Scaffolded Practice Assignment Writing to Support Emergent Disciplinary Literacies

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Abstract

Where academic literacies are understood as situated social practices, effective academic literacy support needs to reflect the disciplinary and institutional specificity of the practices. However, the institutional separation of academic literacy teaching from disciplinary subject teaching, typical of UK universities, creates significant obstacles to the enactment of these principles. One response to this separation suggests academic literacy support in the form of embedded collaborations between EAP practitioners and disciplinary lecturers. This paper reports on two complementary pieces of research investigating one such embedded academic literacy intervention, that of a collaboration between EAP practitioners and TESOL lecturers scaffolding the writing of a practice assignment. The findings for the two studies strongly suggest that the academic literacy intervention facilitated student academic literacy development. The intervention model could also be seen to draw effectively on the respective areas of expertise of disciplinary lecturers and EAP practitioners with positive consequences for the learners and for the disciplinary lecturers and EAP practitioners themselves.

Keywords: *Academic literacy, academic writing, EAP, In-sessional provision*

Academic literacies have been widely constructed as situated, multi-modal communicative practices (Hyland, 2015; Lea & Jones, 2011; Lea & Street, 1998, 2006; Lillis, Harrington, Lea, & Mitchell, 2015) bound up with membership of academic communities differentiated by discipline, institution, and level of legitimate participation (Swales, 1990, 2004; Wenger, 1998). Constructing an academic literacy means learning how to construct, transform and share knowledge as a member of a particular disciplinary and institutional community. It is about

becoming an 'insider'. This means that adequate academic literacy support must be correspondingly specialised, a fact long acknowledged in the English for Specific Purposes literature (see, for example, Hyland, 2002).

There are, however, a number of obstacles to the provision of genuinely situated, specialised literacy support in UK universities. The most significant of these is the widespread institutional separation of disciplinary teaching from academic literacy teaching (Turner, 2011). Within this system, disciplinary teaching is conducted by academics working within disciplinary departments whilst the academic literacy is taught by English for Academic Purposes (EAP) practitioners working within language centres, writing centres or study skills units. This separation has a number of unfortunate consequences. The first is that those staff who are, in principle, best placed to support students in constructing disciplinary literacies, the disciplinary lecturers, generally lack both workload allocations and curricular time to invest in systematic literacy support for their students. Although there have been literacy interventions in the UK stimulated by Writing in the Disciplines (Bazerman et al., 2005), in which disciplinary academics have expanded their curricula to include systematic literacy instruction within their modular teaching (see, for example, Mitchell & Evison, 2006), these remain the exception.

The second consequence is that those staff who are tasked with literacy development work, such as EAP practitioners working in language centres, are by definition 'outsiders' vis-à-vis the communities their students are hoping to enter or might already have entered. There are both disciplinary and institutional dimensions to this exclusion. With regard to the former, a TESOL-trained EAP practitioner trying to support postgraduate chemical engineering students, for example, will most likely lack not only a deep understanding of relevant disciplinary concepts but also insight into how knowledge is constructed and communicated within the disciplinary community. This exclusion has been widely noted (e.g. Spack, 1988; Bond, 2020) and might be considered a defining feature of ESP practice in UK universities (Green, 2020). However, this is not the only problem. Institutional separation remains a problem even where literacy specialists and their students share common ground. An example of this would be a TESOL-trained EAP practitioner supporting students going on to study, or already studying on, a TESOL programme, as in the case reported in this paper. We would claim that simply by being situated outside a particular community of practice, abstracted from its teaching and learning processes, EAP practitioners lack awareness of the specific literacy practices that most concern insiders within the specific community of practice.

Green (2016) proposes an approach to literacy support which attempts to overcome these difficulties by bringing together disciplinary and literacy specialists to collaborate on literacy interventions embedded within specific institutional communities of practice, such as a school or department. Typically, this would be achieved through the introduction of a specific literacy challenge, such as an assignment, which would be designed and assessed by disciplinary lecturers but scaffolded by EAP practitioners. There are few research-based reports of this specific kind of collaborative intervention in the literature and fewer still which seek to bring together the perspectives of both the EAP practitioners scaffolding the execution of the disciplinary assignment, and the disciplinary lecturers responding to the finished work and charting the literacy gains of the participants. This paper attempts to address this lacuna by bringing together two complementary investigations of the same academic literacy intervention. The first of these is a cross-sectional study carried out by one of the EAP practitioners responsible for delivering the taught component of the academic literacy intervention. This

research draws on interview data and practitioner-researcher reflections relating to the broad student cohort. The second is a longitudinal study of two participants in the intervention undertaken by one of the disciplinary lecturers. It explores the students' experiences of the intervention and its impact on their subsequent writing,

The Academic Literacy Intervention

The academic literacy intervention consisted of a disciplinary practice assignment with an integrated EAP programme developing learners' academic literacy practices within the context of this writing task. The course literature provided to these MA TESOL students described the purpose of the practice assignment as being 'to help [the department] share expectations of appropriate style and content of assignment writing for a master's course'. However, the aims were more complex than this suggests. Writing expertise was conceived as being bound up with the development of a situated concept of quality, the ability to apply that sense of quality to specific instances of writing, and with the development of a repertoire of reflective writing strategies (Sadler, 2013). The broad aim was therefore to scaffold the emergence of disciplinary academic writing expertise. There was also a more specific concern, based on experience of the challenges the department's previous students had encountered, with the construction of adversarial arguments and the articulation of individual viewpoints. As Tang (2009) argues, effective academic writing requires the projection of authority and the articulation of an authorial viewpoint situated within, engaged with and responsive to a conversation. Historically, the department had noted a tendency for students to articulate an individual viewpoint without attention to the literature or (more commonly) to offer a survey of views from the literature but with no directing, authorial perspective. To address these issues, the assignment was constructed with the requirement that students develop a position in relation to two opposed viewpoints.

The disciplinary lecturers launched the assignment at the beginning of the first semester to a cohort of MA students. These were principally international students for whom English was not a first language. The assignment task required the students to produce an assignment on a contemporary controversy within the disciplinary field based on specified journal article reading. Students were required to adopt a stance on the subject matter and refer to the listed reading and two self-identified additional sources in a written assignment of approximately 1,500 words. Disciplinary lecturers provided comprehensive formative feedback and an illustrative grade once the work had been submitted.

The EAP programme was designed to scaffold the writing of this discipline-specific assignment. Following the launch of the practice assignment by the disciplinary lecturers, the EAP practitioners conducted weekly 2-hour teaching sessions with the students over a period of 8 weeks. Adopting a process approach to the development of the students' practice assignments, the EAP programme aimed to increase students' understanding of the disciplinary literacy and develop their skill in applying this understanding at appropriate stages in the process of writing their practice assignments. The EAP programme began, therefore, with a broad exploration of what constitutes academic literacy in the discipline through an analysis of the practice assignment question and the assigned texts. The programme then worked towards enhancing students' awareness of text genre features and developing their skill in reproducing these practices in discrete exercises. Following this, students were encouraged to transfer these skills to their own practice assignments. Students received EAP practitioner feedback on drafts of their work mid-way through the programme. This feedback focused principally on students'

use of academic sources together with the development of argumentation and authorial voice. The department's written assessment criteria were highlighted throughout the programme, however, and additional quality measures such as the presentation of the academic writing were therefore also addressed.

The high student participation in this optional practice assignment and in the integrated academic literacy sessions was attributed to the fact that this activity was embedded within the students' parent department. Moreover, not only did the academic literacy sessions appear on students' timetables but the assignment and integrated sessions were actively promoted by the academic staff directing and teaching on the students' MA programmes. Following submission of the completed practice assignment to the disciplinary lecturers, the students received comprehensive written feedback aligned to the department's written assessment criteria. The knowledge that they would receive such feedback appeared to also contribute significantly to the high student engagement with the assignment and the academic literacy programme. Following this feedback stage, the academic literacy programme then continued to develop predetermined academic writing micro-skills (such as integration of academic sources) whilst also responding to the specific academic writing issues highlighted in the disciplinary lecturers' written feedback for individual students. A detailed account of the content of the academic literacy programme is included as an appendix.

Methodology

The paper brings together two separate studies of an academic literacy intervention which was introduced for postgraduate TESOL students at a university in the UK. The first of these is a cross-sectional piece of research conducted by Webster, the academic literacy specialist. The second is a longitudinal study carried out by Green, the disciplinary specialist.

The Cross-sectional Study

This case study research incorporates primary data from the major stakeholders in the academic literacy intervention (EAP practitioners, disciplinary lecturers and students) in order to identify its perceived effectiveness. The research question was as follows: *To what extent and in what ways was the intervention perceived as facilitating students' academic literacy development?*

A qualitative case study approach was adopted for the research (Yin, 2003) as this enables more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, which in turn can 'capture its dynamic, complex and multi-faceted nature' (Wyness, 2010, p. 161). Case study research also allows for multiple data sets to be collected, as in the case here, adding 'thickness' (Geertz, 1973) to the data. In this research, the research instruments adopted were the following:

a) Individual semi-structured interviews with two disciplinary lecturers (DL1 and DL2)

b) A semi-structured interview with one of the EAP practitioners (EP1)

c) A reflective account by the researcher-EAP practitioner (EP2)

d) Two semi-structured focus group interviews, each with eight students (FG1:S1-S8 and FG2:S1-8)

The data-generation for the interviews with individual participants took place immediately after the EAP programme ended. It consisted of interviews of approximately one hour's duration, which were then coded by the researcher and a section independently coded by the second author as a reliability measure. There was a high degree of similarity in the results of this coding process. The focus group interviews similarly took place when the EAP programme ended and they were composed of self-selecting students who responded to a call for participants. These were one-hour sessions with the researcher as facilitator. In addition, the reflective account, also listed above, was generated by the researcher-EAP practitioner at the conclusion of the intervention, providing subjective insights into the effectiveness of the intervention. University ethical protocols were strictly followed, including the obtaining of informed consent from all participants and the introduction of measures to safeguard the data generated and protect the participants' identities.

The Longitudinal Study

The aim of the study was to gain insights into the process of academic writing development in a disciplinary, postgraduate context by eliciting first-person perspectives from a sample of student writers over the course of the first half of an academic year. This paper uses a sub-set of the data collected to report the impact of the academic literacy intervention on two of the eight research participants. The decision to focus on these two cases reflects our concern to provide substantial detail of a narrative which unfolds over several months. By focusing on this limited number of cases, it is intended that the reader will be able to become more familiar with them and consequently be able to arrive at his or her own judgements regarding the conclusions arrived at. The chosen cases contain particularly rich data for the period covered by the longitudinal study and provide some of the clearest insights into the developmental process.

The study addressed the following question: *To what extent and in what ways did the academic literacy intervention facilitate the participants' academic literacy development?*

As with the cross-sectional study, a qualitative case-study approach was adopted (Yin, 2003). Data for the students were gathered chiefly through semi-structured interviews (Drever, 2003), some of which were text-based, and triangulated with textual data, chiefly the participants' drafts, finished assignments and marker feedback. The first interview (I1) was conducted during the first week of the programme and elicited background information, academic literacy histories and expectations of academic writing on the programme. The subsequent six interviews (I2-7) were carried out during and after the writing of a practice assignment (the focus of the academic literacy intervention), and during and after the first two assessed assignments on an MA module spanning the entire first semester of the programme. Interviews I2, I4 and I6 elicited the students' perspectives while immersed in the process of writing and grappling with the cognitive-rhetorical problems posed by the three assignments. In contrast, I3, I5 and I7 were carried out after the students had received their assessment feedback and marks and the interviews focussed on the students' retrospections and their interpretations of the feedback they had received. Each interview lasted between 20 and 30 minutes and was audio-recorded and transcribed. Analysis of the transcripts was carried out using standard qualitative analysis techniques of thematic coding (Creswell, 2005; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). A sample of one case was independently coded by the other researcher, using the coding categories. From these analyses integrated literacy stories were written charting the participants' development from the start of the programme and the academic writing

intervention to the writing of their second assessed assignment. These narratives were sent to the participants for comment and their accuracy confirmed.

Eight UK and international students on an MA TESOL programme participated in the study. The sample was self-selected in response to an invitation which was communicated to all the students on the programme. Of the two participants reported here, 'Lovely' (self-selected pseudonym), was an Indonesian woman in her 30s at the time of the research with a BA in English Language Education. Also featuring in Green (2019), she had entered the university with CEFR C1 in English. The other, 'Alisha', was a British woman in her 40s at the time of the research with a first degree in psychology and a PGCE, which she had completed in the UK in the 1980s. She had taught in primary schools since that time, albeit with a small number of breaks.

Findings

The findings for the two studies are presented here, beginning with those for the cross-sectional study. For this first piece of research, data for disciplinary lecturers are indicated as DL (1-2), those for EAP practitioners are indicated as EP (1-2) and data for students are indicated by the focus group (FG1-2) and individual student (S1-8).

The Cross-sectional Study

The design of the academic literacy intervention. As one of the disciplinary lecturers explained, the practice assignment task was designed to replicate the academic writing demands of the master's programme:

> *The fact is that it is an assignment set by the TESOL team that clearly focuses on the kinds of literacy practices which we need our students to display and the kinds of practices that they find difficult like synthesizing opposing views and orchestrating different voices. (DL2)*

Indeed, the researcher's reflective account had similarly identified the careful consideration by the disciplinary lecturers of the skilled academic literacy practices that the students were expected to demonstrate in the practice assignment:

> *I can see all the thinking that's gone on behind that choice as it involves the students in discursive essay writing, taking a position and using not just textual support but their own experience as teachers or learners, which is quite common in that discipline. (EP1)*

The EAP programme, as explained in the previous section, was designed to develop students' academic literacy skills in the context of this practice assignment. The overall literacy intervention design was well-received with several students commenting very favourably on the discipline-specific practice assignment as a vehicle for the development of their academic writing.

> *The assignment is genius as we have to learn about an issue in our subject and then we can see how it's argued by academics and develop our own skills in making a case with good academic writing. (FG1:S3)*

The core texts assigned to the practice assignment were chosen as they were deemed to strongly reflect genre characteristics of the discipline whilst also introducing opposing viewpoints to highlight the active debates within this discipline (DL1). The EAP programme was able to

exploit features of these representative texts for pedagogic purposes as the interviewed EAP practitioner states.

> *The texts were exactly the kind of thing that they will have to read on their master's programmes and they provide good examples that we can focus on of the ways in which ideas are put forward and supported through reasoning, personal experience and other literature. (EP2)*

Analysis of the practice assignment task and texts facilitated a deeper understanding by EAP practitioners of the academic literacies of the discipline as the researcher also noted:

> *Even though I was very familiar with the kind of writing done in the department and have even taught there myself, I found that the task had a real clarity to it. The staff had obviously given it some real thought and had taken on some of the big questions. (EP1)*

The embeddedness of the academic literacy intervention. The EAP programme's integration within the practice assignment (itself embedded within the disciplinary programme) appeared to lend it credibility with the students. Several of them noted that they perceived the literacy intervention an integral part of their main academic programme since 'it appears on the online timetable, so I thought it was a normal programme' (FG1:S3). The direct involvement of the disciplinary lecturers in the practice assignment and their active promotion of the EAP programme provided a strong positive message regarding the value of such an intervention.

> *My [disciplinary] lecturer introduced it and I'm sure the experience from last year's students and the assignments they produced is that we need this kind of literacy development for our master's. (FG2:S3)*

Student recognition of the alignment between the EAP programme aims and the academic literacy requirements of the MA programme also contributed to the positive student evaluation of its impact.

> *I realised once I was working on my assignments and talking to my tutor that it was the same message they were giving us about academic writing. It really helps us to develop the skills we need. (FG2:S6)*

The EAP practitioners also felt that the EAP programme was an integral part of the literacy intervention and that their contribution had a significant effect on the students' academic literacy:

> *To me, it felt very embedded. It felt as if there was a great synergy between the programme and what the students needed for their master's programme [...] I felt I was a key part of the practice assignment and making a real contribution to the students' early development on that programme. (EP2)*

Indeed, the intervention appeared to allow for EAP practitioners and disciplinary lecturers to adopt clear, efficient and complementary roles in developing the students' academic literacy as one of the disciplinary lecturers noted:

> *It's an excellent collaboration [...] there is a disciplinary collaboration with a task set and marked by disciplinary staff but supported by language centre staff. That seems to me to be a logical answer. (DL2)*

The findings indicated that the students were highly motivated by the fact that the practice assignment (with its associated readings) was determined by their disciplinary lecturers and that '[the lecturers] have designed it to fit in with our programme and what we need to be focusing on in semester one' (FG1: S6). Indeed, the students referred both to the specific academic literacies that they had developed as result of the academic literacy intervention and the corresponding confidence that they had gained as a result of a positive initial writing experience. The metaphor of 'scaffolding' used by one of the students captures the overall student perception of the EAP programme:

> *I learnt a lot about academic writing for my master's on the [EAP] programme. It felt like a scaffolding for the assignment and helped us to have a positive early experience on the MA programme before we started submitting other work. (FG1:S1)*

Embedded within an intensive postgraduate programme, the academic literacy intervention was viewed by one of the disciplinary lecturers as mapping well to the demands of the disciplinary programme:

> *For all programmes unless you schedule your assignments deliberately to have a mid-point submission date, or whatever, in the middle of the semester, they are not writing. They are just doing lots of reading, listening and talking. The practice assignment forces them to do some writing at that point and to get that practice. That's why it's a good time also for the [EAP] programme to run. (DL1)*

Within the academic literacy intervention, the practice assignment provided the opportunity for contextualised skills development to motivated students. The EAP practitioners appreciated this opportunity to both enjoy the credibility of the wider literacy intervention and to be able to develop students' academic literacy within a contextualised framework. As one of them states:

> *It gave us credibility that we're working on an assignment developed and launched by the [academic department] and meant that we could very naturally develop students' writing skills by taking them through the stages of writing this essay that students were very motivated to work on rather than creating a separate writing task ourselves. (EP2)*

Although two students commented on the fact that the literacy intervention was extra-curricular and therefore involved a significant amount of additional work for them, there was an overall recognition of its value and the transferability of skills developed to other assignments:

> *Although the practice assignment is just a practice, we were able to transfer what we learnt to the other assignments, so it was a good use of our time and we could learn from our mistakes the first time without getting bad marks. (FG2:S4)*

Disciplinary lecturers also identified deeper student understanding of approaches to assignment writing as a result of the EAP programme within the literacy intervention:

> *I must also say that I have noticed this year more awareness on the students' part. When we talk about the assignments, they relate it to the course more and say, 'Oh, yes, it's like that session on the course that we did with [teacher].' There seems to be close linkage with other assignments. (DL1)*

Practice assignment feedback. The feedback provided by the disciplinary lecturers on the practice assignment was useful both to the students and the EAP practitioners. For the students, it provided a realistic assessment of their performance against the department's written assessment marking criteria. Even where students were disappointed with the results, they still took comfort from the fact that 'it's better to make […] mistakes beforehand' (FG2:S7) and that they 'wouldn't have known how much [they] had to develop' (FG1:S2) without this feedback. Several students also noted that regardless of the indicative marks they received, they were aware that they had developed an understanding of, and skill in applying, the necessary academic literacy as the student below explains:

> *I didn't do so well… not as well as I'd expected. But I know that I learnt a lot about writing during the course and the essay was much better than it would have been because I improved a lot during that time, I guess I thought I was doing really well but there were extra things I still had to learn. (FG1:S8)*

As the EAP practitioners received copies of students' individual assignment feedback, this also allowed them to obtain a deeper awareness of the disciplinary lecturers' assessments of student academic writing and, in the process, of the disciplinary lecturers' understanding of their own disciplinary academic literacy:

> *It was really helpful to see the feedback from the [disciplinary lecturers]. It gave me a clear idea of how those students had performed and where their strengths and weaknesses lay after we'd been working with them all that time […] And you get to really tune in to the feedback by the MA lecturers and the areas they focus on as being significant for academic writing in that discipline. (EP2)*

Students not only received detailed feedback from the disciplinary lecturers, but they also had the opportunity to discuss this feedback in depth with the EAP practitioners. This enabled both a deeper understanding of how to interpret the feedback comments and subsequent individual practice in developing these skills as one student observed:

> *The MA tutor wrote that I was overgeneralising in three places but the assignment looked good to me. So, it was useful that we discussed this and other comments in groups and with [the EAP practitioner] so I could make them acceptable to the reader. (FG2:S5)*

Academic literacy skills highlighted in the disciplinary lecturers' feedback were introduced or consolidated in subsequent EAP sessions. Students were motivated by this EAP programme responsiveness to disciplinary lecturer feedback:

> *When I got the assignment feedback, I could see better why we studied those academic language things in the [EAP] classes. So, I paid more attention afterwards when we studied more of these areas after the practice assignment. Talking in the groups and from my own [practice assignment] feedback I could see we needed it. (FG2:8)*

The findings for the cross-sectional study presented in this section are now followed by the findings for the second (longitudinal) piece of research.

The longitudinal study

Starting points. Alisha's first degree and PGCE had included writing essays involving reading, synthesising reading, and argument. However, in an interview prior to the start of the MA and the literacy intervention, she stated that she felt apprehensive about the kinds of writing she would do on her MA. This was partly because of negative experiences at school but also because she was aware that she would need to meet higher standards than in her undergraduate studies. In addition, she was conscious of the long time she had spent outside higher education. She felt that in her undergraduate studies markers had mainly wanted to see accurate summaries to demonstrate understanding whereas on her MA programme the tutors would expect to see that her writing showed her ideas, voice and perspective.

Lovely's tertiary education had been through the medium of English and had involved extensive reading. Writing, however, had rarely been required in her coursework. Despite this lack of focus on writing for much of her studies, Lovely had completed a substantial (150-page long) dissertation, which included an element of empirical research. Thus, Lovely was not embarking on the MA wholly without experience of research-based writing and reading. She had reasonably clear expectations of what lecturers would want to see in terms of critical thinking, relating theory to her own thinking, essay structure and good grammar.

Learning from the intervention: Alisha. Alisha herself felt that the intervention overall had had a significant impact on her academic writing: 'I think it was really good that we did the practice assignment. I learned a lot from going through that whole process' (Alisha: I4). It appears to have helped her develop understandings of the nature of academic argument and the process of developing an argument in the context of a specific assignment.

With regard to both her sense of argument as articulating an authorial point of view drawing on and deploying other writers' views, and the process of constructing an argument through writing, Alisha repeatedly used a metaphor from cloth-work. At the very start of the intervention, she had a tutorial with her disciplinary tutor to brief her on the practice assignment. Commenting on this, she said the following:

> *What came out of it was the need to find my voice, my opinion, my ideas…*
> *looking at what other writers say and what I think about them reading broadly*
> *and then coming up with what I think. I came away with a picture of how this*
> *had to be, and it was like almost like a spine and you had to have things like*
> *your experience, so you had your main view, or your point, and you weave in…*
> *that was a key word, weaving in. (Alisha: I1)*

She used the same metaphor later, during the writing of the practice assignment to capture both the difficulty she was experiencing in shaping her argument, and the need to work recursively in order to do so:

> *Just redrafting, redrafting, and I go back to it and think, 'Am I being*
> *hypocritical in what I'm saying? Have I put it in right? Am I seeing the*
> *argument of what he's saying?' and at the same time weaving my own*
> *experience into it. That whole kind of tapestry has got lots of faults in it and*
> *I've had to unstitch, if you want to use that analogy, and then re-stitch, and then*
> *you kind of go back to 'originally I was trying to say this, why did I change it?'*
> *and so constantly kind of going back and forth. (Alisha: I2)*

This challenging recursive process also made her aware of the need to keep track of her sources to avoid plagiarism:

> *You know, you do all the reading and you know, you've read over a few weeks, and then you're kind of forming your ideas, and then you're thinking, 'But whose words am I using?' and, you know, 'Am I actually using their words? So you kind of have to check yourself again, like when you write something down and you think, 'Is that an idea that I got from the reading or is that an idea that formulated as a result of the reading?' You know, you have to kind of double check yourself. (Alisha: I2)*

While writing her practice assignment, Alisha was attending the taught component of the academic literacy intervention, which she found useful in several ways, particularly the opportunities it afforded to discuss the assignment:

> *Just verbalising the issues and hearing others … In one class we had to bring out the main point of an article we'd read, and hearing what other people had done in that was helpful […] and the first lesson was on working out what the assignment was asking us to do, and that was very helpful. (Alisha: I2)*

It also taught her about the mechanics of using sources and academic register:

> *Oh, it's given me some tools like, for example, we were taught how to do referencing, how to use some words, how to… you know, different sentence beginnings for different... how to start different paragraphs. (Alisha: I2)*

Alisha's assignment was given a high pass mark of 59/60 and the feedback commented favourably on her understanding of 'the nuances of the various arguments, which you summarise well and engage with by presenting your own ideas too' (Alisha: PA feedback). However, the feedback also appeared to reflect the difficulties in 'weaving' that Alisha had mentioned in the interview since it noted a lack of coherence:

> *I'm not certain that your argument is coherent: your conclusions appear to be going against at least some of what you are arguing earlier. (Alisha: PA feedback)*

The marker also commented on the level of organisation at both text and paragraph level. Two specific suggestions were made which were to have a significant impact on Alisha's writing: 'At the level of the paragraph, it would be useful for you, I think, to stick to the rule of one idea per paragraph' and 'Topic sentences might help' (Alisha: PA feedback). In an interview to review this assignment feedback Alisha highlighted these as key messages:

> *The criticism that sticks out is the paragraphs and the sentences, so obviously I need to make sure that I'm not too long-winded, that I get my point across succinctly and clearly, and do the critique of the… saying what is good and not just what's bad about something and look at how I present my arguments and develop them. (Alisha: I3)*

Speaking later, during the writing of her first assessed assignment, Alisha again referred to this comment and its impact on her writing:

> *I feel like I've taken the feedback from the practice assignment and tried to implement it in this assignment. For example, in the paragraphs, topic*

sentences changed everything for me. Topic sentences just helped me to think about the paragraph and helped focus my writing of the paragraph by just that one phrase: 'topic sentence'. (Alisha: I4)

Learning from the intervention: Lovely. Lovely also felt that the intervention had had a positive impact on her writing. She viewed it within a developmental continuum of practical experiences:

I can say it's one of my writing practices because I rarely actually write something all during my undergraduate years, and then in my home country as well, so it gives me ideas how to write more... I will not say more fluently but it's... after I did my practice assignment and then I moved to the part one assignment, and then moved again to the part two assignment, I found that I write faster. I mean, I write faster like I also read faster and then get some ideas. I mean it just helps in that way. And then at the time I got the feedback, it makes me more careful to what I have written or how I'm writing. (Lovely: I6)

As in the case of Alisha, Lovely found the writing of the assignment very challenging, particularly the shaping of an argument:

I have a lot of ideas about what I want to say in my mind but when I first try to write something, it's quite difficult to find the suitable statement or suitable notion... what I want to say first, and then what's coming after that. It's quite difficult to do. It's like organising ideas is quite difficult for me. (Lovely: I2)

In fact, Lovely's assignment received a clear fail mark of 45. This was in large part because of these organisational difficulties, and the marker feedback indicated a range of problems related to understanding of concepts, organisation, use of sources and unclear language. A significant finding was that Lovely's understanding of the comments directed at the deeper levels of her writing, such as the quality of her analysis, was partial at best. However, she did appear to comprehend some of the comments directed at surface features, such as word choice, and this understanding did have a significant impact on her approach to word-choice in subsequent writing. (See Green 2019 for a more detailed account of the student response to this feedback.)

During the writing of her practice assignment, Lovely had identified the selection of 'academic' vocabulary as one of the problems she faced: 'because I usually find the easy or the low level of vocabulary, I think it's not really academic' (Lovely: I2). She indicated that in order to identify register-appropriate terms to use, she was trying to focus on new words that she could incorporate into her writing:

The first time I read an article, first I just like to know the ideas, and the second one too. Then, the third time I also look for the language that they used so maybe I can also try to get used to using those words in my essay. (Lovely: I2)

However, the consequence of this was that she tried to introduce words for which she was not certain of their meanings or their use. This resulted in instances of the comprehension difficulties which the marker pointed out. Because of this feedback, Lovely abandoned this strategy in her subsequent work as she explained with reference to the writing of her first assessed assignment:

I really careful again to use the words. If I don't really sure about the meaning so I don't use it. Because last time I usually like… I have read articles and then

> *I find the interesting words and then I try to look up in the dictionary the meaning, and then I try to use it in my essay. I found it's not really appropriate to use in that context, that's why it's become unclear. In my practise assignment and then now I just like to use… that I'm sure that the meaning would be fit in that context. (Lovely: I4)*

During the writing of her first assignment, she indicated that she was still finding the shaping of argument difficult:

> *It's like about organising my ideas and put them together in one paper. It's kind of difficult. Sometimes I have already… I think I have already put all of things and then I put some experts' ideas to support mine but when I read it again it's kind of like… it's not relevant again to the topic and I have to choose again, I have to rewrite again, and then in other case it's like I want to… What comes first and then what come second, and then what come the following after that? (Lovely: I4)*

However, she was aware that this was a problem she had to solve through careful planning and iterative drafting:

> *I more careful, I'm more careful with this one… I am really careful to just, as well, to put them in my first one, or put at the end or put in the middle. It's like I'm really careful on that. Because like in practice assignment I just put them together and then I just wait feedback. […] I have to really careful to take some ideas and also to put my ideas as well because I'm afraid it will be seen as inconsistent. (Lovely: I4)*

This concern had also affected the way she was approaching her sources:

> *Ah, the way I read… I mean, take ideas from someone's... I should be really sure of myself that 'OK, this is the right meaning' from his or her ideas because I'm afraid I will misinterpret what she or he means. (Lovely: I4)*

It is difficult to attribute particular academic writing developments of Lovely's to specific experiences or indeed to disentangle with certainty the impact of the intervention from other factors in the wider 'enabling context'. However, what can be noted is that both Lovely and Alisha felt strongly that the intervention had had a positive impact on their understandings of academic writing and both subsequently passed their first assessed assignments. Alisha achieved a low merit mark (of 63) and the marker commented favourably on the areas of organisation that had previously marred her practice assignment:

> *There is a clear and coherent discussion. You have critically evaluated different points of view and included insightful use of experience and personal ideas. There is some synthesis and reflective appraisal of implications […] Your assignment has a clear structure and the development of the argument is sufficiently sustained though there are still specific gaps and inconsistencies. (Alisha: Ass. 1 feedback)*

Lovely also achieved a low merit mark (of 61) and her feedback suggests improvement in many areas.

There is a clear understanding of the main ideas linked with your own views and experience. There is some synthesis and reflective appraisal of implications [...] Your assignment has a clear structure and the development of the argument is sufficiently sustained but there are still specific gaps and inconsistencies [...] You have observed most of the presentation conventions. There are some language errors but these do not affect comprehensibility. (Lovely: Ass. 1 feedback)

In Alisha's case, there are a number of outcomes which can be assigned to particular experiences. The pre-assignment briefing she received from her disciplinary lecturer, for example, made her aware of the need to develop an argument in her writing. The experience of writing also taught her the value of managing the writing process as in the instance of her keeping track of sources. Furthermore, the feedback she received highlighted for her the importance of paragraph structure. This relatively clear causation contrasts with the data for Lovely, where the causes of change are more difficult to establish. We can reasonably attribute her decision to restrict her word-choice to the feedback she received. As has been explained, she decided to only use language which she felt confident with. However, further impact of the feedback was restricted by her limited understanding of elements of the feedback. Despite this, there are clues to the way in which Lovely benefitted from the practice assignment in the way in which she frames it within a sequence of practical experiences. She states that her undergraduate writing, the practice assignment and her first assessed assignment cumulatively had an impact on her ability to write. It may, therefore, be that she had learned about the standards she was required to meet not so much from marker feedback or briefings but from the practical experience of overcoming the challenges she encountered in her writing. In spite of the difficulties in ascribing increased understandings of standards to any specific learning experience, however, the two stories do suggest that the intervention overall had positive impacts on the writing abilities of the two students.

Discussion

The reader is reminded that this research investigates an academic literacy intervention designed to overcome the limitations of earlier embedded initiatives (see Green, 2016). The paper takes as a starting point the discipline-specific nature of academic literacies (Nesi & Gardener, 2012; Wingate, 2018) and the desirability of creating academic writing tasks similar to those required on degree programmes (Tang, 2009). The scaffolded practice writing assignment, housed within the disciplinary department, aimed to provide a context in which academic literacy development could take place with discipline-specificity and task authenticity. It was designed as a collaboration between disciplinary lecturers and EAP practitioners in which the expertise of each would complement the other as an effective academic literacy development initiative.

Overall, the data indicate that the academic literacy intervention had a significant and positive impact on students' disciplinary literacies. This development can be seen most clearly in the two longitudinal case studies. Both students had initially experienced a high degree of anxiety. For Alisha, a home student, this arose from the transition to writing for postgraduate study, whilst for Lovely, the anxiety stemmed from her lack of substantial previous academic writing experience. In both instances, the practice assignment appears to have provided a low-risk environment in which the learners were able to engage in purposeful, reflective development of their writing skills through a process approach to writing (Brown, 2000). Similarly, there

was evidence in the two cases of increased understanding of academic literacy standards and of writing strategies that the learners were then able to employ in later disciplinary assignments. The benefits of the academic literacy intervention were evident, for example, in the significantly increased writing and reading speeds reported by Lovely as her writing experience grew. Alisha also identifies the improved crafting of text facilitated for her by the recursive drafting process within the intervention.

The academic literacy intervention appeared to make the 'paradigmatic heart' (Pilcher & Richards, 2016) of the disciplinary subject more explicit. The learners were able to develop their understandings of academic literacy practices from the disciplinary lecturers through the explanatory launch of the practice assignment, the construct of the assignment and the assignment feedback provided. The practice assignment, replicating as it does the requirements for formal submission, appears, therefore, to provide the opportunity for learners to both develop an understanding of writing systems and to proceduralise this genre knowledge (Tardy, 2006). Although the longitudinal research has limited data on the specific impact of the integrated EAP programme in this process, the findings do show that Alisha is able to identify specific academic writing micro-skills which she developed in these taught sessions. Furthermore, the cross-sectional research indicates that the integrated EAP programme which scaffolded the practice assignment writing process appeared to contribute to the academic literacy development for the student cohort overall.

Indeed, in the cross-sectional research, the majority of the participants reported the development of specific academic writing skills on the EAP programme. Furthermore, students also indicated that they regarded these skills as being transferable to other, summatively-assessed, assignments within the discipline. Whilst the value of practice assignments is well-established in the literature (see, for example, Lam, Cheng, & Yang, 2017), this research therefore highlights the potential for disciplinary-specific, purposeful EAP activities to be integrated into their pedagogic design. Students are not automatically sufficiently socialised through the enabling context without such explicit learning (see, for example, Freedman, 1993; Thesen & Van Pletzen, 2006) and this scaffolded model appears to provide a context with the necessary discipline-specificity (see Bruce, 2005; Murray, 2016) for students' academic writing to be actively developed.

Previous research has highlighted the significant role of EAP programme embeddedness and credibility in creating learner engagement and avoiding student attrition (Barron, 2003; Sloan & Porter, 2010; Sloan et al., 2013). The fact that the academic literacy intervention had disciplinary lecturer involvement and was aligned with the MA programme needs appeared to contribute significantly to the high student participation on the EAP programme. The EAP practitioners also identify benefits of the model in terms of it facilitating a deeper understanding on their part of the disciplinary academic literacy. Such a finding is particularly significant in light of difficulties which EAP practitioners in other contexts have reported in understanding disciplinary lecturers' literacy expectations (see, for example, Crawford & Candlin, 2013).

Noteworthy partnership benefits could also be seen to emerge from this collaboration between disciplinary lecturers and EAP practitioners. The question of how to complement the roles of disciplinary lecturer and EAP practitioner has long been of interest in the EAP literature (see, for example, Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002) and the findings here suggest that this academic literacy intervention is a viable way forward. Both stakeholder groups reported positively on the fact that the collaboration resulted in a 'constructive alignment' of expertise (Biggs, 2014)

with disciplinary lecturers and EAP practitioners developing students' subject knowledge and academic literacy respectively within the same disciplinary task. In addition, EAP practitioners regarded the model as providing them with contextual legitimacy from the perspective of the students and increased professional credibility as a result of their enriched understanding of the disciplinary academic literacy. As EAP practitioners have often been situated on the fringe of academia without the professional status of disciplinary lecturers (Ding & Bruce, 2017), such changes in professional identity are particularly significant.

Issues around collaboration are significant in the workability (and, ultimately, the longevity) of such an intervention. Resourcing issues are paramount for the success of academic initiatives in an increasingly marketised sector (Holmwood, 2017) and initiatives which have involved curricular expansion and/or significantly increased the workload of disciplinary lecturers on the academic programmes through team teaching (see, for example, Dudley-Evans & John, 1998) have often been short-lived. Whilst there are reports of EAP practitioners operating successfully within disciplines (e.g., Sloan & Porter, 2010; Thomas, 2013), these studies have not provided a specific operating model which brings together disciplinary lecturers and EAP practitioners' respective expertise effectively.

Conclusion

This paper has aimed to explore the impact of a scaffolded academic writing assignment on taught postgraduate students' academic literacy development. To achieve this, the study provides insights from the cross-sectional perspectives of the EAP practitioners, disciplinary lecturers and learners involved, and also draws on longitudinal case studies with detailed accounts of individual learners' academic literacy development in the early stages of their disciplinary programme. The limitations of the sample size for the data sets in both the cross-sectional and the longitudinal research are readily acknowledged, as is the fact that the data refer to a single instance of the programme in a specific institutional setting. The findings are therefore not presented as constituting a full account of the individual perspectives of all learners and teaching staff. Similarly, it is not being suggested that the findings are generalisable to other contexts. However, it is argued that the data do provide sufficient detail for the reader to make judgements about the validity of the intervention and the transferability of the findings to other academic contexts.

The findings suggest that the practice writing assignment provides an effective context for discipline-specific academic literacy to be developed. Learners were motivated to engage with an initiative afforded the credibility of being embedded within their disciplinary department and with disciplinary lecturer involvement. Learners were also able to develop knowledge and skills directly related to the discipline through the framing of the practice assignment and provision of feedback by disciplinary lecturers, together with an integrated EAP programme. Moreover, the respective expertise of the EAP practitioner and the disciplinary lecturer appear to be employed effectively in this model with the parties undertaking complementary roles in the development of learners' academic literacy. The scaffolded practice academic writing assignment therefore potentially offers a means to create the effective collaboration needed for successful embedded academic literacy provision.

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Appendix. An overview of the academic literacy development programme

Week	Activity
1	Disciplinary lecturers launch the practice assignment, providing a rationale for its inclusion in the disciplinary programme and unpacking the assignment question.
2	EAP lecturers develop students' awareness of argumentation, authorial voice and use of evidence in the stipulated assignment texts.
3	EAP lecturers develop students' awareness of text structuring in the stipulated assignment texts and in student academic writing.
	EAP lecturers develop students' awareness of and skill in producing written introductions and conclusions.
4	EAP lecturers provide feedback on assignment drafts which students have completed.
	EAP lecturers develop students' awareness of and skill in applying academic referencing conventions.
5	EAP lecturers develop students' awareness of and skill in summarising content and incorporating counter arguments.
	Students' assignments are submitted to the disciplinary lecturers.
	Disciplinary lecturers provide detailed feedback on the assignments to the students. The EAP lecturers receive a copy of this feedback.
6	EAP lecturers discuss personal assignment feedback with individual students and common themes in the feedback across the cohort are discussed in plenary.
	EAP lecturers develop students' awareness of and skill in writing effective paragraphs.
7	EAP lecturers develop students' awareness of and skills in writing in an appropriate academic style.
8	EAP lecturers further develop students' awareness of and skill in incorporating sources into their academic writing.
9	EAP lecturers develop students' awareness of and skill in producing coherence and cohesion in academic writing.