreed that collaboration between the discipline and LL educators was "absolutely vital" to the success of the program. Shared commitment to inclusive education smoothed the path for collaboration, as well as an internal Learning and Teaching Grant, which provided time for the initial collaborative design, implementation and documentation. One of the LL educators (a curriculum developer), speaking from experience of similar programs in other disciplines, commented:

that's the first time I've been involved in a process where the teachers of the subject area have been more than happy, keen to think about the kinds of assessment tasks and the ordering of assessment and the sequencing of assessment tasks...it was a real trust...and the learning that we all went through during the whole process, I think that was terrific... we all learnt from each other.

The other LL educator also expressed this,

… having worked in two areas [in this faculty], they're very different. I found this experience … incredibly positive … whereas in other areas it hasn't been like that, there's been barriers and indecisiveness both from the top but also at the teacher level and you just can't get anything done.

The educators suggested that there needs to be room for dynamic development of the inclusive curriculum, which requires time for genuine collaboration. This needs to be more than, "an email, telephone call, meet you in the corridor sort of collaboration … [these are] just not enough". The teaching needs to be quite synchronous. If the discipline teacher changes their plans in content, then it can throw out the planned LL class and quick adaptations need to be made; LL educator: "as soon as the sociology course changes then my course changes and that requires communication". At one point in the second iteration of the project, communication broke down due to staff changes and this created confusion and impacted on staff time and efficiency; CS educator: "it all depends on whether the people work together well and communicate well … and I've had the complete opposite experience, and I know how disastrous it is".

All educators agreed that, without management oversight and institutional recognition of such collaborative approaches, they can become hard to sustain. Pressures on universities to respond to other commercial and pedagogic imperatives, as outlined earlier, can undermine such collaboration and commitment to educational outcomes.

DISCUSSION

Re-designing the curriculum and associated pedagogy enabled the transition from "over-assisting" of individual students to applying a developmental and integrated approach that enabled students to become emerging participants in a new discipline discourse. The students were taught the metacognition skills—the "rules of the [power] game"—

to deconstruct academic and discipline language. This potentially provided them with the agency to move in and out of that discourse, and participate more meaningfully in the discourse community into which they were being inducted. Being given the rules of the game assisted students to both integrate the new discourse into their newly forming identities as community service professionals, and to create awareness of how they might maintain their own cultural allegiances and existing identities in that complex process. The "voice" they discover through their writing and other communication in the course strengthens their confidence and their sense of capacity, and provides access to the privileged discourse to which they had not necessarily been previously exposed.

CONCLUSION

While the positive indications of the curriculum design are limited to a particular student cohort, they highlight an approach to the complexity of building an inclusive curriculum that scaffolds diverse students in tertiary education toward academic success. The curriculum design signals the value of close collaboration between LL and discipline educators to mainstream academic skills in this scaffolding process, and provides some impetus for speculation on how this might be more broadly applied as we welcome students into university from a wider range of life worlds. As well as making the assumptions and conventions of academic and discipline discourse more explicit, the approach aims to orient students toward an expanded identity that initiates them into the academic and discipline discourse. From an LL curriculum designer:

If the curriculum can touch where people are at in their learning, and students realise the curriculum is being designed for them, they can learn an enormous amount...they can go from being unable to tell their own story, to writing complex assignments.

The approach also flags the capacity that students bring to the tertiary environment that is not always captured in university curricular and pedagogic practices. It challenges educators to think carefully about how we educate students who, in the words of one student, "had the concept, it was just they couldn't put it down on paper". Assumptions about readiness for tertiary education and deficit discourses are challenged as we reflect on our curricular and pedagogic practices, rather than make assumptions about students' capacities. An LL curriculum designer:

Non-traditional students ...come to an education context not having been shaped as much and can ask deeper questions … curriculum development needs to touch those deeper questions … so they can potentially be more reflexive … more successful learners in the long-term, but it takes time.

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