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Academic literacy curriculum renewal at a South African university: A case study

Abstract

The number of students admitted by universities in South Africa has grown tremendously in the past two to three decades. Most of these students, however, graduate from high school without having gained the academic literacy ability required for success at university. A result of this has been that the students struggle to handle the demands of university education in English, the medium of instruction at these institutions. This causes them to fail to complete their studies in the scheduled time and even to drop out. South African universities have responded to this challenge by introducing academic literacy programmes to help the students bridge the language gap between high school and university. These universities spend large sums of money on academic literacy development requirements such as teachers, learning materials and general administration. It is important therefore that the academic literacy courses offered by such universities are effectively designed and taught. The Central University of Technology (CUT) introduced its first academic language programme in 2007. To date, three academic language courses have been offered under the auspices of this programme. The first of these courses was borrowed from another university and was taught at CUT until the end of 2009. The second one was developed by the academic language development staff inside CUT and was introduced at the beginning of 2010. The whole of 2013 was spent on designing and developing yet another academic language course inside the university, which was introduced in January 2014. This paper is a case study of the curriculum renewal process that went into this project.

Keywords: Academic literacy, curriculum renewal, construct, PTEEP

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1. Introduction

In 2006, the Unit for Academic Development (UAD) at the Central University of Technology (CUT) originated the idea of an academic literacy course. The broader origin of this idea was the low levels of academic literacy that had been reported in several studies (e.g. Weideman &Van Rensburg 2002; Van Dyk 2005) among first year students at South African universities and the resultant need for these universities to deal with this challenge. Being a university of technology where hands-on training is prioritized, CUT did not, at this point, have an academic English or English as a Second Language (ESL) department that could provide the foundation for generating a solution to this problem. In the face of this, the UAD approached the nearby University of the Free State (UFS) which had an established Department of English and which had been running an academic literacy course for first year students for about 15 years. The UAD was determined to have a similar course introduced at CUT. Eventually, an agreement was reached with the English Department of the UFS for CUT to use the UFS academic literacy course for an annual fee. This course was introduced in 2007. Two years down the line, the UAD decided that a new academic literacy course be developed from within CUT to replace the one purchased from the UFS. The course was developed and offered from January 2010. Following complaints from several departments about the relevance of this course for its students, two ESL professionals were mandated to review the course at the beginning of 2013. The finding of this review was that the course was not informed by any theory of academic literacy and that it was mainly designed on the basis of intuition. Consequently, a decision was taken to renew the academic literacy curriculum at CUT and generate a new course that has been offered since January 2014. This paper is a case study of this curriculum renewal process. Specifically, the paper focuses on the needs analysis, conceptual design, material selection and development, thematic content and the teaching methodologies informing this new course.

2. Needs Analysis

The introduction of an academic literacy course at CUT in 2007 was preceded by the administration of a standardized test of academic literacy called the Placement Test in English for Educational Purposes (PTEEP) to a sample of first year students at the institution. The PTEEP was a test of academic literacy developed by the Alternative Admissions Research Project (AARP) of the University of Cape Town. The purpose of this testing was to determine the extent to which these students where academically literate and whether there was a need for the university to intervene. The PTEEP was, in this sense, used as a needs analysis instrument for introducing the academic literacy programme at CUT. The descriptive statistics of the scores obtained by these students on the test are captured in **Table 1** below:

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the scores obtained by a sample of first year students on the PTEEP at CUT in 2007 (N=408)

Variable	M	SD	Max	Min
PTEEP	39.1	12.4	73.4	8.5

The mean score for these students was interpreted to be too low and an indication that they would struggle to cope with the demands of academic education if no academic literacy intervention was put in place for them. It was on the basis of this interpretation that the first academic literacy course was piloted in 2007 and ultimately, fully implemented in 2008.

Since the PTEEP was the needs analysis instrument for the establishment of this course, it was logical that the construct of the test should form the basis for its design. For the purpose of setting the scene for this article, a preliminary discussion of this test and its theoretical bases is therefore relevant.

3. The Placement Test in English for Educational Purposes

The PTEEP is the predecessor to the current National Benchmark Test of Academic Literacy (NBT AL) and was to a very large extent, developed on the basis of the same construct that informs the NBT AL. This construct is, in the first place, informed by Bachman and Palmer's (1996) view of language ability (Cliff & Yeld 2006; Van Dyk & Weideman 2004). Bachman and Palmer (1996) view language ability as being constituted by what they call language knowledge and strategic competence. Language knowledge itself consists of two broad categories, namely, organizational and pragmatic knowledge (Bachman & Palmer 1996). In the words of these scholars, "organizational knowledge is involved in controlling the formal structure of language for producing or comprehending grammatically acceptable utterances or sentences, and for organizing these to form texts, both oral and written" while "pragmatic knowledge enables us to create or interpret discourse by relating utterances or sentences and texts to their meaning, to the intentions of language users, and to relevant characteristics of the language use setting (Bachman & Palmer 1996: 68-69)." Strategic competence, on the other hand, refers to "a set of metacognitve components, or strategies, which can be thought of as higher order executive processes that provide a cognitive management function of language use, as well as other cognitive activities" (Bachman & Palmer 1996: 70). These metacognitive processes involve goal-setting, assessment and planning (Bachman & Palmer 1996). It is the interaction of language knowledge and pragmatic competence together with the language user's topical knowledge and affective schemata that, in Bachman and Palmer's (1996) view, makes language use possible. Bachman and Palmer (1996: 70) have explained this interaction in the following words:

> Using language involves the language user's topical knowledge and affective schemata, as well as all other areas of knowledge discussed above. What makes language use possible is the integration of all these components as language users create and interpret discourse in situationally appropriate ways.

The second basis for the construct underpinning the PTEEP was the New Literacy Studies and its theory of 'academic literacies' (Cliff and Yeld 2006). The New Literacy Studies view what is commonly called academic literacy as having been approached from three main perspectives to date. These are the 'study skills', 'academic socialization' and the 'academic literacies' perspectives (Lea & Street 2006; Boughey 2013; Van Dyk & Van de Poel 2013). In the study skills model, the belief is that students are unable to cope with university education because they lack sentence-level knowledge of the language of learning and teaching. From the point of view of this model, the students simply need to be taught discrete language items such as, for example, grammar, vocabulary and spelling for them to overcome this challenge. In the words of Van Dyk and Van de Poel (2013: 48), once knowledge of these items is achieved, it is "transferrable to other contexts without difficulty. If students, for example, learn the grammar and spelling of a language, they should not have difficulties passing their exams in the prescribed time." The academic socialization model relates very closely with what would be called language for specific purposes in applied linguistics. Proponents of this model believe that students need to be equipped with the ability to handle discourses that typify their particular disciplines. The argument in this case, for example, is that students enrolled in Engineering should, as a way of teaching them academic literacy, be familiarized with discourses that are typical of Engineering as a field of study. As Jacobs (2013: 132) puts it, "discipline-specific approaches … should be focusing on what counts as knowledge in the discipline, and then making explicit for students the principles through which new knowledge is created". The 'academic literacies' perspective views the study skills and academic socialization models as being too restrictive and not adequately representative of the varied discourse competences that students need to possess in order to function effectively in the different communicative contexts that are the hallmark of university education. From an academic literacies perspective, Lea and Street (2006: 159) view "the curriculum as involving a variety of communicative practices, including genres, fields and disciplines … academic literacy practices is the requirement to switch practices between one setting and another, to deploy a repertoire of linguistic practices appropriate to each setting, …" In other words, "this approach claims to support students in such a way that they will be able to switch practices from one setting, genre, field or discipline to another and thus transfer knowledge as they are no longer powerless and outsiders, but rather part of the inner cycle of academic practices" (Van Dyk & Van Poel 2013: 49).

Lastly, the construct of the PTEEP was informed by the distinction that Cummins (1984, 1996, 2009) makes between what he calls Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Cliff & Yeld 2006). In Cummins's thinking, these two types of language abilities are required for conversation in social settings and engaging with academic discourse respectively.

With all these theories of language ability in mind, the construct of the PTEEP was defined as the ability to do the following:

- negotiate meaning at word, sentence, paragraph and whole-text level;
- understand discourse and argument structure and the text "signals" that underlie this structure;
- extrapolate and draw inferences beyond what has been stated in text;
- separate essential from non-essential and super-ordinate from sub-ordinate information;
- understand and interpret visually encoded information, such as graphs, diagrams and flow-charts;
- understand and manipulate numerical information;
- understand the importance and authority of own voice;
- understand and encode the metaphorical, non-literal and idiomatic bases of language; and
- negotiate and analyse text genre.

(Cliff & Yeld 2006: 20)

4. Conceptual design of the course

The design and development of any academic literacy course on the basis of performance on this test should therefore have been informed by the construct on the basis of which the needs analysis instrument itself was designed. Indeed, Patterson and Weideman (2013: 107) have pointed out that "constructs of academic literacy are used both for test and course design". It is in the context of this relationship between the two artefacts that Weideman (2013: 1) has asked the following questions:

> How much reciprocity is there in the realms of language testing, language course design, and language policy making? Why do we not explicitly check whether the design of a course should be as responsibly and carefully done as a test? How can we learn from language policy development about making tests more accessible and accountable? What can test designers learn from course developers about specificity?

For the purpose of developing the current course, attention was therefore paid to the definition of academic literacy that underpinned the PTEEP. In addition, at the time the idea of developing a third academic literacy course for CUT was mooted, a slightly more elaborate view of academic literacy had come into being. This was the construct

formulated by Van Dyk and Weideman (2004), who described an academically literate student as one who is able to do the following:

- Understand a range of academic vocabulary in context;
- Interpret and use metaphor and idiom, and perceive connotation, word play and ambiguity;
- Understand relations between different parts of a text, be aware of the logical development of (an academic) text, via introductions to conclusions, and know how to use language that serves to make the different parts of a text hang together;
- Interpret different kinds of text type (genre), and show sensitivity for the meaning that they convey, and the audience that they are aimed at;
- Interpret, use and produce information presented in graphic or visual format;
- Make distinction between essential and non-essential information, fact and opinion, propositions and arguments; distinguish between cause and effect, classify, categorize and handle data that make comparisons;
- See sequence and order, do simple numerical estimations and computations that are relevant to academic information, that allow comparisons to be made, and can be applied for the purpose of an argument;
- Know what counts as evidence for an argument, extrapolate from information by making inferences, and apply the information or its implications to other cases than the one at hand;
- Understand the communicative function of various ways of expression in academic language (such as defining, providing examples, arguing); and
- Make meaning (e.g., of an academic text) beyond the level of sentence.

(Van Dyk & Weideman 2004: 145)

Van Dyk and Weideman (2004) have added that their construct of academic literacy is also informed by Blanton's (1994) view of academic language ability. Blanton (1994: 228) has argued that academic literacy involves a student's ability to interact with academic texts:

> Whatever else we do with L2 students to prepare them for the academic mainstream, we must foster the behaviour of 'talking' to texts, talking and writing about them. Linking them to other texts, connecting them to their readers' own lives and experience, and then using their experience to illuminate their experience.

Specifically, Blanton (1994: 226) has argued that an academically literate student should be able to do the following:

1. Interpret texts in the light of their own experience and their own experience in the light of texts;

2. Agree or disagree with texts in the light of that experience ;

3. Link texts to each other;

4. Synthesize texts, and use their synthesis to build new assertions;

5. Extrapolate from texts;

6. Create their own texts, doing any or all of the above;

7. Talk and write about texts doing any or all of the above;

8. Do numbers 6 and 7 in such a way as to meet the expectations of the audience.

(Blanton 1994: 226)

The Bachman and Palmer (1996) and the Blanton (1994) models of language ability promote what Weideman (2003) and Van Dyk and Weideman (2004) refer to as an 'open' as opposed to a 'restrictive' view of language ability. In the words of Van Dyk and Weideman (2004: 139), a restrictive and outdated view of language "limits it to a combination of sound, form, and meaning, or, in technical linguistic terms, phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic elements" whereas an open one "maintains that language is not only expressive, but communicative, intended to mediate and negotiate human interaction". These two opposing perspectives of language ability are presented in **Table 2** below.

Table 2: Two perspectives on language ability

Restrictive	Open
Language is composed of elements: • **sound** • **form, grammar** • **meaning**	Language is a social instrument to: • mediate • negotiate human interaction • in specific contexts
Main function: expression	*Main function:* communication
Language learning = mastery of structure	*Language learning* = becoming competent in communication
Focus: language	*Focus:* process of using language

(Van Dyk & Weideman 2004: 140)

For the purpose of renewing the academic literacy curriculum at CUT, the Van Dyk and Weideman (2004) construct was chosen to be the basis for the conceptual design of the new course. The major reason for this was that this construct was more elaborate and an expansion on that of the PTEEP. Indeed, Van Dyk and Weideman (2004: 142) have argued that in their exploration of what this construct should look like, they "considered first Blanton's (1994, p. 226) description of what proficient academic readers and writers should be able to do; second, Bachman and Palmer's (1996, p. 68) framework; and third, an adaptation of this conceived of by Nan Yeld and her associates (2000) at the Alternative Admissions Research Project (AARP) at the University of Cape Town."

5. Objectives of the course

The course generically focuses on the teaching of reading and writing in academic English. In the words of Butler (2013: 82) the main claim for generic academic literacy instructional approaches is that "teaching students the generic AL abilities required for higher education (focusing on 'authentic task types) should contribute to academic success, i.e. it should enable students to apply these abilities successfully in the mainstream courses". The decision to focus on reading and writing in particular was that the ability to handle academic success successfully is mainly demonstrated through effective reading and writing (Gee 2003). The essential role of reading and writing in academic settings has been described by Lea and Street (1998: 160) in the following terms: "academic literacy practices – reading and writing within disciplines – constitute central processes through which students learn new subjects and develop their knowledge about new areas of study". The generic reading and writing approach to the teaching of academic literacy has of course been criticized for its generality and skills-orientation in favour of approaches that are informed by 'academic literacies' and

subject discipline theories (Butler 2013; Boughey 2013). Butler (2013) has argued, however, that translating these theories into teaching remain a practical challenge.

The objectives of the course are therefore reading and writing oriented and are informed by the construct of academic literacy that informs the course. As an example, the objectives of the first unit of the course are presented below:

By the end of this unit, students should be able

- Locate information and clarify meaning by skimming, scanning, predicting and using other strategies.
- Distinguish between main ideas and supporting details.
- Understand relations between different parts of text and be able to identify and use transitions and linking words to achieve cohesion.
- Use context clues to figure out the meanings of new words, recognize metaphors and distinguish between different parts of speech.
- Identify and explain what is not directly stated in the text by making inferences, drawing conclusions and making generalizations about a text.
- Use support that is substantial, relevant and concrete.
- Use critical thinking skills to apply what has been read to real world situations

6. The thematic content of the new course

Once the conceptual design of the new course was chosen, a decision had to be taken on what should constitute its thematic content. At the time of this curriculum renewal, CUT's vision 2020 emphasized, among others, innovation, sustainable development, entrepreneurship and community engagement as the themes the university was planning to integrate into its entire curriculum. The designers of the new course decided that making these topics the carrier themes of the course would therefore be a good introduction of these themes into the broader CUT curriculum. Thus, the course comprises four units, each of which has one of these topics constituting the themes used for academic literacy development. The idea was not to teach these concepts *per se* but to use them to teach academic literacy thematically. Exposing the students to these locally valued themes and raising their awareness of their importance would be a supplementary bonus in the service of the university's vision 2020. These themes would not necessarily be interesting to all students. The responsibility for making them interesting would be the teachers'. Grabe and Stoller (2014: 191) have indeed argued that "if mandated … readings are not inherently interesting, the teacher should determine ways to frame them so that they are (more) interesting to students".

7. Materials Selection and Development

The next step in the development of the course was to select and develop the materials that would help promote the achievement of the course objectives. In this case, the course developers started by searching for and gathering a large number of articles/readings that focused on the four themes referred to earlier. For example, the developers started by searching for and assembling approximately twenty reading passages that dealt with aspects of innovation and that adhered to their preferred reading difficulty level. This difficulty ranged from Flesch-Kincade Grade levels of 11 to 12, which were determined by computing the readability statistics of these texts on Microsoft Word. The passages were then categorized into two genre types, namely, informative and persuasive, which contained, among others, features of text organization such as cause/effect and comparison/contrast. On a very small scale, this was in keeping with the "Interpret different kinds of text type (genre), and show sensitivity for the meaning that they convey, and the audience that they are aimed at" subdomain of the construct of academic literacy on the basis of which the course was designed. Each of the text types was therefore integrated into each unit and enough effort was expended into ensuring that they were adequately recycled throughout the course. Exposure to these different genres should, "offer students explicit and systematic explanations of the ways language functions in social contexts" (Hyland 2003: 18). Moreover, the reading passages were analyzed to determine if they contained text and language qualities such as organization, cohesion, vocabulary, syntax, and semantics which would help advance the achievement of the overall academic literacy objectives of the course. Ultimately, the best passages from those identified for each genre were chosen for inclusion in the course book based on how well they, in the course designers' view, could expose students to the kind of language that would help to improve their academic literacy levels.

8. The teaching methodology used in the course

In the South African higher education context, academic literacy programmes are mainly designed for students who speak English - the medium of instruction at most universities – as an additional language. The probable reason for this is the logical relationship between academic literacy, language learning and academic success. In the words of Van Dyk and Van de Poel (2013: 52), "academic literacy, language and academic performance … are closely related. Language, in fact, could be considered the cornerstone of literacy and literacy, in turn, is crucial for academic success". Currently, the teaching of English as an additional language is informed by a pre-, while-, and post methodology. In the words of Grabe and Stoller (2014: 191), this methodology "prepares students for reading, helps them while reading, and then guides them in considering texts (and text information) for a variety of purposes". This was therefore the teaching methodology chosen for the new course for CUT that aimed at improving reading and writing.

When one considers an example in the reading domain, the pre-reading stage of a reading lesson includes those activities that precede the actual process of reading for comprehension, the purpose of which is to set students up for successful reading. The objectives of pre-reading is, according to Grabe and Stoller (2014: 192) to establish a purpose for reading, tap prior knowledge, provide information needed for comprehension …, set up expectations, stimulate interest, build confidence and motivation, explore text organization, model and practice common pre-reading strategies …

Stoller (1994) has suggested a number of activities that can be performed in a reading lesson to accomplish pre-reading. Some of these activities include creating a semantic map, studying the layout of a reading passage, skimming for main ideas, scanning for details, matching main ideas with paragraphs, examining visuals, reading selected paragraphs carefully, presenting main ideas, consulting a dictionary, and considering new vocabulary (Stoller 1994: 1-4). For the purpose of accomplishing pre-reading in the new academic literacy course under focus in this study, activities were developed and included in the course book that aimed at helping students activate their background knowledge of the course content and relate it to their own lives. These activities were all designed based on a broadly communicative approach to language teaching. In this approach, pre-reading activities typically enable students to work together and share information in order to categorize, classify, evaluate, rank, and build on this information. It encourages effective communication and further language development among students. During this stage, the teacher acts as a facilitator so that language use and interaction are maximized and that language learning processes are integrated into the lesson. Communicative activities such as these focus on specific content and encourage the authentic use of language. In the new academic literacy course used at CUT, the pre-reading activities take forms such as anticipation guides, prediction clouds, visual representations, vocabulary previews, and graphic organizers.

While- or during-reading activities are those that students are required to engage with while they are busy reading. These activities are mainly aimed at helping students monitor their comprehension as they read and deal with comprehension problems before they become too daunting for them to handle (Grabe 1991; Grabe & Stoller 2001). Grabe and Stoller (2014: 192) have identified the objectives of during reading activities as the following:

> guide reading to facilitate comprehension …, help students construct meaning and monitor comprehension, give students opportunities to connect what is read with what they know so they can evaluate what is being read, support ongoing summarization, model and practice common strategies used at this stage …, promote discussions that support comprehension and strategy development.

Some of the activities associated with the during-reading stage are outlining or summarizing key ideas in a difficult section, determining sources of difficulty and seeking clarification, looking for questions to answers posed during pre-reading and writing down

predictions of what will come next (Stoller 1994: 4; Grabe & Stoller 2001: 191). For the purpose of incorporating the while-/during-reading stage in the academic literacy course currently offered at CUT, questions on the content of the texts selected for the course were developed and inserted in the right margins of these passages. Among others, these questions oblige students to analyze organizational patterns of texts, examine structures, use context clues to find the meaning of new words, and state their opinions on the content. Put differently, the questions ask the students to consider other structures and vocabulary choices based on the context as a whole in order to consider form, meaning and use in a particular context. This enables students to practice being active readers, learn language in context and make meaning beyond sentences. Producing and comprehending language this way "are a factor in our ability to perceive and process stretches of discourse, to formulate representations of meaning from not just a single sentence, but referents in both previous sentences and following sentences" (Brown 1980: 189).

The post-reading stage mainly focuses on measuring and consolidating the students' holistic comprehension of a reading passage. Typically, post-reading "extends ideas and information from the text while also ensuring that the major ideas and supporting information are well understood" (Grabe & Stoller 2001: 191). In other words, post-reading aims at helping students comprehend a reading passage well enough so that they are able to apply this understanding outside the reading passage itself. Grabe and Stoller (2014: 192) have described the objectives of post reading in the following words:

> check comprehension, explore how text organization supports comprehension, provide opportunities for reading fluency development …, ask students to summarize, synthesize, evaluate, integrate, extend, and apply text information, ask students to critique the author and aspects of the text …, establish and recognize comprehension successes …., model and practice common post-reading strategies

All the post-reading activities in the new academic literacy course at CUT were designed based on Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom et al., 1956) so that the students are engaged at all levels of thinking. In particular, the higher order thinking skills covered by Bloom are crucial, as they lead to problem solving skills that can be transferred to the students' surroundings. It is important therefore, in the context of Bloom's Taxonomy, that the current academic literacy course offered at CUT raises the students' awareness of the four themes of value to the university, namely, innovation, sustainable development, entrepreneurship and community engagement, and that they start thinking about how they can start improving their situation in the world from these four perspectives. To this end, the course contains post-reading activities that allow students to reflect on a reading passage in a variety of ways. These activities are communicative in nature and enable students to discuss the reading passages in relation to their lives and make real world applications. Among others, agreement and disagreement continuums are used to encourage students to share their opinions and allow them to explain their reasoning

with others. This obliges students to engage affectively with the course content and to relate it to their own views and feelings. These activities enable students not only to become more engaged learners of language, but to engage more with what is happening in the world around them. **Figure 1** below is a visual representation of the pre-, while/during-and post-reading stages incorporated in the new academic literacy course offered at CUT in 2014.

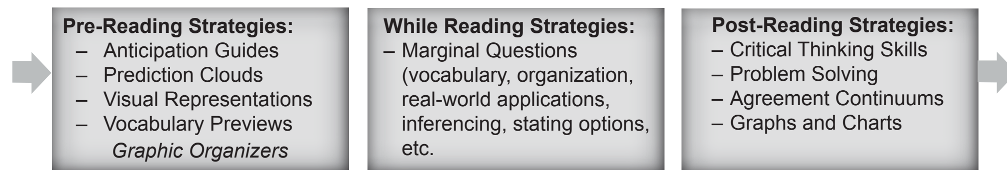

Figure 1: The stages of an effective reading lesson

Typically, writing in an academic context involves planning, gathering information, drafting, revising and editing or proofreading. The pre-, while/during- and post framework is, in this sense, applicable to the teaching of writing as well. This is the format that also forms the basis for the teaching of writing in the academic literacy course currently offered at CUT. The writing section of this course aims to help students understand organizational structure, recognize genre specific vocabulary and syntax, critique the effectiveness of arguments, and use writing strategies successfully. Firstly, the students are taught essay writing strategies. The students are required to produce a variety of texts in their different disciplines. As a result of the time constraints that characterize academic literacy teaching at this university, however, not all of these types of writing could be accommodated in the course. As the most commonly required kind of writing across most disciplines in academic contexts, essay writing was prioritized. In two units of the course, four parts of an academic essay, namely, introduction, body, transitions and conclusion are taught separately first and holistically later. The pre-writing stage of a lesson on each of these parts includes activities such as explaining and giving examples of such parts. This is followed by activities aimed at drawing the students' attention back to a previously read passage and asking them to judge the soundness of the text based on their understanding of what constitutes parts of an essay. This is followed by brainstorming on a writing topic. The while/during-writing stage mainly involves a joint construction of the part of an essay under focus by the class under the guidance of the teacher. This involves students contributing sentences towards the completion of the part of the essay involved. In other words, the teacher and his/her class work together to produce one piece of writing. Once a piece of writing has been constructed, the teacher works with the students to revise and proofread it. After this, the students are given a writing task on a different topic to complete on their own to show how much they understood the process that was involved in producing the jointly constructed text with their teacher in class. This is followed by the post-writing stage where the teacher gives feedback to the students on their writing assignments. The feedback is given on

the basis of a writing assessment rubric which is in the students' workbook and which is introduced and explained to them at the beginning of the course. The writing assessment focuses on and gives equal weight out of twenty points to Focus, Organization, Support and Mechanics. In the process of providing feedback, students are required to consider this feedback in the context of their marked work and with reference to the rubric.

Secondly, the RAFT writing strategy (Saskatoon Public Schools 2004-2008) is taught to complement the essay writing instruction dealt with above. RAFT (Role, Audience, Format, Topic) is taught to train students to consider different audiences and points of view when writing. Teaching this strategy follows the pre-, while-, and post-format similar to that used in writing the four parts of an essay. In the pre-reading stage of a RAFT strategy lesson, for example, the teacher asks students to look at a passage previously read in class and to identify its RAFT properties. In the while/during writing stage, the teacher constructs a new text jointly with the students applying the RAFT strategy. The students are then given a RAFT strategy writing assignment to produce on their own, which the teacher marks and gives feedback on in the post-writing stage. The combination of these two writing strategies not only prepares students for varied types of writing that they will have to produce at the university level, but also helps develop awareness among them that writing is context-specific. This idea is depicted in **Figure 2** below.

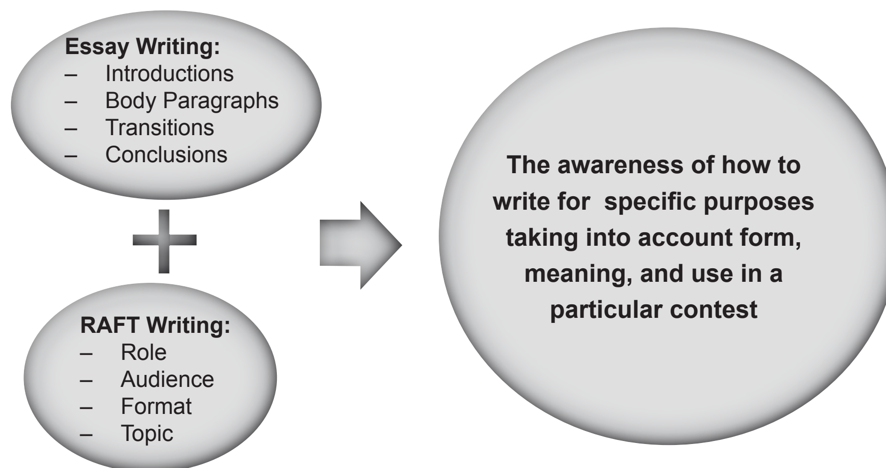

Figure 2: The purpose of the chosen writing strategies.

Finally, each of the four units of the course ends with two 'end of unit' assignments, the purpose of which is to consolidate learning. For these assignments, not only do the students have to use the reading and writing abilities acquired throughout a unit, they are also obliged to apply their knowledge of the content on innovation, sustainable development, entrepreneurship and community engagement. For these tasks, an essay and a group project are assigned based on the subject content of each unit. The essay must be written about a relevant, real-world case that the students are required to research

and describe using appropriate language, while the group project requires the students to work in groups to brainstorm a way to implement a change in their community based on the content of the unit. Students are required to make a PowerPoint presentation of their group idea and implementation plan to the class.

The final stage of the course renewal process involved determining if and ensuring that the objectives for each of the four units were informed by the construct of academic literacy underpinning the whole course and that the activities in a unit were all geared towards the achievement of such objectives. This was done by compiling a list of all the academic literacy abilities targeted by a unit and checking if the activities in such a unit would in fact help the students develop such abilities. Most importantly, the designers ensured that all the objectives were recycled in the course activities and that they were, in their judgement, adequately covered throughout the course book. Any objectives that were, in the designers' view, not adequately practiced in a unit would receive more attention in the next unit. Naturally, some objectives were more prioritized and given more attention and space than others.

9. Conclusion

This article was a case study of the academic literacy curriculum renewal process that was initiated and carried out at CUT in 2013. The course emanating from this process was introduced in January 2014. The article argues that the conceptual design of this course was informed by a construct that was founded and expanded on that of the Placement Test in English for Educational Purposes, the instrument that was used to assess the academic literacy needs of the students at this institution. The article also demonstrates that the themes and the materials selected for this course were informed by some of the graduate attributes emphasized in the university's vision 2020, namely, innovation, sustainable development, entrepreneurship and community engagement. These are the attributes that CUT was busy working towards infusing in the curriculum university wide. Furthermore, the article argues that academic literacy teaching falls within the field of teaching English as a second language (ESL) and that, for this reason, the teaching methodology informing the curriculum renewal process presented in this study followed a pre-, while-, and post format, the currently used methodology in the teaching of ESL. Also, the article demonstrates that academic literacy teaching in the course is organized around types of text genres containing discourse features that could, on a small scale, help students develop an awareness of text types. The article also shows how the 'end of unit' activities are geared towards helping students consolidate what they learn throughout a unit. Finally, the article emphasizes the importance of ensuring that all activities in the course book help the course achieve most of its objectives. This highlights the importance of aligning an academic literacy curriculum with the construct of academic literacy that is chosen for academic literacy course development. Logically, this construct should, in turn, be informed by the one underpinning the needs analysis instrument that precedes the development of a course and an evaluation of how successful the course was in making learning possible – effecting adequate development of academic literacy levels.

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