

# 10

## ACADEMIC LITERACY AS A GRADUATE ATTRIBUTE

IMPLICATIONS FOR THINKING  
ABOUT 'CURRICULUM'

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### INTRODUCTION

This chapter is set within the current focus on graduate attributes. These are qualities which students require in order to study at university, as well as and more typically, the attributes that students require in order to graduate as competent and meaningfully engaged members of society. The particular subset of attributes on which the chapter focuses covers approaches towards academic literacy, broadly understood as encompassing writing and reading, digital literacy and information literacy. I locate my understanding of academic literacy within what is broadly referred to as a 'situated literacies' approach and trace the implications of this approach for curriculum design and for research into the curriculum. In order to substantiate many of the claims in this chapter, I provide examples from various studies conducted while being involved in research and development work on language across the curriculum at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), and from research into language, biography and identity I have conducted while working at Stellenbosch University. I draw from the international literature, as well as from South African literature, which has its own trajectory and concern to respond to the educational, racial and linguistically saturated divisions and inequities of our past. This chapter makes a strong argument for an understanding of graduate attributes in general – and of academic literacy in particular – as practices deeply embedded in the disciplines. For pragmatic reasons, it might be necessary to provide for stand-alone approaches towards the facilitation of academic literacy amongst students. With regard to the broader concept of graduate attributes, I ask whether the kinds of attributes we expect from students, such as criticality or lifelong learning, should not be the subject of attention for educators themselves.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ACADEMIC LITERACY IN THE CURRICULUM

Much current curriculum design is taken up with considerations of the qualities and dispositions with which we expect the curriculum to equip students as graduates, rather than, or in addition to, the specific content knowledge a student should acquire. The last

**PART TWO • CHALLENGES IN RECONCEPTUALISING UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION**

two decades have seen a focus in formal curriculum planning within higher education on the final outcome of education, known as ‘graduate attributes’ (in Australia, cf. Barrie 2004), or as ‘graduateness’ (in the UK, cf. Yorke 2009). With reference to Australia, Barrie (2004) maintains that these attributes refer to the generic values, attitudes or skills that students should acquire in order to become employable and to be able to contribute to the welfare of society. The South African equivalent of this is the Critical Cross-Field and Developmental Outcomes (SAQA 1997) which emphasise the qualities an individual requires in order to learn and to live successfully in a diverse and complex world. In this chapter I make use of the graduate attributes theme as I believe this is a useful way to focus our minds on key goals of higher education. In so doing, I am mindful of the various criticisms of the concept, for example that the language of attributes and outcomes fails to capture the complexity and richness of the teaching and learning experience (Clegg & Ashworth 2004). Furthermore, it is said to de-emphasise the degree to which the attributes are learnt through the disciplines (Jones 2009), and according to Campbell (2010) it underplays the extent to which the attributes are engendered by particular contexts such as the home and family, rather than by educational institutions.

The broad cluster of language, communication and academic literacy tends to feature prominently within the various lists of graduate outcomes. Communication and literacy are evident in two of the seven SAQA Critical Cross-field Outcomes: learners should be able to “collect, analyse, organize and critically evaluate information” and “communicate effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written presentations” (SAQA 1997:1). They are also embedded within the goals for higher education in the Education White Paper 3 (RSA DoE 1997:14):

To produce graduates with the skills and competencies that build the foundations for lifelong learning, including, critical, analytical, problem-solving and communication skills, as well as the ability to deal with change and diversity, in particular, the tolerance of different views and ideas.

While language and literacy are outcomes of higher education, they are also foundational, in the sense that they are required for successful learning. Given the significance of this cluster of attributes, it would be fair to assume that attention to them would occupy a central place in the design of a learning programme. It is unfortunately the case that they tend to be deemed the expertise of ‘outsiders’ to the discipline or department. They get relegated to Cinderella first-year courses and siphoned off for specific groups of what in South African policy discourse are called ‘educationally disadvantaged’ students. Why this is the case, and what to do about it, is given consideration in this chapter.

## IS THERE A PROBLEM?

In addition to being embedded in the graduate outcomes policy discourse, language and literacy receive attention because of the sense of alarm associated with this domain. There is a belief that students cannot write or express themselves correctly, and that they write formal texts in ‘sms-speak’. But I agree with Ivanič *et al* (2009:14) that this is a “crisis narrative”, and that this sense of crisis is overstated. I further agree with Ivanič *et al* that on the contrary, there has been a “proliferation” of literacies, and that these are actually resources for learning. While the sense of crisis may be overstated, there are nevertheless problems that require attention and resolution. One problem is that academics are not sufficiently familiar with the literacies practised in social media and at schools, both their limitations and potential, in order to build upon what students know and do not know and can and cannot do, in order to realise their potential in the academy (Greenhow, Robelia & Hughes 2009). For that matter, academics are also not always as familiar as they could be with the literacies deployed in various professional and social domains. But a far more serious problem remains the degree to which access to the dominant literacies is dependent on social class and privilege. This unequal access further influences access to academic literacy and further opportunities to learn at university, as noted with reference to literacy by Street (1995), to modes by Bernstein (1996) or with reference to discourse by Bourdieu, Passeron and De Saint Martin (1994) and Gee (1992). The extent to which this is a problem in higher education in South Africa is reflected in the national retention and success rates, which in this country fall below international norms and are highly influenced by social inequality (Scott, Yeld & Hendry 2007). So yes, there is a very real problem, one of inequality and lack of valuing of vernacular discourses or primary discourses of students. Forward-looking curriculum design can meliorate this.

## ‘ACADEMIC LITERACY’ – TOWARDS A DEFINITION

In order to situate this chapter within the theoretical domain, I use the phrase ‘academic literacy’ which I use interchangeably with ‘literacy’ and ‘discourse’, two concepts used in the literature to which I am referring. A simple definition of academic literacy is provided by Ivanič *et al* (2009:49) as being “the particular ways of reading and writing which help students in their learning”. The phrase intersects with “academic discourse”, which I defined (Leibowitz 2010:2) as “a culturally specific set of linguistic and discourse conventions, influenced by written forms utilised primarily in academic institutions such as the university”. It thus pertains to students as well as to academics. The word ‘discourse’ suggests more culturally laden, ideological, values or identity perspectives as is clear from the work on discourse by Gee (1992) or Bourdieu, Passeron and de Saint Martin, whose work was published in 1965 and translated from the French in 1994. Their book consists of the first substantial piece of research I am aware of, to use this term in relation to academia.

**PART TWO • CHALLENGES IN RECONCEPTUALISING UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION**

Ivanič *et al* (2009) used the plural, “academic literacies”, to suggest that there is more than one kind of literacy, appropriate for more than one context and purpose. When described by Halliday (1994), ‘literacy’ pertains strongly to the written mode. He says that if we do not limit the word ‘literacy’ to written forms, then we will have to coin another term to describe reading and writing. But we learnt from Kress (1997) how multimodal communication has become, and increasingly so. Mehlenbacher (2010), citing Warschauer (2002), distinguishes between four forms of literacy in education: computer, domain (relating to content and the disciplines), textual and visual literacy. In the annual report on IT trends, Educause (2011:3) writes that “Digital media literacy continues its rise in importance as a key skill in every discipline and profession”. I would add to Mehlenbacher’s list, information literacy and numeric literacy.

While these ‘literacies’ are listed by some as being separate, I would argue that they are integrated within the concept of academic literacy. Thus academic literacy is the acquisition of systems of signifying, symbols, text or spoken discourse, which support successful learning and knowledge construction in a culturally specific way in higher education. It tends to be seen as foundational, and pertaining to the beginning of a student’s career. In his seminal 2004 article, Barrie provides an account of how academics at his institution targeted graduate attributes within four categories. The first of these was the focus on “undifferentiated foundation skills (like English language proficiency or basic numeracy)” (Barrie 2004:265), which he maintains the academics saw as precursors to disciplinary learning. There is, however, an increasing tendency to focus on academic literacy within later years and postgraduate studies, presumably with the understanding that at each stage of a student’s career he or she makes transitions, not only in the first year. This was a conclusion I reached in the study on students’ transitions that I conducted at UWC. Of the 20 students I interviewed, many found their transition to first year dramatic. One student said that “it was a very traumatic and harrowing experience”. But many also found the transition most awkward the first time they had to do a research assignment, at honours level or when changing to a new university:

I was very frustrated [at the new university] and said to myself, ‘Well, I’ve been four years at [the first university] but never, I have never had someone who marked my paper like this’ and to start all over again, it’s very difficult’ (Leibowitz 2010:96).

Two of the most significant concepts associated with a definition of academic literacy from a socially situated approach are those of context and function, which influence the look and shape of texts, both oral and written. This is fully elaborated in the work of Halliday on register (1985), and developed in work on literacy by writers such as Gee (1992), Barton (1994) and Street (1995). The focus on function and, in particular, on motivation, is most extensively dealt with by Clark and Ivanič (1997). Context and function influence what practices individuals engage in and the forms they acquire, as well as at a more attitudinal level, their motivation to acquire academic literacy and their sense of identification with it when at university.

The influence of context and function on the forms a person learns to use, and thus the shapes of the texts one creates, is provided by the account of an Afrikaans-speaking female student who regularly visited the library when she was in high school, and read copious quantities of novels in English, for the pleasure of engaging with stories. But she did not read non-fiction and she did not engage in debates about what she read. When she arrived at university she found that her writing had been influenced by the kind of reading she engaged in at school, at the expense of more discursive or analytic writing:

From prior life, what interested me is writing, it is writing stories, everything in a way it is like a story, like when I write my essays I would start in the beginning that now at school and when I read books I would read, I would read books 'in the beginning' or 'from this day on'. Now I would write an essay like that, like in the beginning, but not like use words, but I would start with that and I think that was a big influence that I write like a story because I wanted to do journalism and I mostly focus on writing a good story and not [...], sometimes focusing on what I must write (Leibowitz 2010:120).

The comment below, by a professor in the arts faculty at my university, is an example of how the acquisition of certain "ways with words" (cf. Heath 1983), in one context, enables an individual to sue that same language or register in other contexts in which similar functions are being exercised. Riana participated in many debates around the dinner table which required her to analyse and defend her position. This led her to develop ways of talking or writing that stood her in good stead in her later academic life when she had to perform similar functions:

Through the way in which we were brought up I did get a lot of ... a lot of academic debate ... you have to articulate your argument clearly ... if things are different then you have to show that they're different and not start muddling things ... and that part of being education [is typical] in this department (Leibowitz 2009:269).

Riana was using language in her home for a purpose – arguing with her father, scoring points, marshalling information in support of her argument that had a similar function to the purpose for which she would use language in the academy. At the level of attitude, the purpose with which we imbue reading and writing or learning to read and write will inform how we understand learning to use academic literacy. A rather more negative example in this case is from a study I conducted with 36 students studying linguistics at UWC. There were students in the group who were struggling to pass their first year, and who were extremely motivated to do so. However, their understanding of the purpose of academic learning was so instrumental as to be completely at odds with the purpose more traditionally associated with learning: to become more educated, to be able to make informed choices, and so on. While an instrumental or extrinsic motivation for learning in higher education might be implicit in the minds of most undergraduate students, for those who have not experienced the joy of learning for other reasons this instrumental reason becomes salient. Thus one might argue that motivation to acquire academic literacy is important, but that it depends

**PART TWO • CHALLENGES IN RECONCEPTUALISING UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION**

on the experience one has had with the possible purposes to which it is put in one's prior learning experiences. This once again underscores the importance of context, including institutional context, biography and practice in the acquisition of academic literacy. According to Ivanič *et al* (2009:51) practices involve "purpose(s), identities, roles and values, participation, activities and processes". Hamilton (2000) identifies the key elements of a literacy practice as participants, settings, artefacts and activities. A comment from a lecturer of English literature at Stellenbosch University illustrates several of these facets in combination: the artefact (the book), the influence of people (the parent) and the influence of values:

There were always books in our home and we were always told that the most valuable thing that you could gain is an education and that ran throughout the way the family did things (Leibowitz 2009:267).

The mention of books in the same sentence as "the most valuable thing" suggests that the book has value as a resource with which to engage and from which one can learn, as well as symbolic value. Gutierrez, Morales and Martinez (2009:216) describe artefacts, which can be material and ideal/symbolic, as playing an essential role in learning via culture:

Culture is conceived of as human being's 'social inheritance'. This social inheritance is embodied in artefacts, aspects of the environment that have been transformed by their participation in the successful goal-directed activities of prior generations. They have acquired value.

The socially situated view allows us to see academic literacy as being embedded within the social settings in which it is practised and acquired, and thus how most of the time we acquire literacy by doing and interacting, not only by being formally taught to read or write. Having experienced, engaged in and practised academic literacy before entering academia is a substantial advantage, which has accrued to the individual from childhood, through school to university. This presents two challenges: first, what to do when an individual has not acquired literacy via this gradual accrual due to an accident of birth and absence of luck, and second, to what extent can one formally provide this to substantial groups of students in a generic format early on in a student's career, as so many institutions attempt to do. I return to these vexing questions later in the chapter.

**THE ROLE OF 'LANGUAGE' IN ACADEMIC LITERACY**

An issue that appears to raise its head almost whenever academic literacy is discussed in South Africa is the role of language, especially second language, in learning. On the one hand, language is of course everywhere, and is the primary semiotic medium through which our thinking, values and attitudes are communicated. I say 'primary', because body language and manner of dress, for example, are also means of signifying, but they have far less depth and ability to convey meaning. According to Bourdieu, Passeron and de Saint Martin (1994:8) language and syntax "provides us with a system of transposable mental dispositions [which] go hand in hand with values

which dominate the whole of our experience and, in particular, with a vision of society and culture”.. But this matter is both more and less complex, than a simple one-to-one relationship between ‘language’ and thinking and learning. We have all heard the argument that language, for example English, French or isiXhosa, is a key factor in inhibiting the learning of students who study in their second language. This word ‘language’ is thus often equated with academic literacy itself. Arising from my study on the literacy biographies of 36 students having English, Afrikaans or isiXhosa as main languages at UWC (Leibowitz 2010) I argue that proficiency in the dominant language is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for academic success. This is because other aspects of the discourse are vital: the discursual forms, but also, the understanding of the purpose or function of the forms. This is something that students are inclined to point out themselves. In my research with the 36 students studying Linguistics at UWC, one isiXhosa-speaking student said, for example, “The way I analyse things is different from the way my lecturers analyse things. This is always the case, even in Xhosa, so I can’t say English is the barrier” (Leibowitz 2010:161). A similar observation has been made at a historically white South African university where students’ writing in an additional language attributed their achievement with reference to their English, but the researchers felt that this was “a fairly minor, and sometimes non-existent, category in most departments” (Kapp & Bangeni 2009:594).

The work of Cummins and Swain (1986) on the distinction between Basic Interpersonal skills and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency is useful in understanding the relationship between on the one hand, language as first or second language, and discourse or academic literacy, on the other. They write that if one acquires certain academic forms and ways of engaging with knowledge in the first language (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) it is easier to acquire these forms in an additional language. Thus there is a follow-through of practices engaged in in the first language, to practices engaged in in the second, less familiar language. This point is well illustrated in the account of reading and writing in English, by a student at UWC whose first language was Afrikaans:

Student: I think it [English] has been a block to my understanding, depends also now on what it is, what type of thing it is that I am reading or that I am writing about. If it is a factual thing then, I mean, if you get something in class that you have to read, then it usually takes me two or three times to really read through it and understand what is going on. But if it is something, you know, like, not a factual thing but something interesting or that type of thing, then it doesn’t take that long for me to understand.

Researcher: And writing essays in English?

Student: Also depends on the type of topic. Factual things take quite a long time really for me to understand and know what I am talking about, unless it is something I have heard people spoke to me about in class or something and then I can relate to what I have heard and what is in the book (Leibowitz 2010:159).

**PART TWO • CHALLENGES IN RECONCEPTUALISING UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION**

This interchange demonstrates how language as first or second language is one of several elements that influence a student's acquisition of academic literacy. Prior engagement with content, and prior exposure to genres such as fiction or non-fiction, would be other significant elements. Language and genres are among the various aspects of communicative and literacy practices included in the framework developed by Ivanič *et al* (2009) for their study of literacy across the curriculum.

The tendency to attribute causality to matters of linguistic form such as mastery of a language like English was criticised by Nightingale (1988), who demonstrated how language errors in a student's writing can emanate from a students' lack of familiarity with the underlying forms of inquiry. Lea and Street (1998) give an example from the writing of a student who wrote proficiently in terms of form in a subject where he was familiar with the material, and less proficiently in a subject where he had not mastered the underlying epistemology and values. They suggest that an approach which focuses on the underlying epistemology (1998:10/15):

... might open up areas of inquiry and reinterpretation that would revalue much student writing, shift attention from surface features of 'literacy' to deeper features of epistemology and of authority, of the kind indicated above, and perhaps explain much of the miscommunication between tutors and students that is coming to be documented as researchers focus on academic literacies.

From the study on 36 students studying academic literacy at UWC I concluded that:

... because limited proficiency in the dominant language often co-occurs with inadequate mastery of the written academic register, it is easy to understand why many educationists refer to difficulties with the additional language as the problem, when it is only one among the many challenges facing multilingual students (Leibowitz 2005:676).

Another important observation from the same study was that there is not a neat and predictive sequence for acquiring academic literacy among students learning in an additional language. One cannot assume, for example, that students will achieve a specific level of basic communicative proficiency in a language before acquiring a deeper level of engagement with forms of inquiry in that language. Some students acquire communicative proficiency and surface mastery more quickly than others. And yet others might be the ones to appreciate more quickly the function of practices such as analytic debate or referencing. The following example from an essay by one of the 36 students in their first year demonstrates a clear understanding of the purpose of argumentation in an essay and of referencing to support a point of view, and simultaneously, an evident lack of fluency in English and proficiency with regard to punctuation. The student is providing evidence why he agrees with the statements that extroverted people learn a second language easily, even though the literature does not always support this. He is demonstrating that he is familiar with some of this research, and provides an example from his own experience, which he was asked to do, in an essay:

**CHAPTER 10 • ACADEMIC LITERACY AS A GRADUATE ATTRIBUTE**

For example it is often argued that an extroverted person is well suited to language learning. However, research does not always support this conclusion. Mr Kruger's reader 1995 p. 37 have a weighty support with argument that an extroverted person is well-suited to language learning. After matric I went out to seek a job ... (Leibowitz 2010:185).

In the same study there were contrasting essays written by students from the same educational and linguistic backgrounds who wrote nearly flawless essays in English, but who displayed very little engagement with the theory and who had not adopted the forms of enquiry required for the assignment. This lack of neat, predictive sequencing does not make curriculum design any easier, and calls for a more flexible and student-oriented approach.

One of the most interesting examples demonstrating the interwovenness of teaching and language is an Australian study by Baik and Greig (2009) on the impact of an adjunct English language tutorial programme on the academic performances of first-year architecture students. The 'ESL' (English as a second language) students were able to join a tutorial within the same programme before the final essay was handed in. Two of the aspects covered were the opportunity to repeat the course content, and a more language-focused element. In evaluative responses it became clear that the ESL students valued most highly the opportunity to go over the work again, far more than, if at all, the language-focused components. The writers were not expecting this outcome.

**THE INSTRUMENTAL VIEW OF ACADEMIC LITERACY**

Thus far we have considered a problem with the way academic literacy is defined, in that the student's home language is ascribed a dominant role, more than is warranted in many cases. A second theoretical issue bedevilling planning for academic literacy in the curriculum is the belief that academic literacy is an autonomous and coherent set of skills that one can teach to students in a decontextualised manner, by formal instruction in institutions. Each institution blames the previous one for not imparting this package of skills. As Griesel and Parker (2009:19) write in a study on graduate attributes and employability, "[i]n most countries an adequate foundation for these competencies will have been laid in the schooling system before students enter into higher education". However, schools are merely building upon the acquisition of academic literacy that will have begun in the home. Then lecturers of second- and third-year courses blame lecturers of first-year courses, teachers of post-graduate courses blame teachers of undergraduate programmes, and so on. This leads to an assumption that lack of communication skills and academic literacy can be remedied or filled with a course for a specific group of students in their first year of study, rather than being something that is acquired through use, in context and "by degree/s" (Taylor, Ballard, Beasley, Bock, Clanchy & Nightingale 1988). The instrumental view is featured in Barrie's typography of strategies for dealing with graduate attributes, which

**PART TWO • CHALLENGES IN RECONCEPTUALISING UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION**

he describes as “best addressed by the provision of an additional remedial curriculum” by “non-disciplinary teachers” (2004:265).

This instrumental approach leads to academic literacy being seen as a handmaiden to the disciplines, thus of lower status. Thus international students in Anglophone countries and students from ‘disadvantaged schools’ in South Africa, who do not have full access to the dominant language or dominant forms of literacy in the institution tend to be described in terms of deficit or pathology. In South Africa Boughey (2002) has criticised the pathologising of the student, and with regard to the international student, Turner (2011:3) refers to the “relentlessly remedial representation of language issues in the institutional discourse of higher education”. Turner (2011:4) maintains that pedagogic practices such as the seminar or lecture “are quintessentially language or languaging practices” and that language only becomes visible when it fails to live up to transparency (2011:29) and that this is when deficit and remediation set in.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR CURRICULUM DESIGN**

What, then, are the implications of a socially situated view of academic literacy for curriculum design and planning? One important implication is that the facilitation of academic literacy does not necessarily imply a focus on form or language. Here I digress to my work at UWC: After doing so much with students about their language in the Computer-supported English course and in the writing centre, Wendy Woodward, my collaborator in the English Department would write, “But why don’t the students’ essays improve?” The answer lies in their understanding of key concepts and key processes of enquiry, which was more significant than their engagement with form. In ‘Attention to Form in Students’ Writing: the CSE English 1 Editing Programme’ I concluded:

The issue of the focus on form is more elusive, once again. We cannot prove statistically that such a focus has any worth. We can, however, note that this is a perceived need of a significant number of students, who have found the material useful. The literature, as well as the contradictions in the students’ opinions, shows us that the issue of form is rather more complex than it may seem at first sight: the curriculum as a whole needs to communicate to students that it is but one aspect of writing; that attention to content and meaning is more important and might well help improve their own form. Although attention to form is necessary, it must be more thoroughly located within the curriculum than this course has been (Leibowitz 1994:185).

So after all the hours I put into this innovation, this is a very quiet admission, I think, that it was not worth the effort. The answer for the curriculum might lie less in a focus on form *per se*, and more in the ecological approach that stresses “apprenticeship in applied settings, access to empowering modes of discourse, guided instruction that leads to self-regulated learning, and understanding learning in cultural-historical contexts” (Gutierrez *et al* 2009:223).

A second implication would be the idea that the responsibility for the acquisition of academic literacy lies with all educators. Ivanič *et al* (2009:19) maintain that “[i]t is therefore the responsibility of all educators to consider the communicative aspects of pedagogic practices”. The counter-arguments to integration of academic literacy into the curriculum is that if one only integrates academic literacy into the mainstream curriculum, the following are real threats, as I have heard in my work in two higher education institutions, and in participation in several review processes:

- “They” (the academics in faculties) don’t know how to do it or don’t understand language.
- “They” refuse to do it or don’t want to understand language.
- The responsibility to attend to this will die away over time.

We should not create too absolute a division between the general concept of pedagogy and that of language and academic literacy. In many universities there is a clear separation between the roles of professional development practitioners and academic literacy experts. The latter group often start working directly with students, and as they start realising that their work would have more impact on a greater scale if they worked directly with lecturers or with policy and the curriculum, they end up working in parallel, but rarely in collaboration, with professional development practitioners. Elton (2010) and Jacobs (2005) argue for partnerships between disciplinary experts and language experts, which in the South African context Jacobs describes as having ‘transformational’ potential. The disciplinary expert brings that knowledge of the discipline to the partnership, while the academic literacy expert brings experience with teaching and learning, and of students grappling with meaning, into the debates (Lillis & Scott 2008). This may be so, but a more holistic strategy for curriculum change would be partnerships between disciplinary experts, language practitioners and academic development practitioners (Jacobs 2007).

One of the strategies advocated in the literature for advancing academic literacy is that the rules of the discourse be made explicit (Bouhey 2002). This does not necessarily imply making the conventions explicit for the students, although at certain points it might be, as Elton (2010) suggests. In more general terms, Turner (2011) calls for ‘linguaging’ which she sees as agentic, involving both acquisition and a critical approach. She writes that lecturers need to become culturally reflexive. Surely one does not need to become a language specialist to do this?

I have been making a strong argument for the location of responsibility for language and academic literacy across the lecturing cohort and across the curriculum. However, I am aware that this should be informed by the delicate balance within curriculum design, of focusing on the needs of students on the one hand, and on staff capacity and timetabling considerations, on the other. If student concerns were the only factor, one would plan the language and academic literacy strength of modules according to what the student would need to acquire, and at what point in the curriculum this

**PART TWO • CHALLENGES IN RECONCEPTUALISING UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION**

would be required. However, the dominant discourse in most institutions remains that language and academic literacy is not the responsibility of all teachers, and many academics would feel unconfident of taking on this responsibility. Thus, a short-term view might well require curriculum planning to take into account where the desire and expertise to facilitate academic literacy lies currently in an institution, while planning for a longer-term and more situated approach.

Up till now I have been arguing for an approach that seeks to acculturate students as seamlessly as possible into the language and academic literacy practices of an institution and a discipline. One might well turn this position on its head and ask, is this indeed transformative, and why is the emphasis not on reorienting the institution itself to the needs of diverse student and even staff populations? Is there no role for re-evaluating the academic standards themselves, and for reorienting the curriculum? This challenge was issued in South Africa as long ago as 1995 by Ndebele, and is posed internationally by writers such as Lillis and Turner (2001). Thus partnerships involving language and disciplinary experts are not innately transformational, it depends on the degree of cultural reflexivity and desire for change amongst educators, a point Michael Joseph made in 2011 at a conference on content and language-integrated learning.

This brings me to a point about content knowledge versus process: if we argue that graduate attributes are not only about what a student acquires, but also about how they acquire these attribute and about what they come to be, can we not extend this proposition to academics and curriculum planners: expertise is not purely about the knowledge that educators have, but the processes they undergo to extend and learn to share this knowledge with students, and what they have come to be? In this sense, graduate attributes as a concept can be extended to educators, as 'educator attributes'. This is especially the case if we adopt a broader understanding of academic literacy as acquired gradually, and as influenced by context, biography and practice. In this view, fostering academic literacy is neither the sole responsibility of the academic literacy or language expert, nor of the school teacher, nor of the lecturer of first-year students, nor of the academic seeking to enhance his or her own academic literacy. Rather, in common language, 'we are all in this together'.

This discussion on academic literacy also raises broad questions for discussion with regard to graduate attributes. It cautions curriculum planners, teachers and researchers to be wary of assuming that these attributes can be fostered independently from the disciplines and, equally importantly, independently from influences such as institutional or social context.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH**

A socially situated view of academic literacy would encourage research into the role of academic literacy and into its facilitation across the curriculum, as well as into stand-alone courses. It would also encourage partnerships between literacy experts, disciplinary experts and experts in higher education teaching and learning. As was

suggested in the previous section, such partnerships should begin with an open-minded, reflexive and critical habit of mind. Once again, if we wish to advocate graduate attributes of criticality, creativity, or problem-solving, our research approaches to facilitate this should bear traces of these attributes.

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**PART TWO • CHALLENGES IN RECONCEPTUALISING UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION**

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