

Editorial

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This special issue of the *Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education (JLDHE)* marks two significant events: it is ten years since the establishment of our journal, an important landmark in the evolution of the field of learning development (LD), and twenty years since the publication of Mary Lea and Brian Street's highly influential paper that introduced the concept of 'academic literacies' to the field, changing it in a range of ways. The paper, entitled 'Student writing in higher education: an academic literacies approach' (1998) and published in the journal *Studies in Higher Education*, has acted as a catalyst, inspiring new theoretical, pedagogical and research initiatives in several countries. It also underpinned the development of a field of inquiry focussing on how language practices affect students' opportunities for learning and their participation in higher education.

In celebration of these two events, we are delighted to present this edition as a collaboration between colleagues in the Association for Learning Development in Higher Education (ALDinHE), BALEAP the global forum for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) professionals, and the European Association of Teachers of Academic Writing (EATAW). The origin of the collaboration was a meeting held at the 2017 ALDinHE conference. This led to a successful joint BALEAP/ALDinHE event held in Essex in 2018, following which a proposal was made to form a joint editorial board. A call for papers was issued in February 2019, which elicited over thirty proposals for this special edition.

Lea and Street's paper was based on findings from an ESRC-funded ethnographic study into the expectations and interpretations of academics and students of undergraduate writing tasks. The research reported that the implicit models of student writing underlying much teaching and assessment practice in universities 'do not adequately take account of the importance of issues of identity and the institutional relationships of power and authority that surround, and are embedded within, diverse student writing practices across

the university' (1998, p. 157). Adopting a practices rather than a skills approach, they argued, avoids assuming that 'the codes and conventions of academia can be taken as given' and instead calls for 'a more complex analysis of what it means to become academically literate' (p.158). As Lillis put it, they advocated looking at 'student writing as a socially situated discourse practice which is ideologically inscribed' (2003, p. 192). Many learning developers, EAP practitioners, and others found this stance appealing because it implies both a practical and ethical pedagogy, validating the meanings students bring initially to their learning experience. This means taking account of students' prior knowledge and their social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, rather than assuming that only the academically authorised meanings have value. The emerging conception of a new pedagogy based on academic literacies suggested involving students as legitimate participants in curriculum development, in the organisation of teaching and learning activities, as well as in subject specific knowledge creation and research in inclusive and socially relevant HEIs.

The current special edition of the *JLDHE* brings together contributions to practice and research focussing on how students are supported in the development of language and skills for successful study in the increasingly diverse higher education contexts of the twenty-first century. Included here are nine papers, four case studies, three opinion pieces, and one literature review bringing together a range of responses to, and examples of the development of, academic literacies since Lea and Street's seminal article.

The introductory section opens with 'Academic literacies twenty years on: a community-sourced literature review' by John Hilsdon, Cathy Malone, and Alicja Syska. This is a somewhat experimental collaboration sourced from across the professional bodies of ALDinHE, EATAW and BALEAP. Taking Lea and Street's 1998 article as a starting point, it brings together 17 contributions organised topically around issues of modality in learning, student identity, and focus on text, before considering implications for further research and practice. This review is a reflexive attempt to capture professional debate and discussion that has emerged in the last two decades that has been explicitly connected with the field of academic literacies. In identifying significant areas of overlap and divergence between different professional bodies, these reviews also act as a springboard into other theories and fields of research.

One of the foremost thinkers and researchers in the field of academic literacies is Theresa Lillis. Her opinion piece, “‘Academic literacies’: sustaining a critical space on writing in academia”, explores the relationship between academic language and literacy practices and participation in academia, arguing that an academic literacies perspective offers opportunities for practitioners and policy-makers to explore critically some of the (often taken-for-granted) assumptions about academic writing conventions and the ways these embed and impose conditions for participation in knowledge making. She argues that all contributors to HE practices, including students, across countries where neo-liberal regimes prevail, can benefit from adopting an academic literacies lens to critique methods of demonstrating, assessing and evaluating learning. This approach suggests utilising Lea and Street’s notion of academic literacies for creative questioning and development of practice in both the normative and transformative functions of academia.

Another well-known contributor to the field is Ursula Wingate. In ‘Achieving transformation through collaboration: the role of academic literacies’, Wingate presents a particular view of how academic literacies can be transformative. She sees the academic literacies ‘model’ as a perspective for research into students’ writing and pedagogy for writing development practitioners. This implies a different emphasis in the definition of academic literacies than that given by Lea and Street, where the approach is posited as having potential for pedagogy in general to ‘adequately take account of the importance of issues of identity and the institutional relationships of power and authority’ (1998, p.156) associated with student writing. Wingate too argues for wide-ranging transformation; in her view, however, this means concentration on what she calls ‘adequate academic literacy support’ for students via the integration of ‘academic literacy instruction’ using genre-based approaches.

Setting the context for this special edition in our tenth anniversary year, Steve Briggs and Mick Kavanagh discuss a successful one-day joint conference between BALEAP and ALDinHE, held in 2018, which was based on a shared practical and theoretical interest in academic literacies work. This paper encourages further cross-association collaborations between our professional associations and the content of the current issue can be seen, at least in part, as the first fruits of this joint initiative.

In their paper, Kim Mitchell, Diana McMillan and Michelle Lobchuk seek to move our understanding of writing self-efficacy forward by exploring the relationship between the

cognitive concept of writing self-efficacy and a socially constructed epistemology of writing. At the heart of their work, 'Applying the "Social Turn" in writing scholarship to perspectives on writing self-efficacy', is a proposed synthesis of three constructionist-situated perspectives: activity theory, rhetorical genre theory, and communities of practice.

Simon Williams explores how novice student writers could benefit from a more principled combination of EAP and academic literacies approaches to support their development of a balanced voice and achieve fluency in reflective writing. In 'The appearance of voice: EAP and academic literacies approaches to teaching reflective writing' he argues that as reflective writing increasingly forms part of the assessment of student learning, the balance between the more objective approaches to teaching academic writing (i.e. EAP) and academic literacies as an approach that develops students' subjectivity (i.e. academic literacies) becomes increasingly important. This 'joined-up' approach, he argues, can provide the optimum learning environment for novice student writers to develop and achieve reflective writing fluency.

Sharon McCulloch and Tania Horak focus on staff in two UK universities who provide writing support to students. They compare the views and identities of EAP teachers and learning developers, with the aim of understanding both groups' perceptions of academic writing. The results of their study suggest a spectrum from autonomous, text-based approaches to academic literacies perspectives on writing, but with some commonalities across all approaches. They suggest sharing good practice and developing a greater understanding of the similarities and differences between the two approaches in order to facilitate greater awareness of what it means to be a professional academic writer and appreciate the range of expertise these two groups bring to their field.

John Wrigglesworth presents a case study that involves putting the principles of an academic literacies approach to work in an undergraduate academic language module. The paper opens with a thorough exploration of academic literacies and its value in challenging taken-for-granted assumptions in higher education. The author then presents a case study of his own attempts at using academic literacies. The case study challenges the reader to envisage how a genuine attempt to break down institutional power structures in the interests of empowering students as writers might take place in higher education.

In their paper exploring the notion of 'third space' as part of an academic literacies approach, Sandra Abegglen, Tom Burns and Sandra Sinfield describe their experience of designing and delivering an interdisciplinary first-year undergraduate module. They sought to create a participative space in which students can reconceive their identities and academic potential as well as contributing to course and curriculum design. They see this initiative in terms of a rhizomatic model, offering a variety of non-hierarchical entry and exit points for students, many of whom are underprepared for more traditional approaches to university teaching and the learning environment.

The connections between how a discipline communicates in texts and how disciplinary knowledge is produced are explored in a paper by Bente Kristiansen. She argues that promoting student awareness of knowledge domains and discourse communities is vital and she suggests that rhetorical contexts and knowledge-making practices of disciplines can become powerful vehicles for pedagogy.

Jennifer Sizer describes 'textography' (Swales, 1998) as a potential approach for practitioners of EAP and LD to use in their work with students and staff to promote greater mutual understanding. According to Sizer, textography makes use of textual analysis and ethnographic methods of describing communication to enable assessment of students' needs, as well as helping them to develop their awareness and understanding of language conventions, which may vary widely according to context and usage.

Lynne Gornall writes about using appreciative inquiry to consult students and academics about support for postgraduate international business school students in order to identify preferred modes of support and clarify intersecting professional roles that support change. An explicit academic literacies approach was evaluated most highly by all participants. The reasons given are summarised by linking ideas from communities of practice with a description of learning development practice as fulfilling a brokering function for academics and students. She draws upon previous studies to define brokering in this context as promoting collaboration on work towards change and development, and 'spanning boundaries' between subject lecturers, students, and learning developers.

Similarly, in discussing the links between English for Academic Purposes and academic literacies approaches, Paul Breen presents a case study of EAP acting as a fulcrum between theory and practice. The study focuses on a three-month pre-session course

designed to help students satisfy university entrance requirements and visa regulations. It illustrates the range of issues arising in discussions of students' 'level' of English and learning needs, as well as varying interpretations by academics of discipline specific language. Breen's study adds weight to the argument that EAP practitioners need to work more closely with the mainstream disciplinary communities.

Drawing on Lea and Street's academic literacies perspectives and genre theory, Philip Montgomery, Jason Sparks and Bridget Goodman explore how postgraduate students studying social sciences in an English-medium university in Kazakhstan develop knowledge and capacity in a range of academic genres. This mixed methods study blends a detailed genre analysis based in the Hallidayan concepts of field, tenor and mode alongside pedagogic enquiry into approaches that support successful learning of academic genres. A key finding of their research, which is consistent with Lea and Street's theoretical position, is that explicit, accessible feedback, linked to transparency of genre usage in meaning making, contributed to their students' success.

Rosella D'Alesio and Ben Martin report on a project designed to help demonstrate the benefits of collaboration between learning developers and subject lecturers. Their case study describes how a generic academic literacy framework was developed for this purpose. It was designed to be concise, non-level specific and accommodating of a multiplicity of factors involved in developing academic literacy. They explain how the framework was developed and how it can be evaluated, concluding with a discussion of planned next steps for their project.

Linda Thies and Viola Rosario present a two-part case study using Lea and Street's (1998) paper on academic literacies to inform ways of working collaboratively with a range of partners on embedding academic literacies in course curricula. Both studies focused on the development of curricula in selected professional courses in order to increase students' awareness of disciplinary requirements and to ensure that students develop the academic literacies needed to succeed in their area of study. What differed in these studies was the combinations of project partners and the nature of the partnerships.

In her case study, Angela Rhead highlights academic reading as a troublesome threshold concept for students and teachers alike in HE. She adopts a writing retreat format to introduce an exciting teaching innovation at Keele University: academic reading retreats.

These retreats deliver a range of strategies for reading journal articles and provide opportunities for private practice and shared reflections, which can facilitate deep learning about complex epistemological concepts. They open a dialogue within the academic community that helps students better understand the relationship between reading and enquiry, and helps academics better understand their students' reading challenges.

The wide-ranging content of the papers in this special edition demonstrates the diverse, creative and inspiring ways in which academic literacies approaches are being interpreted, explored, and practised. This attests to the fertile and ground-breaking nature of Lea and Street's concept and the readiness with which it has been taken up by HE researchers, educators and policymakers in UK academia and beyond. Those who are interested in the questions of what it means to be academically literate, to participate in higher education, and how best to work with students with diverse needs, will continue to respond to and draw upon this conceptual framework. This special edition adds to this productive and important debate and we believe that all involved can be proud of the work it contains.