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Towards Self-Expression in L2 Classrooms: The Effect of Explicit Teaching of Story Structures on EFL learners' Narrative Ability

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Biodata

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Abstract

Retelling stories, as an instance of guided speaking, can be an effective strategy to enhance learners' communicative output and class participation. In many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classes, however, this effective strategy is rarely exploited to its full potential, and the usual performance on the part of students is hardly anything better than a partially memorized impersonal report. The current study set out to investigate whether this deficiency is due to the learners' linguistic incompetence or their unfamiliarity with narrative macrostructures. To this end, 60 intermediate-level EFL students were assigned to two classes of experimental and control, where the experimental group received explicit instruction on narrative story structures (Polanyi, 1979; Liskin-Gasparro, 1996). Results indicated that learners in the experimental group outperformed those in the control group regarding storytelling abilities. Although suffering from similar linguistic inadequacies as their peers in the control group, they seemed to have developed skills to meet narrative demands of story telling; specifically, they had learned how to inject their emotions, attitudes and evaluative stance into their story, and make it worthy and different from merely reporting a sequence of events occurring in the past. The sense of achievement through self-expression, as attested by the participants, was another advantage of this experiment.

Keywords: narrative, story structures, narrative proficiency, retelling stories, evaluation

Introduction

The majority of information transferred among people is not in the form of clear and logical arguments, but through narratives (Riessman, 1993). Narrative is popular in everyday life since through narrative people construct social reality and make sense of their past experiences (Bruner, 1986; Smith, 1990). From a socio-cultural perspective, stories can be seen as tools to support and maintain culture and traditions. In fact, people use stories to enhance and define cultural aspects for the benefit and enjoyment of their members (Martin, 2002). Besides, the use of narrative as a therapeutic device has been widely discussed in psychotherapy (Halonen, 2002; Silverman, 2004). Following Bourdieu (1999, p. 615), McKendy (2006) talks about “a joy in expression” when marginalized and silenced individuals are given an opportunity to make themselves heard.

The ability to tell a good story in a coherent manner—what Lalleman (1989, p.217) calls “narrative proficiency”—needs a high level of language and cognitive skills (Harste, Woodward, and Burke, 1984). According to Bruner (1990), narrative production or storytelling draws on different kinds of knowledge: (a) general knowledge about events; (b) memory sequencing; (c) understanding of time and causality; (d) understanding of people and typical social interaction; (e) understanding and insight into feelings; (f) verb tense and linguistic connectives; and (g) cultural conventions of narratives.

Berman (1995) proposes three separate competencies and dimensions in a successful narration: a linguistic dimension—the use of forms and structures; a conceptual dimension—assigning due weight to the evaluative elements that lie outside of the narrative backbone; and a communicative dimension—interpreting the narrative task so as to meet the pragmatic conditions imposed by the listener’s expectations, on the one hand, and the narrator’s responsibility for communicating clearly on the other (pp. 306-307). Accordingly, a successful narrative activity requires efficient activation and utilization of linguistic, conceptual and communicative resources available to the narrator. Failure or under-development in any of these competencies is expected to result in undesirable outcomes. Considering the contribution of narrative proficiency to the overall success of communication in one’s first as well as second language, seeking ways to improve the aforementioned competencies seems warranted.

The affective, cognitive, socio-cultural, and linguistic dimensions of narration afford it a unique status as a multipurpose and bankable task in EFL/ESL classes, an asset with an

empowering effect on the learners, when treated as ‘whole-persons’ with their cognitive as well as affective needs catered for (cf. Curran, 1972; Richards and Rodgers, 2001, pp.92-3). Telling or retelling stories while inserting their emotional and attitudinal reactions, the learners can have more ‘personal investment’ (Curran, 1976, p.103) in the language learning process. It is unfortunate that these potentials are underused and even sometimes wasted through casual and mechanical treatment of narrative tasks in the pedagogical settings. Narrative, at least in the EFL contexts we know about, is mostly treated as a purely linguistic task with no attention paid to the role it can play in social interaction. To address this gap, the present research attempts to highlight the significance of fostering EFL/ESL learners’ narrative proficiency and investigate the impact of explicit teaching of story structure on the quality of narrative production, from a linguistic as well as a socio-pragmatic perspective.

Background

Labov (Labov and Waletzky, 1967; Labov, 1972), no doubt, is to receive credit for discovering the worth and importance of systematic study of narrative in sociolinguistic research. Labov (1972) defined oral experience of personal narrative in terms of six discrete structures: a) abstract: summarizes the story; b) orientation: setting or scene temporally or spatially; c) complicating actions: narrative or event structure; d) result: outcome of the events; e) evaluation: why the story is important or worth telling; and f) coda: relation between the past experience or story and current situation. Outliving the criticisms concerning its apparent inattention to context, Labov’s model of narrative structure continues to be the most influential analytical framework in narrative studies (see Georgakopoulou, 2007, for a thorough review). According to Bruner (1997, p.62), the structural components of the model, evaluation in particular, have had an impressive staying power.

A Labovian approach to narrative analysis, in fact, belongs in the socio-pragmatic tradition of narrative scholarship, along with other dominant models including the conversation analytic model of storytelling pioneered by Sacks (1974), Goffman’s (1979, 1986) footing, and Bakhtin’s (1981, 1986) voicing, with their common emphasis on the inadequacy of the one-dimensional analysis of the denotational/referential content of narratives (cf. Koven, 2002). The significance of Labov’s structural analysis within this tradition lies in its simultaneous attention to both denotational and interactional aspects of narrative while the others highlight the interactional feature of narrative, largely at the expense of denotational feature. Through introducing the notion of evaluation, the Labovian model helps to distinguish between denotational and interactional properties of narrative, and by doing so,

enables the analyst to differentiate varieties of narration, such as *report* and *storytelling*, in terms of the load of social interaction. Such a differentiation (richly developed in Polanyi's works discussed below) seems quite useful to language teachers in need of an analytical tool to judge the quality of the learners' narrative tasks. As a 'code-centered perspective' to narrative analysis (to use Schiffrin's term, 2003), the Labovian approach views "narrative primarily as a mode of language-based action and means of social interaction [...] this perspective analytically privileges the language of stories, i.e. the code in which they are conveyed" (Schiffrin, 2003, p. 538). Within this framework, it is possible to study formal and functional boundaries among units of talk and hence, it seems to be a good model for explaining, in tangible terms, how stories are told and organized.

Polanyi (1979, 1985) adopted Labov's model (1972) but integrated the six parts into three structures (a) narrative structure: temporal contexts or events; (b) descriptive structure: background information of characters or situations; and (c) evaluative structure: telling the audience what the narrator feels is crucial information. Polanyi (1982) makes a distinction between a 'report' and 'story': while both are telling 'what' happened, a report does not involve "'why' those events took place and 'why' they are considered to be worth telling" (p. 515). On the other hand, as she aptly mentions, one tells a story to make a point and leave an 'impact' on story recipients. She then explains how the 'intended impact' is achieved:

... A teller is not satisfied merely to have been 'allowed' to tell his story; he wants to be appreciated for having had an IMPACT on the story recipients. Not any impact will do, of course. He does not want the recipients to be amused by a story he is telling to have them feel sad [...]. In order to forestall such differences in interpretation which might result from IMPARTIAL REPORTING OF CIRCUMSTANCES, the speaker 'evaluates' the various propositions asserted in his telling differentially. He includes META-INFORMATION throughout his telling of the story which indicates DIFFERENTIAL WEIGHT he assigns to the various states and events in the story.
(Polanyi, 1982, p. 517; emphasis through capitalization added)

It follows, then, that we cannot expect the same degree of interest, involvement and personal investment with regards to the task of narration when the speaker is concerned with an 'elicited report' as contrasted with the time he/she is asked to 'tell his/her own story'. The point is that a narrative task in most EFL classes, as the authors have observed and have been informed, is more akin to reporting than storytelling, and this, regretfully, makes classroom narrative activities a dull, repetitive, and uninteresting experience for EFL learners. Many professionals and educationalists (Hendrickson, 1992; Wasson-Ellam, 1992; Freire, 1996; Bruner, 1996; McQuillan & Tse, 1998; to name but a few) are recommending the use of storytelling for teaching and learning purposes, however, no hint is offered regarding the

'how' of the task. The tacit assumption is that through mere exposure to the narrative mode of presentation, the learners will be able to deduce the underlying structures and use them in their own performance. Nevertheless, there is ample evidence indicating considerable difference between native speakers' storytelling and that of non-native learners (Fakhri, 1984; Lalleman, 1989; Liskin-Gasparro, 1996; Kang, 1997; Parke, 2001, Tickoo, 2003), the difference usually leading to the disadvantage of non-natives, especially minority children (Perez & Tager-Flusberg, 1998). Therefore, in line with Montague, (1988) and Gordon, (1989), it seems to us that explicit teaching of story structures is a viable strategy to help EFL/ESL learners discover the world of storytelling and enjoy the advantage of this discovery in their classroom as well as real-life communication.

Therefore, the express purpose of the study is to examine the usefulness of teaching story structure, adopting the Labovian approach to narrative as an analytical and teaching tool. It should be noted, however, that in spite of the theoretical vigor of Labov's model, its application, especially operationalization of the notion of 'evaluation', has proved to be complicated. To the best of our knowledge, few if any other treatments of the model are as systematic, elaborate, and yet non-technical enough for instructional purposes as the one provided by Liskin-Gasparro (1996). In her analysis of narratives produced by non-native learners of English, she illustrates the way certain linguistic/discursive devices can signal the narrative, descriptive and evaluative structures in a storytelling task. Therefore, as a workable tool for the study of narrative which does not presuppose a great deal of background in discourse analysis, it seems to be readily accessible to EFL teachers who wish to exploit the potentials of narrative activities in their classrooms.

Method

Participants

A total number of sixty female EFL learners at the intermediate level of language proficiency were selected from an English language institute in Lar, a city in Fars province, Iran. The participants were all Persian native speakers in their twenties. Therefore, it can be safely assumed that they were homogeneous in terms of English language proficiency level, L1 background and age. Since random assignment of the students into control and experimental groups was not feasible, intact-group design was employed in the study.

Instrumentation and Procedure

The current investigation was carried out over a span of ten weeks. In order to conduct this study, the following steps were taken. First, a retired version of the Michigan test (version 2001) was used to ensure the participants' homogeneity in terms of their general language proficiency. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the proficiency test. In order to check if there is any significant difference between the groups' proficiency level, an independent t-test on the scores of the Michigan test was run. The t-observed value ($t_{obs} = .447$) did not exceed its critical value ($t_{crit} = 2.0$, $df = 58$, $\alpha = .05$) and it was concluded that the two groups are balanced in this regard.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for the proficiency test

Group	N	Mean	SD
Control	30	44.73	9.33
Experimental	30	43.50	11.89

N= number of students in each group, SD=standard deviation

Furthermore, it was necessary to compare the groups' storytelling ability prior to explicit teaching of story structures. What ensued was a pre-test in the form of oral elicited narration in which the learners were required to retell a short story. The learners' storytelling performances were tape-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed in terms of type and frequency of story structures. Table 2 below presents the results of the analysis. The observed chi-square value ($\chi^2_{obs} = 1.33$) does not exceed its critical value ($\chi^2_{crit} = 5.99$, $df = 2$, $\alpha = .05$) indicating no significant difference between the groups.

Table 2: The frequency of story structures in the groups' pretests

Group	Narrative	Descriptive	Evaluative
Control	249	298	77
Experimental	263	294	93

The next step was selecting some narrative tasks both for the teaching of story structures and also to check the participants' narrative proficiency as the posttest. Among the types of narrative tasks mentioned by Lalleman, (1989, p. 217), i.e., (1) an existing story (a fairy tale), (2) an experience of or an invented story by the speaker or writer, and (3) the retelling

of an existing story or a story that is told with reference to a series of pictures, the third type could ideally serve our purpose in the study. The reason to avoid free or invented storytelling was the difficulty of comparison that could result from the inevitably uncontrollable variation in the learners' narratives in terms of topic, length, diction, etc. Various sources were browsed and, finally, six short stories from "A 3rd Serving of Chicken Soup for the Soul" (Canfield & Hansen, 1994) were selected. The book is a collection of short, inspirational stories based on real events and personal experiences of some individuals. In addition to being entertaining, each story contained an implicit moral to trigger some emotional and/or attitudinal reaction on the part of the learners. Another important characteristic of these stories was that, although they were not simplified materials, they enjoyed average difficulty level, i.e., 72.53, estimated through the Flesch readability formula (Flesch, 1948); thus, serving as appropriate reading materials for intermediate students. The titles of the selected stories were as follows: Almie Rose, Tommy's Essay, Compassion is in the Eyes, Golden Crane, Make a Wish, and Two Families.

The learners were asked to read the stories at home and to retell the stories orally in the class before other students. The retelling of each story took between 10 to 15 minutes. The learners in the control group were exposed to the same material presented to the experimental class, but they were not receiving any instruction in terms of the macrostructure of the stories they were supposed to read and retell. The last performance of the learners (Two Families story) was considered as their posttest, which was tape-recorded and transcribed for further analysis.

Teaching and Assessing Narrative Proficiency

For a systematic teaching of story structures, Liskin-Gasparro (1996) makes some helpful suggestions which were followed throughout the treatment. She recommends asking the learners to build their stories from the bottom up: "first plotting the narrative line, then pinpointing where contextualizing details would be effective, and finally, inserting internal and external evaluative devices at appropriate points" (p. 283). Accordingly, the learners in the experimental class were asked to divide stories into episodes in terms of the chronological order of the events. Then they were encouraged to explore the context of the story, and describe the setting and the characters. Finally, they were instructed to use some evaluative devices (Liskin-Gasparro, 1996, p. 278; reproduced in Table 3 below) to highlight some parts of the story that they viewed as important.

Table 3: The list of proposed evaluative devices

-
- 1- Comments on action: brief comment: external
 - 2- Comments on action: longer reflection: external
 - 3- Reference to previous action: external
 - 4- Ironic aside: external
 - 5- Retarding narrative actions: gerund (progressive constructions): internal
 - 6- Retarding narrative action: Juxtaposition of narrative and descriptive clauses: internal
 - 7- Repetition: lexical and/or syntactic: internal
 - 8- Contrast: internal
 - 9- Expressive phonology: internal
 - 10- Lexical choice: internal
-

Assessment of learners' narrative skill was done on the basis of Labovian analysis (cf. Polanyi, 1979; Liskin-Gasparro, 1996, Koven, 2002). The following procedure was adopted when analyzing the transcriptions of the learners' oral presentation: first the retold stories were divided into three kinds of clauses: independent, dependent, and elliptical. These clauses were numbered. Second, these clauses were divided into story world and non-story world clauses. Third, story world clauses were divided into those that advance the story line through the presentation of a set of chronologically-ordered events (narrative structure), and those that do not advance the story line, but describe the context and characters in the story (descriptive structure). Non-story world clauses were viewed as evaluative structure as they do not advance the story line and enter into stories from *outside world* and their relevance is to be established by the teller and inferred by the audience. In order to make sure of the reliability of analysis, the transcriptions were analyzed by the researchers and inter-coder agreement was estimated through the kappa coefficient (Hartmann, 1977). The obtained value ($\kappa = .929$) can be considered as a satisfactory index of agreement between the raters; thus, supporting the credibility of the findings.

Results and Discussion

The quantitative analysis of the transcribed retold stories revealed a considerable increase in the experimental group's output regarding all three structures, especially 'evaluation' (see Table 4). The difference between the groups is not due to chance as the observed chi-square value ($\chi^2_{\text{obs}} = 24.33$) exceeds its critical value ($\chi^2_{\text{crit}} = 5.99$, $df = 2$, $\alpha = .05$). Therefore, it can

be concluded that explicit teaching of story structures had a significant effect on improving the learners' narrative ability.

Table 4: The frequency of story structures in the groups' posttests

Group	Narrative	Descriptive	Evaluative
Control	318	265	98
Experimental	465	364	262

The difference between the groups, nevertheless, was not restricted to differential performance merely in terms of the frequency of the story structures. Remarkable qualitative differences were also pinpointed which will be detailed under separate headings.

Narrative structure

A quick look at Tables 2 and 4 demonstrates a high frequency of narrative structure in pretests and posttests of both control and experimental groups. This is to be expected since narrative structure is the backbone of story line (Liskin-Gasparro, 1996) and through this structure the key events of the story can be reported. However, a closer scrutiny of the stories reveals that the experimental groups' accounts were richer in terms of narrative details, especially those concerning the emotional and mental states of the characters. Another important difference was that the learners in the control group tended to transfer the narrative clauses of the story, as intact as possible, to their retellings so far so that their performance was akin to memorization, while the experimental group learners were more inclined to re-organize the story line in their own words. The following excerpts, provided by 'Leila' and 'Negar' (pseudonyms) in control and experimental classes, respectively, can help clarify the point. It should be noted that their grammatical mistakes have not been corrected. (Due to copyright restrictions, reproduction of the whole stories was not possible.)

Excerpt (1)

- 1- when the war ended
- 2- Japanese family went home
- 3- They were surprised to see
- 4- which was healthy and intact without any change

5- and they put red rosebud on the dining room table
as a gift for the Japanese family
(Two Families story retold by 'Leila')

Excerpt (2)

6- and war in Europe ended
7- then the Japanese family were going to their home with the train
8- They were in train depot
9- suddenly father noticed that
10- a man who is standing ahead of them
11- is family of Swiss
12- then thought more and
13- and suddenly he noticed
14- that he is their neighbor and their family
15- they said hello
16- and they were happy to see each other
17- then they went home
18- when they arrived
19- Japanese family surprised
20- because everything was good
21- and the Swiss father handed the passbook to the Japanese father
22- it was all money
23- that he worked during all these years
24- they went to living room
25- there was some rose buds on table
26- and also a beautiful gift for the Japanese neighbor
(Two Families story retold by 'Negar')

Leila's account is quite typical of story retelling performance in EFL classes in our context. In fact, it can be considered as a low-risk strategy since by sticking to the framework and even wordings of the story, the learners can avoid making grammatical and lexical errors. Negar's performance, on the other hand, is full of narrative details, leading to a lively and natural story. Putting more flesh to the bone of her account, she becomes more vulnerable to making linguistic errors but her story is more similar to real-life narratives.

Descriptive structure

While narrative structure is needed to show the progression of events along a given chronological order, the descriptive structure is used to contextualize those events by introducing details about the characters, time and place. The high frequency of this structure in the performance of both groups can be explained by the fact that this type of information may be automatically and readily imported from the main story to the learners' retelling. The main question is whether the descriptive details mentioned can provide the necessary context for narrative structure to facilitate understanding of the events. Throughout the experimentation, the experimental group was instructed to pay attention to and exploit this property of descriptive structure and make a distinction between important and not-so-important contextual information. For example, as it can be seen in excerpt (1) produced by 'Leila' in the control group, many interesting details describing the 'how' of events have been recognized as unimportant and been simply omitted: It is just mentioned that when the war ended, the Japanese family went home. In excerpt (2), on the contrary, details of getting back home are provided by 'Negar' in the experimental class: The very point that their Swiss neighbors were in the train depot to welcome the Japanese family is an indication of strong friendship between the two families, a key element for appreciating the message of the story.

Evaluative structure

The most remarkable difference, both quantitatively and qualitatively, between the control and experimental posttests was due to their use of evaluative structure. Incidentally, this structure is what makes a 'story' different from a 'report' (cf. Polanyi, 1982). Because of the instruction they received during the course of study, the experimental class members developed the awareness that storytelling is a social activity between a teller and audience rather than a unilateral task. Using evaluative devices, they were trying to whet their audience's appetite and engage their attention. While retelling, they were visibly checking the recipients' verbal and/or facial reactions and were seeking new strategies to keep them on their seat, and to encourage them to keep on listening to the story. When interviewed, they described this type of story telling as an emotionally rewarding experience since it provided them with an opportunity for self-expression. They were using a host of evaluative strategies to comment on the events, express their attitude towards the characters in the story, link the story to their own personal experiences and cultural background, and formulate generalizations about life and society.

The following excerpts (Excerpts 3 and 4) by Mina (pseudonym) in the experimental class demonstrates the employment of clauses as the beginning and end of the story which do not belong to story world as they do not advance the plotline. They are used, however, to reflect the teller's point of view and judgment. In fact, as also discussed in the Bakhtinian tradition, it is through "investing the words with evaluations" that an author or narrator "orients the information in a novel way toward the world" (Vitanova, 2005, p. 158). The novel ways of retelling the same story was the phenomenon frequently observed in the experimental group but not in the control one.

Excerpt (3)

27- every year some people immigrate to another country

28- Some of them go to escape poverty or political problems

29- Some of them go for excitement or adventure

(Two Families story retold by 'Mina')

Excerpt (4)

30- because they take care of our nursery our greenhouse

31- and this is worth more than all things for us

32- where you can find neighbors like this

33- they are so kind and friendly

(Two Families story retold by 'Mina')

In sum, the ubiquitous use of evaluative comments and the learners' willingness to employ them in their retellings created a dynamic and lively classroom atmosphere as each student was trying to present a different and unique account of the story, one that would encourage the audience's appreciation and praise.

Concluding Remarks

"Why harp so much on the value of narrative skills? Do we learn a second/foreign language to tell stories?", one may ask. In response, it could be argued that we do not have to be professional story tellers to use narratives. As Labov (1997, p. 395), candidly says: "narratives are privileged forms of discourse which play a central role in almost every conversation". In fact, succeeding in this mode of discourse is an important factor for the efficiency of a speaker's communicative performance; it enables him/her to "occupy more

social space” and “hold the floor longer” Labov (1997, p. 402) because he/she knows how to make his/her contribution interesting to the audience.

The other side of the coin is the failure in the accomplishment of the narrative task; when the story “falls flat” (Polanyi, 1982, p. 519), the speaker suffers a loss of face, not knowing how to deal with the implicit or explicit “so what” (Labov, 1972) response to his/her story. The unpleasant feeling of embarrassment that follows usually needs to be ironed out by the speaker or others present. Therefore, it seems to us that narrative proficiency is not a trivial or luxurious skill in language learning. It is believed that EFL learners, receiving instruction on narrative structures and devices, will be more successful in initiating and maintaining communication, and this, needless to say, will result in further exposure to L2, and consequently more proficiency in the use of language.

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Reading Between the Lines of Enquiry: Introducing First-Year ESL University Students to Scholarship through Literacy Skills Development

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Abstract

Scholarship may usefully be defined as referring to the professional standards that academics apply in their work, such as rigorous attention to detail, critical thinking, ensuring that all assertions may be substantiated and documenting sources. All students entering university are expected to learn to apply such standards, and to this end may be required to take preparation courses. However, a significant proportion of those entering English-medium universities come from non-English language backgrounds and for these students, who usually have on entry a minimum proficiency level of IELTS 5, the need for familiarization with academic culture and standards is compounded by the need for ongoing development of linguistic proficiency, particularly in relation to the skills required to read and write for academic purposes. Focusing on these skills, lecturers teaching on preparation courses seek texts as the basis for development. However, research (e.g. Hirvela, 2001) has indicated that the selection of appropriate reading material is problematic. This paper draws on the outcomes of a study concerned with the induction into the academic community of undergraduates for whom English is a Second Language (ESL). Following Biggs' (1999) concept of the "constructively aligned" curriculum, in which all components are integrated, serve the same goals and support each other, it is shown that first-year ESL students can benefit from reading various types of unabridged academic reporting. Such material has the significant advantage of supporting the dual goals of academic socialization and the development of academic reading skills. It is suggested that students are best supported by a phased approach in which they progress from reading articles on topics closely related to their preparation, to those concerned with scholarship in teaching and learning in their disciplines, and, finally, to articles from within their disciplines.

Introduction: English-medium higher education

Recent estimates suggest that worldwide over 2.7 million students pursue higher education outside of their country of citizenship, with 67% of these students being hosted by six countries; these are, in descending order according to overseas student enrollment, the US and the UK (together accounting for more than a third of all international students (Graddol, 2007, p.76)), Germany, France, Australia and Japan (UK Higher Education International Unit, 2009). The impact of these internationally-mobile students on individual countries can be significant; for example, in 2006 they accounted for 25.5% of all students enrolled in higher education institutions in Australia (Baik & Greig, 2009, p. 401) and 13% in the UK (UK Higher Education International Unit, 2009). While such figures fluctuate from year to year as a result of various factors that affect student mobility, including changes to foreign and economic policy and the availability and quality of the provision of higher education in the home market, their impact on the host economies and societies remains substantial.

Concurrently, many countries have recently witnessed rapid expansion and improvement to domestic higher education opportunities. In India, for example, the number of post-secondary institutions tripled from 6,000 in 1990 to 18,000 in 2006, while in the Asia Pacific region, domestic training has grown from 9% to 19% over the same period (Roslyn Kunin & Associates, 2009, p.8). Both regions also expect significant growth in student populations; India, for example, anticipates that its college age population will grow from 125 to 139 million between 2005 and 2015. While such growth will be absorbed in part by the expansion of domestic higher education institutes, it is also expected to contribute to the numbers of students opting to study overseas (Roslyn Kunin & Associates, 2009, p.8; British Council, 2004), although the overall trend appears to be towards a decline in the numbers of students travelling overseas for higher education study (Graddol, 2007, p.77). To some extent traditional international student destinations such as the US and the UK are being replaced by:

.... a bewildering assortment of joint ventures and overseas branch campuses [...] as American, Australian and British universities now compete for international students in their home countries. The UK's University of Nottingham, for example, opened two Asian campuses in September 2005: Nottingham Malaysia and Nottingham Ningbo in China (a joint venture with Zhejiang Wanli University). By such ventures, numbers of transnational students studying for UK degrees are expected to overtake international students coming to Britain for study. The new overseas campuses are likely to attract students from elsewhere in the region, thus helping to provide an international intellectual environment.

Graddol, 2007, p.79

While such joint ventures and university branches offer English-medium instruction, domestic higher education institutes located in countries for which English is a second language are increasingly opting to provide instruction in English. A number of factors influence this decision, including the desire to retain students who might otherwise be attracted by the competitive advantage provided by an overseas English-medium education, with its associated potential to improve employment mobility and opportunity. League tables indicate that approximately 66% of the top 100 universities worldwide are in English-speaking countries (Graddol, 2007, p.74). Graddol adds that this is:

.... one reason why English is used increasingly as the medium of education in universities across the world. If an institution wishes to become a centre of international excellence, it needs both to attract teachers and researchers from around the world, and to encourage international students to enroll on its courses, enriching the university's prestige, revenue, and intellectual climate. A recent commentary in *The Economist* observed: The top universities are citizens of an international academic marketplace with one global academic currency, one global labour force and, increasingly, one global language, English.

Graddol, 2007, p.74

Graddol (2007, p.96) notes that while such universities began to expect graduates to have attained English language proficiency of around IELTS 6, in practice, as a result of low proficiency levels on entry, students rarely exceed IELTS 5, and he notes that the idea of exit proficiency level is gradually being replaced by entry proficiency levels of IELTS 5.5 and that students will ideally, through study in English, have reached IELTS 6.5 by age 20. Worldwide, therefore, proficiency levels among undergraduates vary from IELTS 5 to those who have bilingual or first language competence.

It may be seen therefore that a very significant proportion of undergraduate education worldwide is provided in English to students for whom English is a Second Language. These students are expected to have attained a level of English proficiency sufficient for study in English, and the trend is for language support for these students to move from the general (as in a classroom-based, timetabled approach in school) to the more specific, that is, to academic and discipline-related language developed primarily through immersion (Graddol, 2007, p.97). This trend has been accompanied by a shift in emphasis in target level of English language proficiency, from the often unrealistic and misguided goal of attaining first language or near-first language proficiency to a far more pragmatic emphasis on successful

intercultural communication in a variety of local and international contexts, in which “the competence needs of students can be related to the different communities with and within which they will need to communicate” (Nunn, 2007, p.37). This:

... implies an ability (not just a readiness) to interact in unpredictable multicultural contexts and the ability to adapt to a variety of communities and types of community. Some of these will be temporary multicultural communities, other will be monolingual and mono-cultural speech communities. Standards of competence are related to the composition of the membership of the community and are not definable in terms of ‘native’, or educated ‘native’ as members may not be native.

Nunn, 2007, p.39

The transition that these students must make when they progress from secondary to tertiary education is marked, therefore, by the shift from *learning English* at school to *learning in English* at university, a context that includes various communities and types of community. This shift has various implications.

Learning in English at university

Students who once learned English at school, as second language learners, at university find themselves required both to learn in English and to familiarize themselves with the culture and processes of scholarship, a culture that differs from secondary school in several ways. For example, university students are expected to be self-motivated and independent learners who are able to cope with course content that is presented in a variety of ways, from lectures to seminars and tutorials. They are also expected to be able to engage with the assessment process, requiring them to read, research and write to academic standards.

The transition therefore from learning English to learning in English, superficially subtle, has radical implications for university administrations, faculty and students, as decisions must be made regarding the allocation of resources enabling ESL students to reach the standards identified by Graddol above. ESL students’ work is compounded: not only do they need to acquire the discipline-related knowledge that all students need while concurrently familiarizing themselves with university culture and behavior norms and expectations, but they must also continue to develop their English language proficiency. The challenge is clearly the most demanding for those at the lower end of the proficiency range. To support ESL students, universities frequently require them to undertake preparation courses to develop academic communication skills either prior to admission or as co-requisites to discipline-related courses. These courses are often labeled ‘English for Specific Purposes’

(ESP) or ‘English for Academic Purposes’ (EAP). However, some institutions, in accord with the trend identified by Graddol and discussed above, are increasingly moving towards preparation courses in which ESL students are not differentiated from others. In this approach all students, regardless of differing language proficiencies, are considered in relation to the skills and language they need to develop to enable them to perform well at university, and preparation courses may have titles such as ‘Academic Research and Communication Skills’ or ‘Academic Communication’. ESL students in particular benefit from this approach as they must work alongside others for whom English is a first language. Together, indeed often in teams, students develop a range of skills such as intercultural and interpersonal communication and writing, study and research skills, as well as begin to come to terms with the culture of a university and what is expected of them. The assumption is that all students have an adequate foundation of linguistic skills; all, therefore, develop linguistic skills incidentally, through immersion and application; linguistic issues are addressed, but only as they arise and as they are needed and rarely if ever form the main focus of a class.

Both types of courses – that is, those aimed at ESL students and those aimed at a broader target group – were considered in research carried out from 2003 and 2007 (see Brandt, 2009a, pp.1 - 18 and Brandt 2009b, pp.145 - 156), though the majority fell into the ESP/EAP category. The study had set out to investigate the induction of undergraduates into the academic community in several universities, and its findings are related here to current practice at one institution.

Research base: investigating preparation courses

The research set out to address the question: ‘How does EAP tutors’ practice compare with discipline lecturers’ expectations of their ESL students?’ Participants represented tertiary institutions in nine countries including Indonesia, Australia, Bahrain, the UAE and the UK. Other studies have investigated the practice of EAP tutors, and compared it with subject-lecturers’ expectations: Kehe and Kehe (1996), for example, conducted research into the preparation of ESL students in Japan for study in the U.S., while Ferris and Tagg (1996), examined subject lecturers’ expectations of ESL students’ oral and aural skills. In both cases, however, the focus was on ESL students intending to study in the U.S. The research referred to here on the other hand was concerned with the preparation of ESL students planning to continue their studies at the same institution, in various international locations.

All data were gathered according to an ethical framework of 7 criteria (Patton, 1990), including informed participant consent, guaranteed anonymity, and confidentiality. A two-

phase qualitative approach to data gathering was designed. Phase one involved a questionnaire of open-ended questions completed and returned electronically by 36 participants (16 subject and 20 EAP lecturers). In the second phase, two subject and two EAP lecturers who had not been involved in phase one were invited to discuss the preliminary outcomes, the purpose being to allow for triangulation and the substantiation, rejection, modification or supplementation of the issues that had been identified during the first phase of the research.

The very large quantity of data generated by phase one was analyzed and synthesized manually in order to provide maximum opportunity for familiarization, understanding and comparison (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As the data were gathered, they were read and re-read, enabling the identification of emerging themes via a process of inductive reasoning (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). The process adopted involved collating all responses to the same question; annotating the collated data according to the research question; word processing all data to facilitate use of the “find” function to assist in the identification of themes and issues; identifying relative significance and relationships between themes and issues and identifying themes and issues for discussion in phase two (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A similar analytical process was applied to phase two data, leading to the identification of 9 categories and 31 issues considered critical to the preparation of ESL students for English-medium university study.

One category related to reading and writing skills development, and two issues are of relevance to this discussion. First was the belief widely held among lecturers that the development of reading and writing skills should be integrated, although the outcomes indicated that this was not always applied. The second issue of relevance here relates to the selection of reading material, which was found to be problematic from a number of perspectives. Issues identified included a particular dilemma for teachers aiming to develop first-year students’ academic reading skills. These teachers must find appropriate reading materials for classes of students of different disciplines or of the same (or closely related) discipline; in all cases however first-year students by definition have little discipline knowledge. Common solutions identified in the research included the use of texts drawn from the media, which offer advantages in terms of currency but do not exemplify academic writing, and the use of ‘general-interest’ semi-academic texts (e.g. taken from *The Economist*), which can lack discipline relevance and therefore credibility from students’ perspectives. Other options identified include EAP and ESP textbooks, discipline-specific textbooks, literature, and parts of academic journal articles, such as abstracts (see Morton,

1999). This dilemma is not new; Hirvela (2001, p.331), for example, citing research published between 1987 and 1997, notes that “a major point of contention in EAP is what kind of texts should be used in EAP instruction.”

While the research helped to identify some current solutions to the problem of sources of reading materials, it also indicated that students are rarely asked to read full-length journal articles, generally because it is assumed that they are not written for an audience of students and that consequently they are likely to be linguistically and conceptually too complex, particularly for first-year undergraduates. However, at one institute in the Arabian Gulf, ESL students, with support, are routinely asked to read complete conference proceedings papers and journal articles. These form the basis of a literature review as part of research projects, and so help to develop students’ reading and writing skills; however, faculty also recognize that requiring first year ESL students to read such articles goes beyond narrower definitions of academic literacy to include facilitating induction into the scholarly community.

Academic reading

The expectation that reading is the basis for writing is one of the key features that distinguish academic reading from reading for other purposes and from learning to read at school. It is no accident that this expectation reflects a fundamental scholarly process: the move from known to unknown, from reading what has been published to researching and writing about something new. Hirvela (2001, p.330) notes that while reading and writing in a second language are challenging enough, in academic contexts, the challenge is compounded as writing from sources goes beyond discrete reading and writing skills to their integration and inter-dependency. Consequently he observes that:

... students having writing problems may actually be experiencing reading problems. The act of composing from sources starts with the reading of those texts. Difficulties in reading them impact significantly on writing about them, since students are writing in response to what they have read and how they have read it. Finding ways to incorporate reading effectively into EAP writing courses is essential, then, if we are to establish a meaningful link between reading and writing in EAP instruction.

Hirvela, 2001, p.330

Complex tasks that require the synthesis of a number of skills are a hallmark of study at university level. Further examples include listening to a lecture and taking notes, giving presentations, doing team-based project work and annotating an article. Such tasks require students to move fluently and flexibly from one (often complementary) role to another: from

reader to note taker, from summarizer and synthesizer to original text writer, from speaker to listener, from working in a team to working independently. This integration of roles and skills appears likely to lead to more effective learning; for example, studies have indicated that integrating reading and writing leads to better learning than when they are addressed separately (Mateos & Solé, 2009, p.435). This benefit may be explained as the result of reinforcement: clearly, reading and writing in combination reinforce each other, and the intrapersonal communication that is required to move from one role to another is also likely to reinforce learning: students' “‘internal collaboration’ or ‘dialectic’ with themselves [....] explains these tasks’ potential for promoting learning” (Mateos & Solé, 2009, p.436). Such integration and interrelatedness in skills and tasks means that students should be equally – or nearly equally – proficient in each skill area, as the quality of notes taken, for example, reflects the degree of understanding of the text or lecture. Many preparation courses address the development of such higher order skills, and, the research found, generally use reading material as their starting point, in the belief that texts provide the most useful springboard for academic communication skills development, doubtlessly reflecting the status of written material in academic contexts.

Academic success, therefore, is closely related to effective reading skills (Shih, 1992). Current theory describes reading as an interactive process that relies primarily on ‘bottom-up’ processes which ‘top-down’ processes draw upon (Alderson, 2000; Grabe, 2009; Koda, 2005). ‘Bottom-up’ processes, also known as micro-level processes, include decoding words and structures which are the basis for the ‘top-down’ or macro-level processes that involve understanding and relating this understanding to what the reader already knows about the language and content of the text. It is at the ‘top-down’ level that interaction between reader and text occurs as the reader makes connections between what he or she already knows about the context of the text, using the new information to expand or modify existing knowledge. This is a ‘deep’ level of processing that requires students to access the meanings expressed in the message (such as the ideas and evidence presented, for example); it is in contrast to a more ‘surface’ level, in which the focus is on the features of the message itself, such as the vocabulary and grammar.

While there is no doubt that bottom-up processes are critical for fluent reading (a large extensive vocabulary is particularly essential (Alderson, 2000, p.35; Laufer, 1998, p.1, Liu & Nation, 1995), being one of the best predictors of text comprehension), the ability “to integrate text and background information appropriately and efficiently” (Grabe & Stoller, 2002, p.28), in order to construct and negotiate new meanings, is a key skill at this level.

This requires several higher-order cognitive skills, such as the ability to link new information to known concepts, to theorize, analyse and synthesize, solve problems and select and apply a range of appropriate metacognitive skills and strategies effectively, including preparing and planning, monitoring and evaluating strategy use and ensuing learning, and orchestrating different strategies (Anderson, 2002).

Given that it is the task of preparation courses to develop such higher order skills in students, and that reading materials form an ideal springboard for this development, the question arises: what reading materials enable us to provide the best springboard to “incorporate reading effectively into EAP writing courses [in order to] to establish a meaningful link between reading and writing”, as Hirvela (2001, p.330) suggests is necessary, thereby establishing learning as integrated and cumulative?

What should first-year ESL university students read?

To foster the development of higher order skills, John Biggs (1999, p.64) discusses the importance of establishing an “aligned system of instruction” which is a “fully criterion-referenced system, where the objectives define what we should be teaching; how we should be teaching it; and how we could know how well students have learned it.” This is a description of an outcomes-based approach which will be familiar to many; however of particular interest here is Biggs’ emphasis on how:

... all components in the system address the same agenda and support each other. The students are “entrapped” in this web of consistency, optimizing the likelihood that they will engage the appropriate learning activities. I call this network *constructive alignment*.
Biggs, 1999, p.64.

How can we “entrap” first year university students in a “web of consistency” in relation to what they should be asked to read? The concept of a “system [addressing] the same agenda” justifies the exclusion of reading material drawn from the media or from other non-academic sources, and leads us to look inwards to the functions and products of a university. As a starting point, therefore, an obvious focus is on scholarship, because “scholarship is bound up with the nature and functions of the university. It is highly valued in higher education. The ideal of the scholar is frequently intimately associated with ideas about the essence of what universities are for” (Brew, 1999, p.1). What, however, is meant by ‘scholarship’? The concept is multi-faceted, making a precise definition difficult to achieve, but most efforts to define the concept draw attention to *inquiry* (e.g. Boyer, 1990; Healy, 2000), *communication*

and community (e.g. Healy, 2000; Shulman, 1993; Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin, & Prosser, 2000), reflection (e.g. Robson, 2006), professionalism and standards (Brew, 1999) and teaching and pedagogy (e.g. Trigwell, Martin, Benjamin & Prosser, 2000). One study investigated senior academic administrators' perceptions of 'research' and 'scholarship'. The author found that:

'Scholarship' was perceived to be part of the research process, providing the context for good research by adding the element of breadth to the depth of 'research'. In addition, 'scholarship' describes the manner of pursuing a serious, sustained line of enquiry as well as the dissemination process.
Neumann, 1993, p.97.

Brew (1999) carried out a phenomenographic study that identified five distinct conceptions of scholarship. In her findings, she too emphasized the quality dimension, which she argues provides the most useful definition of scholarship. Referring to her data, she provides the following definition:

... scholarship describes the professional way in which academics work. It refers to the qualities of meticulousness and rigour associated with academic reporting: e.g. making sure footnotes are accurate and that all statements can be substantiated. A number of specific aspects were mentioned: "techniques of critical thought"; "reflective, scholarly process." This conception is aligned with Neumann's suggestion noted earlier; that scholarship includes the idea of a quality describing the way research should be done. [...] The idea of professionalism is central to the quality conception.
Brew, 1999, p.6

Regardless of the difficulties in arriving at consensus on the precise definition of scholarship, its cultural capital will always be academic reporting in the form of presentation and publication. The latter takes a number of forms: conference proceedings, journal articles, monographs, books, reports. While students arriving at university expect to read books, most have little understanding of the functions of journals and even less of the functions of proceedings. However, such publications encapsulate scholarship, as defined above; their inclusion in the curriculum would therefore represent a move towards Biggs' *constructive alignment*, where the cultural capital of scholarship provides a source of teaching materials. The reading materials selected will in this way by definition address the same agenda and support other components of the curriculum, facilitating students' socialization into university culture via a:

... learning process through which the individual acquires the knowledge and skills, the values and attitudes, and the habits and modes of thought of the society to which he [or she] belongs.
Bragg, 1976, p.3.

How this learning process is managed at one institution is considered next.

Reading between the lines of enquiry

The Petroleum Institute in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, offers five degree programs in engineering subjects related to the petrochemical industry: Mechanical, Chemical, Electrical, Petroleum and Petroleum Geosciences. Instruction is in English and students are required to have achieved a minimum TOEFL score of 500 before entry, equivalent to IELTS Band 5; in practice classes are a mixture of students of proficiency levels that vary from TOEFL 500 to those who have bilingual mastery of English and, usually, Arabic.

To prepare for study of their major, two first-year communication courses are prerequisites. The design of these courses reflects the belief that ESL students most effectively develop academic communication skills through acquiring and articulating knowledge. A student-initiated enquiry-based approach is employed which requires teams of students to complete three research projects, having identified with guidance suitable research questions that can be answered by gathering data from within their immediate contexts. The three projects utilize quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. Students are encouraged to investigate genuine matters of concern identified by instructors and academic management.

Students are guided to engage in all stages of the research cycle including locating and reviewing relevant literature, writing surveys, interviewing participants and analyzing and presenting data. These stages form the primary content input of the course; for example, students are given presentations and workshops on the purpose of literature reviews; how to document sources; quantitative and qualitative methods; writing research proposals; gathering and analyzing data, and writing a discussion and recommendations. Students are expected to apply what they learn to their own research, and thus have a clearly defined purpose for completing the various stages, as they are interdependent. This process emphasizes academic processes of enquiry (a 'top-down' approach) and deemphasizes discrete language and skills (a 'bottom-up' approach).

In the course of an academic year, students will read approximately 12 journal articles or conference proceedings. All but two of these are sourced through the institute's online academic database by the students themselves (who receive training in its use in the first weeks of the first semester). The two articles that students do not find themselves are provided for them at the beginning of the first course. These articles are selected to

exemplify academic reporting, but they are also chosen for their content, which is closely related to the communication needs of first-year ESL students, and for their ability to suggest to students potential areas for research.

While articles on communication-related topics are particularly useful in the early stages of students' academic socialization and skills development, students should later be encouraged to read examples of academic reporting in their disciplines, because:

..... the academic language needs of our students are closely related to the purposes of the disciplines they are being inducted into. That is, different disciplines foreground different types of language – in terms of genre, grammar and lexis.
Cullip & Carol, 2002.

An effective way to bridge between communication-related articles and discipline-related articles at this stage is to focus on examples of academic writing that reports on scholarship in teaching and learning (SoTL) in the discipline. SoTL involves:

... systematic study of teaching and/or learning and the public sharing and review of such work through presentations or publications. "Study" is broadly defined given disciplinary differences in epistemology and the need for interdisciplinary SoTL. Presentations and publications may be local, regional, national or international. SoTL, then, shares established criteria of scholarship in general, such as that it is made public, can be reviewed critically by members of the appropriate community, and can be built upon by others to advance the field (Shulman, 2001). SoTL focuses on teaching and learning at the college level, and is primarily classroom and disciplinary based. Ideally, SoTL also involves application and use.
McKinney, K. (no date)

Appropriately selected conference proceedings and journal articles as reading materials in the preparation of university students offer a number of specific benefits, which are considered below under the six areas of length, currency and continuity of available supply, content, quality, difficulty and uses.

1. Length

Conference proceedings and journal articles offer particular benefits in terms of length and structure. They are (or should be) concise and self-contained. While a new student may anticipate the reading of a journal article as an intimidating task, a good teacher will help his or her students to break it down into 'manageable chunks', and will teach a range of strategies to facilitate reading, such as skimming and scanning; using headings as a guide, etc.

2. *Currency and continuity of available supply*

Academic reporting also offers advantages in terms of currency and the availability of a continuous supply of new articles. Articles are often freely available via the internet or through university databases, and up-to-date (though this is not by any means always an essential criterion: the need for current articles is related to the topics chosen for investigation). For lecturers, the fact that journal articles are being continuously produced is particularly useful, as it can help to ensure the injection into the curriculum of fresh materials and topics, leading to original student research projects.

3. *Content*

Students should be encouraged to select articles that they have skimmed and consider likely to be of interest or use in their research. In terms of topic, a phased approach is recommended, with articles closely related, in this order, to:

1. The preparation of students for university study.
2. SoTL in the student's discipline.
3. The student's discipline.

In selecting articles, students should be encouraged to identify and share what prior knowledge they have of the topic. Research has shown that this not only influences what a reader remembers from a text, but also his or her understanding of the content (Alderson, 2000).

4. *Quality*

Students need to be guided to consider the quality of the publication they have identified, and to be prepared to reject poor-quality articles. They need to understand that indicators of quality are present in the authorship (what are his or her credentials?) and in the journal in which the article was published. To assist students with the latter, the practice of peer-review needs to be explained and, ideally, demonstrated, which can be done most effectively through the lecturer's personal examples. Students may also be guided to provide constructive peer-reviews of each other's writing, which serves to improve understandings of the process and its purposes. It is also useful to draw students' attention to journal ranking and the criteria used. They can be asked to identify the top journals in their fields. Students can also be encouraged to seek articles recommended by their lecturers or librarians.

5. *Difficulty*

Research has shown that for adequate reading comprehension, students need to know at least 90 to 95% of the words in a text in order to be able to understand the main ideas and therefore be able to guess the meaning of unknown words (Laufer, 1998; Nagy & Scott, 2000). Students should therefore be encouraged to select only those articles that meet this criterion, and to this end, they can be shown strategies to establish readability, for example, by selecting two or three paragraphs at random and underlining every unknown word. If the proportion of unfamiliar words greatly exceeds 10%, they should be encouraged to locate another article.

6. *Uses*

Conference proceedings and journal articles have many uses in the preparation of ESL students. At the Petroleum Institute these uses include:

- *'Bottom-up' language analysis:* e.g. learning new vocabulary or structures.
- *'Top-down' language analysis:* e.g. discourse (text organization (abstract, introduction, literature review, conclusion etc); cohesion; coherence; reference; conjunction, etc) and genre (purpose; audience; descriptive and expository genres).
- *Exemplifying academic standards:* e.g. citing (short quotes, long quotes, paraphrasing); reference lists; keywords and their purpose; contrasting citation standards (e.g. APA, Harvard); avoiding plagiarism; footnotes and endnotes; appendices.
- *Extracting content:* e.g. identifying the author's intentions, position, thesis, main claims, arguments and counter-arguments and supporting detail.
- *Identifying assumptions:* authors of academic articles assume that the reader is familiar with key concepts and debates within the area. Students can be guided to deconstruct the writing, to 'read between the lines', in order to identify such assumptions.
- *Developing information literacy skills:* students are guided to use the library's database and internet search engines such as 'Google Scholar' to identify appropriate articles.
- *Developing academic writing skills:* students are encouraged to integrate reading with writing, for example, by analyzing examples of paraphrase or synthesis, or sections

of text such as the abstract, introduction or conclusion, and then using these as guides in writing their own.

- *Encouraging critical thinking:* e.g. students can be asked to identify and critique the author's credentials and the extent to which the journal may be considered a quality journal. They also need to consider whether the evidence that the author provides for his or her findings is sufficient or not; if his or her arguments are valid and logical; what the author may have omitted and whether or not the text contains any inconsistencies or contradictions. They need to be guided to reject articles that fail to meet criteria, and these may be negotiated with their lecturer. Nunn (2009) notes that before students are able to select appropriate texts, they need to understand and apply various criteria, and he describes an approach in which students are guided to generate criteria themselves in the form of a pre-reading activity, having attended a series of mini-lectures on genre and pragmatic theory.
- *Encouraging reflection, metacognition and metacommunication:* students can be asked to review their learning processes in terms of successful strategies and less successful strategies, for example, sharing with peers both what was learned from their reading and how it was learned. Metacognitive and metacommunicative skills play an important role in reading, and students can be introduced to active reading strategies that aid comprehension including clearly understanding why they are reading, identifying significant content, monitoring comprehension and taking action when comprehension is poor (Baker & Brown, 1980). Metacognition can also help students to apply old knowledge to new situations because effective learning requires the organization of knowledge into chunks of stored patterns that can be readily called on.
- *Initiating students' own research:* articles provide an excellent source of inspiration for students' own enquiry. They can also provide the basis for a literature review section of their report. Opportunities for team work are presented as students, working in teams of 4, for example, can each read, annotate and summarize an article, adding their work to a pool from which all can draw in the preparation of an (albeit mini) literature review.
- *Enticing students into the 'web' of scholarship and enquiry:* Students who are encouraged to deconstruct an academic article gain a better understanding of processes of enquiry, and are more likely to appreciate the importance of the various

stages in the process, such as establishing a research question, carrying out a literature review, identifying suitable methods and analyzing data. They can begin to see how each stage is a key part of “a serious, sustained line of enquiry” (Neumann, 1993, p.97). This can help to improve understandings of the products of scholarship and their various functions. Deconstruction and analysis of academic writing with a view to carrying out original research can also help to encourage collaboration and cooperation between lecturers and students, as both parties are focused on identifying feasible and appropriate lines of enquiry. Collaboration positions lecturers’ work at the heart of scholarship and many opportunities are created for lecturers to use their own work as examples, enhancing students’ understanding of the profession and its culture. Guided reading of academic articles can also be confidence-building for students, making it more likely that students will consult such articles in the course of their future studies.

- *To encourage students to see learning in broader terms, involving content as well as process and values:* Lecturers have a responsibility to help students to see that learning goes beyond facts to include process. Hermida, citing Herteis (2007), notes that students tend to think about learning in terms of content that consists of facts and principles, while the rest of what happens is simply ‘activities’. As a result of this observation, he notes:

So “teachers have a dual responsibility: we must do a better job of explaining to our students that these “hidden” things are actually content, and we have to give them the opportunities to learn them.” We need to teach reading processes, attitudes, and skills explicitly and move them to the forefront of our actual curricula instead of taking them for granted.

Hermida, 2009, p.26

If reflection and metacognition are integrated in teaching academic literacy, teachers can help students to see that content and process have equal value; indeed, they should be guided to understand that process *is* the content of the academic literacy class.

Many of the uses described above presuppose the judicious selection of articles, which could be time-consuming for teachers; however this is a task that students themselves can most usefully be equipped to complete. It is important that students appreciate that not all academic reporting will be appropriate or useful; nor will it always meet the standards identified above. Such reporting should, of course, be avoided, and the application of quality criteria by students themselves is an important part of the process, going some way towards developing their critical thinking skills.

In the appendix, I have provided links to a few examples of articles that have successfully been used with students who have attained a minimum proficiency level of IELTS band 5 or equivalent. I also provide a link to the *Directory of Open Access Journals*, an invaluable resource in relation to the approach described above.

Conclusion

Academic articles, with the advent of the internet, have become readily-available artifacts of an “international intellectual environment” (Graddol, 2007, p.79). This paper explores the possibilities created by their use as resources in the preparation of first-year ESL students, in particular, for university study. While it is not suggested that these students should read academic articles to the exclusion of other materials, it is shown that requiring them to read appropriate and relevant journal articles as part of the curriculum can offer significant opportunities and benefits in terms of their linguistic development and academic socialization. The use of such materials, in particular, contributes towards a “constructively aligned curriculum”, in which the components are integrated, serve the same goals and support each other (Biggs, 1999).

To provide students with adequate support in relation to this opportunity, however, a phased approach is proposed whereby students begin by reading articles closely related to their current status as students in transition, followed by articles concerned with scholarship in teaching and learning in students’ disciplines, from which they progress to those drawn from the discipline itself. This last phase is essential, as:

... academic subjects and their literacy requirements can differ across disciplines so that, for example, expectations for Science students can vary in straightforward, or subtle ways, from those for History students. Such variation could include written (or oral) conventions for how to structure an argument or report research findings (Carlin, 2005; McCallum, 2004). Johnson, 2008, p.239

Given that successful entry into the target discourse community is the ultimate aim of any course that seeks to prepare ESL students for academic study, this phase cannot be ignored. A curriculum that is constructively aligned as suggested here has important consequences in terms of enhancing its integrity and credibility, both of which are likely to lead to greater student satisfaction. The materials and the support provided are also likely to encourage students to feel included and involved in the academic culture, rather than left languishing on the periphery, trying to work out what they need to do in order to be fully accepted by a culture that can appear, from the perspective of a new student, intimidating and

unwelcoming. Most importantly, carefully-selected articles exemplify high standards of scholarship, which, when mirrored by good teaching and high lecturer expectations, can elicit student writing of an exceptionally high quality.



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Appendix

Examples of 'open access' journal articles of potential interest to ESL students with a minimum proficiency level of IELTS 5 or equivalent

Many of the articles in the list of references above meet the criteria identified in this paper and therefore offer potential in relation to the category of students referred to here. Several are available online and in such cases, links have been provided. The *Directory of Open Access Journals* is also a useful source. This service:

... covers free, full text, quality controlled scientific and scholarly journals. We aim to cover all subjects and languages. There are now 4539 journals in the directory. Currently 1761 journals are searchable at article level. As of today 337443 articles are included in the DOAJ service.
(see <http://www.doaj.org/>)

A few possibilities, organized according to the main themes of this article, are provided below.

EAP/ESP:

Is EAP Necessary? A Survey of Hong Kong Undergraduates
Ken Hyland
<http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ajelt/vol7/art5.htm>

A Shared Focus for WAC, Writing Tutors and EAP: Identifying the "Academic Purposes" in Writing Across the Curriculum
Kate Chanock
<http://wac.colostate.edu/journal/vol15/chanock.pdf>

Academic literacy development: a multiple perspectives approach to blended learning
Katherine Gilliver-Brown & E. Marcia Johnson
<http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/auckland09/procs/gilliver-brown.pdf>

Transition into university culture:

'Nobody cares': the challenge of isolation in school to university transition
Mark Peel
<http://www.aair.org.au/jir/May00/Peel.pdf>

The role of social transition in students' adjustment to the first-year of university
Tanya Kantanis
<http://www.aair.org.au/jir/May00/Kantanis.pdf>

How school-leavers choose a preferred university course and possible effects on the quality

of the school-university transition

Richard James

<http://www.aair.org.au/jir/May00/James.pdf>

Scholarship:

The value of scholarship.

Angela Brew

<http://www.herdsa.org.au/branches/vic/Cornerstones/pdf/Brew.PDF>

A New Model of Scholarship at Kwantlen University College.

Balbir Gurm & Alice Macpherson

http://www.kwantlen.ca/_shared/assets/new_model_of_scholarship_20067481.pdf

Scholarship in teaching as a core professional value: what does this mean to the academic?

Gill Nicholls

<http://www.esal.ee/ookk/Scholars.pdf>

Reading for academic purposes:

Academic English reading proficiency at the university level: A Norwegian case study.

Glenn Ole Hellekjær

<http://nflrc.hawaii.edu/rfl/October2009/articles/hellekjaer.pdf>

Reading readings: How students learn to (dis)engage with critical reading

Kate Wilson, Linda Devereux, Mary Macken-Horarik, Chris Trimmingham-Jack

<http://www.herdsa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/conference/2004/PDF/P048-jt.pdf>

Integrating Extensive Reading into an English For Academic Purposes Program

John Macalister

<http://www.readingmatrix.com/articles/macalister/article.pdf>