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Understanding student writing from lecturers' perspectives: acknowledging pedagogic complexity to support transformative practices in context.

By

Dr Lynn Coleman, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Cape Town, South Africa.
ColemanL@cput.ac.za

ORCID no: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9474-0311

Biography:
Lynn Coleman is a senior lecturer and academic staff developer at Cape Peninsula University of Technology. She has worked in the vocational higher education sector for two decades holding various professional, student support, teaching and academic and curriculum development roles. She completed her PhD in 2013 at the Open University in the United Kingdom. Her research explored the relationship between literacy practices and the curriculum environment in visual communication and media courses in the vocational university setting. Aspects of Lynn's PhD research was incorporated into edited volumes addressing the theme of literacies in the university. She has also published her work on literacy and textual practices in the vocational university and integrating curriculum theorisation with the academic literacies perspective in various local and international journals. She has secured research funding grants to pursue her research interests in student writing development, pedagogies of writing and action research as a tool for developing teachers-as-researchers. Lynn spent two months as Visiting Academic at the Division of Teaching and Learning at Uppsala University, Sweden in 2018. She is founding member and current convenor of regional inter-institutional Academic Literacies Forum in Cape Town.

Dr Jackie Tuck, The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK

jackie.tuck@open.ac.uk

ORCID no: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4116-5664

Biography:
Jackie Tuck is a Lecturer in English Language and Applied Linguistics at the Open University, UK. She has over thirty years of teaching experience in a wide range of post-compulsory educational settings including Further, Adult and Community and Higher Education. She has taught English Language Studies and Applied Linguistics, English Literature, Communication, English as an Additional or Foreign Language, English for Academic Purposes and Women's Studies. She completed her PhD in 2013. Her doctoral research focused on university teachers' practices around student writing in the disciplines. In her work she adopts an "academic literacies" approach, employing ethnographically-oriented
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methodology to critically explore the lived experiences of all participants in the complex web of practice relating to writing at university. She is a founding member and convenor of the Professional, Academic and Work-based Literacies Special Interest Group within the British Association for Applied Linguistics.

Please make **Jackie Tuck** the corresponding author for the paper.

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Abstract

In South Africa, inequalities endemic to HE systems worldwide are further compounded by apartheid legacies. Despite an intensive focus for over twenty years on how pedagogic intervention could be harnessed to address these inequalities, black students' participation and success rates in South African HE remain stubbornly low, suggesting a need for fresh perspectives. This paper draws on a study conducted in a South African vocational university to illuminate the complex nature of lecturers' writing pedagogies. It does this by placing lecturers at the centre of detailed qualitative enquiry, a relatively rare focus in student writing research. We show how lecturers understand student writing development and how their pedagogies are informed by language ideologies operating within and beyond the university. Findings suggest the need to engage with the complex lived experiences of lecturers in order to promote deeper pedagogical change, both in South Africa and the HE sector more widely.

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Keywords
Student writing; academic literacies; writing pedagogy; lecturers; language ideologies

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Introduction

For some thirty years there has been growing recognition of the centrality of language and academic literacy to student participation and success in HE. The work of scholars and practitioners contributing to the field of university language and literacy development can be broadly differentiated into two discourses offering competing approaches to student writing, each entailing distinct implicit theories of writing and different implied identities and roles for teacher and student (Ivanič 2004). On one side are powerful 'common sense' discourses that position the acquisition of decontextualised language and literacy skills as the major catalysts for student success. Within this framing, individual students are deemed to arrive at university with 'gaps' which their teachers must fill in order to enable them to meet the standards of the academic and professional domains they seek to enter (Haggis 2009; Boughey and McKenna 2016). This approach is borne out in transmission-oriented pedagogies which seek to ensure that students can reproduce the technically proficient texts prized within these domains. On the other hand are discourses associated with situated theories of literacy, which prioritise the connection between writing, knowledge and learning for students and scholars (Lea and Street 1998; Thesen and van Pletzen 2006). These discourses underpin academic socialisation approaches which acknowledge that academic literacy practices are socially situated, multiple and intimately linked with epistemology and so need to be made explicit for students in specific disciplinary contexts (Lea and Street 1998). For some, the emphasis on meaning rather than form in such epistemological framings points to more critical pedagogies which explicitly value the language resources, knowledges and cultures students bring with them to their studies. From this perspective, the teacher's role is not only to bridge gaps between students' vernacular language and literacy practices and those of the academy and professions, but to facilitate students' epistemic access to the academy (Boughey and McKenna 2016) and critical engagement with their chosen disciplines. In its fullest form, this framing arguably amounts to a third, transformative (Lillis and Scott 2007) discourse, predicated on dialogue and diversity rather than successful assimilation.

These alternative, context-sensitive writing discourses and pedagogies have developed currency as a moral response to the decontextualized approach because the latter frames some students as being deficient and, whether as a result of schooling, 'culture' or language background, inadequate to the task of obtaining a degree. In the South African context, decontextualizing discourses of students' skill and language 'deficits' perpetuate both

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ideologies of racial inequality and unequal outcomes for black[i] students. Unfortunately, there is evidence that research-informed academic development has made little headway in challenging 'common sense' deficit discourses as played out at classroom level in South African HE (Boughey 2013; Boughey and McKenna 2016) as elsewhere (e.g. as noted by Lea 2013). Moral commitments to challenge deficit framings of students seem not to have substantially impinged on in-use strategies which reinforce the very discourses they seek to challenge (Boughey 2013; Tuck 2018 in the UK context).

All of the broad framings of academic literacy development described above assign the teacher a pivotal role in supporting student writers' development, yet empirical attention to university teachers' experiences, perspectives and writing, has been limited. This paper draws on an ethnographically based study to focus directly on lecturers working in the disciplines of Marketing and Public Management to foreground the complexity of pedagogic activity around student writing. We argue that this study begins to address a lack of research and theorization of university teachers' work with student writers, without which the pedagogical success of any alternative approaches is likely to be limited.

Discourses of language and literacy at university in South Africa

At different points in the second half of the twentieth century, governments in a number of Anglophone contexts moved to expand participation in HE of minority and disadvantaged groups. A key response was to recognise the need for staff development for university lecturers (e.g. Laurillard 2003, Boughey 2007). Another key response was to develop provision designed to address 'gaps' between students' language and literacy skills and those required for academic success. These responses took different forms in different national locations (Ivanič and Lea 2006; Boughey 2013). In this discussion we focus specifically on the South African context, partly to contextualise the study presented here, but also because the acknowledged urgency of race equality issues in South Africa has meant particularly intense focus on contested questions of student skills and literacies. Moreover, South Africa's HE sector has long grappled with the issues which arise where a single language (English in most institutions) is intended as the vehicle for full educational participation of a multilingual student population. Such issues have, somewhat belatedly, come to the fore for institutions in many English-dominant countries tasked with addressing the linguistic diversity of their own student populations (for research highlighting this issue outside South Africa see Preece 2009 in UK, Horner et al. 2010 in US).

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A historical view of educational development in South Africa highlights the intimate entanglement of apartheid-structured racial discrimination with the language, literacy and writing support provided primarily for black students. In the early 1980s élite 'white' institutions began to grant access to increasing numbers of black students, deemed to need additional academic 'support' in order to cope with their university studies (Luckett and Shay 2017). This support centred on language and communication since the perceived limited (English) language proficiency of these students became the primary reason ascribed to their poor academic success (Kapp 1998). Most universities responded by providing discrete language support interventions (Boughey 2007; CHE 2016). Alongside changes in student demographics, the student support focus began to shift. Earlier narrow constructions of the language 'problem' started to give way to a new wave of understanding that placed language, literacy and learning within specific academic and disciplinary contexts (Boughey 2013). Guided by the work of literacies scholars such as Gee (1996), Street (1984), Prinsloo and Breier (1996) and Lea and Street (1998), South African practitioner-researchers started to highlight students' situated engagement in the various literacy activities they encountered within the university (Moore et al. 1998), demonstrating that success at university demands more than the mastery of a set of technical writing skills, English language competencies or target genres (for example, Thesen 1997; Leibowitz 2000).

However, within the South African sector as elsewhere, this discursive and pedagogic shift, though influential in some circles, appears to have been far from comprehensive. Boughey (2013) argues that under the guise of appropriated critical terms such as 'academic literacies' (Lillis and Scott 2007), institutions, educational developers and lecturers have continued to reinforce language ideologies that position students as being in deficit of a single (autonomous) set of (English) language skills and writing conventions. From this perspective, then, despite the rich contribution of scholars keen to ensure that the multiple resources students bring to their university learning are validated and mobilised, their research does not appear to have had a substantial impact on dominant discourses and the way these play out in practice (Lea 2013). This argument is borne out in some pedagogic research (see for example, Sosibo 2015; Butler 2013) and in pedagogies which focus almost exclusively on the technical and grammatical features of academic writing (Boughey 2013; Boughey and McKenna 2016, 2017). The present study seeks to add to the body of evidence about 'on the ground' pedagogies and how these instantiate discourses of writing.

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A central, if implicit, tenet of decontextualized accounts of language is that it is merely a conduit for thought and knowledge (Boughey and McKenna 2016; Turner 2011). Within this model, the main role of language is to transmit the message from one individual mind to another without interference. Paradoxically, this leads to a focus on language forms rather than meanings. In addition, those individuals who 'possess' the necessary 'autonomous' skills (Street 1984) are imbued with special intellectual and social status (see Gee 1996; Lea 2013). Where English is the medium of teaching and learning in institutions serving multilingual student populations, there is a further layer of linguistic hierarchy. English occupies an "unassailable" position as a "power commodity" (Makoe and McKinney 2014, 13) which reinforces the capacity of autonomous language ideologies to position bi- and multilingual students as being in deficit. Poor completion and retention rates are thus largely understood in terms of problems inherent to students themselves and pedagogies focus on "the forms of the additional language" (Boughey and McKenna 2016, 4). Even where there is implicit recognition of students' vernacular languages and literacies, these are often framed less in terms of valued diversity, than as an unfortunate mismatch which requires the intensive re-socialisation of students on arrival at university.

We now turn to consider the specific nature of the of the vocational institution which formed the setting of the study, a University of Technology (UoT).

Research context: the University of Technology

In South Africa, vocational and career-orientated undergraduate diplomas[ii] are almost exclusively delivered within the UoT sector. The primary function of the UoT is to prepare its graduates for the world of work. In support of this strongly vocationalist agenda, attention is often directed towards the development of industry-specific skills and competencies that have currency within the professional field (Coleman 2016). In Cooper's (2015) classification of South African universities into three distinct bands (or levels) of 'research-intensivity', all UoTs fall into the lowest band, characterised by lower research publication rates and lower proportions of masters and doctoral graduates. Like other UoTs (Cooper 2015), Mountain City predominantly serves students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Its student population is mainly black and multilingual, with English being typically either a second or third language. English is the presumed language of teaching and learning. Mountain City UoT thus provides a telling case through which the operation of discourses which reinforce

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student language and literacy deficits and compound rather than challenge disadvantage can be better understood. The Faculty of Management Studies, where all the research participants are located, is the largest at Mountain City.

Methodology

This study adopted an ethnographic research approach able to accentuate practitioners' situated understandings of student writing development within the UoT context. The research questions sought to understand lecturers' views about students and their writing, how these were constructed at departmental, faculty and institutional levels and how these views influenced the kinds of writing pedagogies lecturers employed. The research asserts the importance of empirical attention to lecturers' perceptions, understandings and interpretations of the teaching and learning contexts they inhabit (Tuck 2018). While much HE research, including on student academic writing, has focused on the student experience, the present study builds on Lea and Street's (1998; 1999) seminal research which included detailed consideration of teachers' perspectives as well as those of students. McKenna's (2004) study of UoT lecturers' understandings of student writing is also significant in recognising the central role of lecturers in shaping learning contexts and their tacit knowledge of the institutional conditions which in turn influence their practice as lecturers (see also Tuck 2018). The aim was to adopt an exploratory rather than an evaluative approach and to avoid "making prior assumptions as to which practices are either appropriate or effective" (Lea and Street, 1998, 158).

The study was characterised by an ethnographic orientation; that is, we gathered multiple sources of data over a sustained period in order to build a rich picture of participants' practices around student writing, viewed from their own 'insider' perspectives (Lillis 2008). Over a six-month period, seven subject lecturers working in two different departments in the faculty participated in a series of multiple interviews. Participants were selected through a combination of firstly, purposive and then snowball sampling. They reflected wider institutional demographics and represented a cross-section of teaching experiences, research activity and career time at Mountain City. Twenty-one interviews were organized around three broad themes as set out in Table 1. In order to accentuate participants' lived experiences, the first round of interviews took a biographic and narrative approach (Mason

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2002). Subsequent interviews were semi-structured to accommodate the researchers' focus alongside any new themes that might arise. Various curriculum and pedagogic documents were also collected from participants and used to elicit information about participants' pedagogic routines and as a means of avoiding "idealized or generalized responses" (Lea and Stierer 2009, 422).

Table 1: Types of interviews and documents collected

	1. Biographical	2. Student Writing	3. Institutional Conditions
Interview Themes and approaches	Exploration of interviewees' professional, academic and writing histories.	Semi-structured discussion seeking participants' views on student writing in the university, writing pedagogic and assessment practices. Discussion about a text brought to interview. In some cases a second interview was scheduled to discuss the text.	Semi-structured discussion about how institutional environment influenced their practices
Documents		Curriculum documents, lesson plans, short readings, assignment briefs, anonymised marked written assignments Powerpoint slides, formative assessment activities, classroom activity sheets	Subject guides for students, institutional/faculty policies

Our use of interviews was built on Clegg and Stevenson's (2013) position that interview studies within the HE context can offer richness and complexity in the meanings they generate. Furthermore they argue that as such research is often undertaken by 'insiders' to either the immediate research site or the broader HE setting, this means that interviews can then be positioned and understood 'within a contextually dense web of meaning making' that incorporates the notion of a 'tacit ethnography' (Clegg and Stevenson, 2013, 5-6) One of the researchers has worked at Mountain City for over a decade and brought her understanding of the institution's broader history and socio-cultural practices to the interviews and to data analysis.

At the analytical stage, the study also took advantage of the 'outsider' position of the other researcher, familiar with HE contexts in the UK, but not in South Africa. Both researchers

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worked independently with the data in the initial analysis. Thereafter, as a team we were able to introduce a productive, self-questioning dialogue between familiarity and strangeness as we identified key themes and patterns, in keeping with the ethnographic orientation of the study (Lillis 2008). This reduced the risks of making assumptions about what mattered to participants based on over-reliance on one researcher's 'insider' experience. Transcripts and the documentary data associated with participants' curriculum and pedagogic activities, including texts discussed in interviews, were analyzed. This entailed building holistic thick descriptions of participants' conceptualisations and pedagogic practices around student writing. Alongside this, our analysis cycled between theoretical constructs and participant voices/data, thus relying on both deductive and inductive reasoning to guide the emergence of the themes from across the data for all seven participants.

Findings

In this section of the paper we present findings in terms of two broad discourses traceable across the study, with glimpses of a third: respectively 'filling', 'bridging' and 'dialoguing in' the 'gaps'. We do not thereby wish to imply that participants' perspectives and pedagogies were always clustered within discrete categories; rather we are seeking to make sense of what could be understood as a spectrum of discourses and practices emerging in the study. The conceptualising of discourses as discrete and identifiable may be a convenient construct for thinking about the wider ideological and structural influences on day-to-day perspectives and practices, and how these may compete with one another, but in practice they flow into and mingle with one another in the eclectic realities of lecturers' lived experience. Lecturers in the study appeared to move through and between 'different' discourses in their practice and in their accounts of practice.

Filling the gaps– transmitting the language forms and writing skills required for academic and professional success

All the lecturers in the study talked about their work with student writers as filling the gaps in students' language knowledge and skills and their poor academic writing proficiencies more generally. The writing pedagogies they deemed appropriate for their students were frequently premised upon this sense of students' deficits: 'it's a particular student that comes with particular skills that are mostly lacking' (Angie[iii]). English language proficiency was singled

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out as an area of deficiency, explicitly or otherwise. For example, Sapna commented that students struggle because they 'don't really speak English'. Clive commented that '[Students] want to learn the international code…but at the same time they are struggling. They need to improve in that code, that language.' At times, participants extended the construction of deficit to students' home languages themselves: 'there's no Xhosa word for administration, how do you explain administration?' (Brian). At other times the fact that English was the language in deficit remained implicit; for example, Brian comments that dealing with plagiarism in student writing is a challenge because 'they can't read and they can't write', implicitly erasing students' literacy in their home language(s). Although students' other language skills (such as speaking) were commented upon as being inadequate for university study, writing was considered the 'moerse [huge] problem' (Brian), as Sapna put it 'writing has always been a problem for students … the biggest challenge [for me] in all these years'

These framings of students were associated with a focus on remediation, with emphasis on 'giving' students the skills and genre knowledge they need in English. This frequently appeared to play out in the form of correction-oriented pedagogies aimed at instructing students in 'grammar, spelling and all the basics' (Angie). Angie explained: 'I do believe that if your errors are not pointed out and addressed then student are just going to keep repeating the same errors the entire year, second year, third year, forever.' Her pedagogic routines include 'writing up the common errors' and 'rectifying' paragraphs. Lecturers' writing pedagogies also emphasised improving students' proficiencies through transmission-oriented strategies. For example, Sapna described her work with one class: 'I taught them how to write a correct and strong conclusion and distinctly told them what goes in a conclusion: a concluding sentence, a summary, a recommendation and I allow them to give their opinion.' Sapna's wording here reflects a comfort with a heavily prescriptive approach.

As well as voicing a sense of students' language deficits on entry to higher education, some lecturers in the study framed their pedagogies in terms of a concern about students' *future* perceived deficits. Lecturers made a connection between anticipated judgements against privileged (English) language norms (e.g. Brian offers an imagined example: '"This person can't write. He's stupid, he can't write properly"') and students' potential to succeed in their specific professions and industries. For example, Robert commented that 'If you can't write well, you can forget about progressing up the ladder'. There was an implication that possessing these skills would shelter students from the prejudice often experienced by those who 'lack' these language and written repertoires, with material consequences. Njabulo

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comments 'I do make it clear that in the real world, they [students] will be judged on language more than anything else…if you go for an interview and you say "I'm gonna", "I wanna"… you will be identified with someone who's from the streets and you're not going to get the job.' Thus lecturers in the study were motivated partly by the need to redress students' perceived language deficits as a means of protecting them from social stigma attached to particular language forms and practices.

Bridging the gaps– classrooms as sites for socialisation into key academic and professional language practices

In another key writing discourse/pedagogy evident in the data, some of the lecturers characterised the educational 'gap' as a mismatch between students' home and early schooling language and literacy practices and those required in academic and professional contexts. Participants acknowledged the vernacular and schooled practices brought by students to their undergraduate studies and saw their role as 'bridging' (Clive, Angie) the gap between these and the required norms at university and in the target professions. This orientation was signalled by a wide spectrum of academic socialisation practices ranging from relatively didactic teaching aimed at 'acquisition' of target genres to a more nuanced approach to developing genre 'awareness' (Wingate 2019). At the prescriptive end of the spectrum, several participants talked about their use of templates and marking protocols designed to encourage students to reproduce academic genres successfully:

> So the lecturers … have a template, a marking memo. If you have an introduction, it's two out of two [marks] … so it forces you [as a student] to think about all these elements: is your introduction an introduction? Is your conclusion a conclusion? (Brian)

> we introduced the template that said 20 words per block [of text] … so that students can write concisely (Janet)

As well as inducting students into the writing requirements of university, participants saw a central part of their role as socialising students into the unfamiliar ways of writing associated with the destination professions of their courses. Efforts were often focused on teaching key genres associated with industry, such as the marketing plan or meeting minutes. Many of the written tasks participants set were designed to socialise students to complete these key documents:

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> just to introduce people to … what they may be experiencing out there and that you can't waffle … somebody else is going to read it … [in] the world of work. (Janet)

Classroom pedagogies in some accounts were thus overtly constructed to create an interim space where students could be socialised into the written practices legitimised to 'give a good account of themselves in the work situation they find themselves in' (Robert). Clive describes his 'very high expectation of [his] students' driving his focus on the marketing plan: 'that's why I've spent a lot of time developing very explicit instructions and very detailed examples of what I'm looking for'. This intensive and detailed modelling and guidance is in turn driven for Clive by 'high expectation in the industry'. Robert describes a similar motivation for a focus on 'technical' public management genres: '

> the feedback that I get from industry … is that more attention should actually be paid to … minute writing, report writing, specifically because we need to sensitize them to the technicalities (Robert)

The mixing of and moving between deficit-oriented and socialisation approaches is illustrated by a curriculum document shared by Angie (see Figure 1) which focuses on academic rather than vocational literacy. The emphasis on appropriateness (with regard to layout, style, structure and so on – see columns 1 and 3), coupled with the explicitly formative element in assessment (column 4) suggests an induction into process as well as a focus on the desired textual product. Here, the reference to 'process writing' suggests an attempt to inculcate (e.g. through 'formative exercises') a desirable (and pre-defined) writing habitus in students.

Figure 1: Segment of learning outcomes for Language and Communication in Marketing at Level 1

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Learning outcomes	Teaching & Learning Activities	Assessment Criteria	Assessment task
What you should be able to know and do in terms of knowledge, skills and competence at the end of a learning unit.	*What activities will be used to achieve the outcomes?*	*What should students do to demonstrate understanding of subject content?*	*How will you be assessed, incl. formative and summative assessments?*
<u>Academic Literacy</u> <u>By the end of this unit students should be able to</u>: Write an academic essay Use the appropriate layout, style and referencing method Information Literacy (See Appendix 1 for full details)	1. Reading, note-making and paraphrasing exercises 2. Examples of academic writing to show the layout and style 3. Process writing – drafting, revising and editing 4. Discussion on plagiarism 5. Examples of Harvard referencing method 6. Pair exercises on referencing	<u>Students should be able to</u>: 1.Use the appropriate structure and formal writing style in an academic assignment that answers the set question 2.Research the relevant material and document your sources using the appropriate academic references (Harvard)	Submission of an academic essay This assessment will include both the process, as well as the final product Formative exercises completed as part of the essay writing process will be part of the cumulative assessment mark

Across the two courses featuring in the study, participants seemed to favour what might be termed reading- and writing-intensive approaches in which a very large proportion of study-related literacy activity took place within the classroom. There was a general presumption against setting work to do outside the class, exemplified by this comment from Brian: 'our lecturers don't give homework because they [students] don't do it'. Njabulo described one of his pedagogic strategies thus:

> "Clear everything, now you're writing. Okay I want you to write." And I go and I police them. "Write, write" … I help them create these spaces for actually writing. And this is why it sits in the classroom. (Njabulo)

Like the learning outcomes curriculum document in Figure 1, Njabulo uses language which suggests the influence of 'process' writing pedagogies, stemming from work in the US (e.g. Elbow, 2000). For example, he invokes pedagogic techniques he calls 'free writing':

> we do free writing … I give them key terms. I show them key terms on a PowerPoint slide, which I then switch off thereafter. So I say to them 'now I want you to write' and there's emphasis on the students using their own words, their own understanding… (Njabulo)

Viewed in context, however, Njabulo seems to be referring to a version of a socialisation writing pedagogy (rather than the self-expressive function of writing emphasised in some

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versions of free writing). For him, this approach emphasises writing for epistemic access, rather than the need to conform to requirements and expectations.

Although Angie advocates a 'back to basics' pedagogy focused on language errors, she too illustrates a mixed approach, claiming that the aim is for students to achieve epistemic access: 'My intention is to point out and give feedback on basic grammar so that it can lead to meaning. Meaning making and argument because those are the outcomes we want'.

Two main reasons for reading- and writing-intensive classroom pedagogies were advanced by participants. One was that students were often unable to afford text books and so would often not complete written tasks at home:

> I've re-packaged [the readings] for them because many of them don't have textbooks. They can't afford them. So I'm bridging that divide. (Clive)

Some participants also expressed the view that oral communication is given more priority or value in students' out-of-college lives and framed reading- and writing-intensive classroom activities as an attempt to gradually re-orient students away from an oral habitus.

> We come from an oral culture and we enjoy the company of our friends. We can talk about the project and they'll understand it but they will not get down to write it… They get home. They've got busy family lives and stuff like that. They don't write. (Njabulo)

Thus for Njabulo, Clive and Angie, writing-focused pedagogies signalled a responsiveness both towards students' lack of material resources and what they perceived as the 'much more oral' (Njabulo) culture of students.

However, participants expressed an awareness that there was actually little time within classrooms to work in this writing-intensive way. As Janet put it: 'I don't think we have a lot of time to do a lot of writing', and Njabulo commented: 'I must say [actual writing] is very difficult to fit it in there because I want to do so much'. Clive comments specifically that he has too much 'theory' to cover in a semester to allow time for class-based writing activities: 'We realise how important it is to write but we can never fit into our programme', and Angie similarly attributes the drive to cover the curriculum as a key constraint: 'I would like to do more writing but I am inhibited a bit by getting through the curriculum'.

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Dialoguing in the gaps – reconstructing pedagogic and knowledge relations
Remedial (gap-filling) and socialisation (gap-bridging) perspectives and pedagogies predominated across the data set, covering a spectrum of approaches in terms of framings of students and of the teacher's role in supporting students' university and professional literacies. There were, however, glimpses of lecturers' attempts to additionally forge other, more ambitious pathways and seek to extend the textual practices and relational dynamics of the classroom to enable students to participate critically and creatively in their own learning. For Clive, this manifested in his desire to extend the written genres he focuses on to include the essay and expose students to textual practices beyond those demanded by the marketing profession and rigidly prescribed by the course curriculum:

> I want the essay … to move students to a place where they critique and marketing knowledge becomes powerful knowledge. Not just technicist knowledge that keeps the systems going. (Clive)

This offers a very different, potentially transformative, framing for the academic essay than that apparently adopted by Sapna in her prescriptive example given above.

While Clive's words reflect a desire to forge a new relationship between students and disciplinary knowledge, Njabulo's account of his pedagogies at times emphasized reconfiguring the relational dynamics of the classroom. He described creating opportunities for the lecturer and student to play different roles, allowing students to become more active and equal participants in the classroom and where their voices, language resources and cultural capital are more recognised:

> You can write in your own language and mixtures. I don't look at grammar, I don't look at punctuation. There are no rules, and the emphasis is that you're writing to yourself. No one will read this. So I will not read it. (Njabulo)

He aims to encourage students to actively resist the genres and arguments he puts forward as their teacher: '[I am] really trying to understand, to get into student's minds and see what they're doing and follow their structure and allow them **to destroy my structure**' (authors' emphasis). Njabulo sees his role partly as introducing students to ways of thinking in their disciplines, but also emphasises his desire to make the classroom 'a negotiated space':

> with my students, from day one until the end of term, we are trying to negotiate power within the classroom. … This is what we're here to do … I promote it. I go all out and say, 'This is wonderful; we want to hear the new ideas'. (Njabulo)

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Njabulo acknowledged that students arrive at this classroom with different predispositions to writing 'I don't see it as a given that students when they come to my class, that they are enthusiastic about writing. I see it as something that we develop together.' Instead of imposing a predetermined notion of what students' relationship to writing has to be, Njabulo develops an interest and enthusiasm for writing as a joint activity in which lecturer and student participate together. In order to achieve this dynamic, Njabulo seems to make a point of starting conversations with students, dialoguing in the 'gap' between students' literacies and the academic and professional literacies promoted in the institution:

> I engage with my students. I get to see what they feel and I talk to them outside corridors. I get them to come to my office. I engage then with all the spaces. I go and sit down there and talk to them. (Njabulo)

Njabulo thus describes elements of a more dialogic pedagogy where he attempts to meet students half way. He provides the clearest example in the study of working across all three of the discourses identified here. There is also evidence of his sense that he is engaged in a trajectory of professional change:

> Now, the language is to express key concepts. It is not the language that I saw at the beginning of my course, the grammar, the verbs and all sorts of things. Now it is language which you use for expressing ideas and opinions and this is how I'm looking at my students' writing today.

Discussion

Lecturers frequently conceptualised student academic writing development and structuring their pedagogies in support of filling perceived 'gaps' in students' language and literacy or 'bridging the gaps' between students' existing reading and writing practices and those required in academia and industry, and often as a mixture of both. These approaches entailed transmission and induction pedagogies in various guises, ranging from those which positioned students as having individual language deficits, to those which framed students as lacking opportunity to acquire desirable practices and knowledge. This lack of opportunity was attributed to students' low socio-economic status (for example, lack of money to buy text books) and/or to a lack of a reading and writing habitus stemming from what lecturers saw as the predominantly 'oral' culture of students. In some ways, lecturers' references in the study to students' oral culture suggest they are making a link between black identity and orality (a link echoed in O'Shea et al.'s (2019) study of students' discourses). Complaints about students' unhelpful vernacular communication practices are common in HE sectors

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worldwide – often targeted at students' perceived attachment to social media and its assumed negative effects, such as reduced concentration span or inability to write with pen and paper. However, findings of the present study suggest that the specific socio-political conditions of the South African UoT entail an additional postulated discontinuity between (black) students' 'home' and 'university' communicative practices. This suggests that it is important for academic developers in the South African context to highlight the work of researchers who have argued that the 'oral cultures' into which black students have been socialised are too frequently dismissed as being misaligned to academic literacy practices without full recognition of their depth, variation and complexity (e.g. Leibowitz 2000).

Key motivation for the 'gap-filling' and 'gap-bridging' approaches seemed to be lecturers' perception that the priority for students in their future, post-graduation lives, was to be able to 'give a good account of themselves' (Robert) 'out there' (Janet) in industry, not just in terms of being vocationally well-prepared, but to avoid the shame and stigma associated with particular language practices in a post-apartheid nation rife with stubborn race-based inequalities. This is significant in the South African context where language use is stigmatised (along lines ingrained by apartheid) and where a multilingual nation is still served by a notionally monolingual higher education system. There were however, clear signs of an awareness amongst lecturers in this study that 'gap-filling' and 'gap-bridging' approaches were limited. There was a desire to be more meaning-focused, to construct the classroom as a 'thinking space' (Njabulo) and to construct students as meaning-makers, rather than the passive recipients of education. There was a desire to encourage students to acquire 'powerful knowledge' (Clive) and so gain epistemic access (Angie) to the university and the professions and that this was no less important for vocational degree students than for those on more traditionally 'academic' pathways. Further still, some teachers in this study sought to recognise and nurture students' epistemic *contribution*, actively encouraging critical engagement and dialogue, and inviting students to 'destroy the structure' (Njabulo). This might be one way of enacting 'inclusive, relevant and socially just pedagogies' (Naidoo and Thesen 2018) in the context of academic and vocational literacies. This is not only a question of giving students a voice in challenging and changing what is taught or how, but also requires teachers to rethink how they position themselves and students in relation to knowledge, and ultimately depends on a provisional and dialogic understanding of knowledge itself

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However, findings from this study indicate that teachers' attempts to create negotiated spaces were severely constrained. One key constraint was class time for meaning-focused writing pedagogies. This suggests that current calls within the SA university sector for 'decolonizing the curriculum' (Shay 2016), might mean less focus on 'coverage' and on 'making sure' students meet the (supposedly fixed) expectations of academy and industry, and more on creating dialogic pedagogic spaces where outcomes are open-ended and what is 'known' remains in play. The other key and perhaps most powerful constraint evident in the study, is the continuing hegemonic power of decontextualizing and deficit discourses of language and writing in academia, industry and wider society. Although autonomous models of literacy are only 'one part of a bigger picture' of the stubborn inequality which gave rise to student protests at universities across South Africa in 2015-2016 (Boughey and McKenna 2016, 7) they are all the more influential for their apparent 'common sense'. Such models freely pervade the perceptions and practices of conscientious and committed teachers despite the fact that they are motivated, in many cases, by genuine desire for social justice in South Africa. Resource constraints within the university system, and socio-economic injustice outside it, exacerbate the discursive constraints. It may therefore be more helpful to understand lecturers as 'inhabiting' rather than agentially 'appropriating' these powerful discourses (Boughey and McKenna 2016, 5). The evidence of this study is that teachers do not intentionally adopt pedagogies which project one specific pedagogic discourse, for example a deficit framing, onto their students' language capabilities and cultural backgrounds. Nor is there a need to ensure they work always at one specific place on a continuum of practice from normative to transformative. There is indeed an urgent need for teachers to step out of their comfort zones (Boughey and McKenna 2016) and risk more radical pedagogies, but they are more likely to do so if the institutional conditions (e.g. policy and resourcing) are more favourable, and in the context of wider social and ideological transformation.

A related point to be drawn from these findings is the importance of examining and supporting teachers' practices in context, and of not making assumptions about what particular labellings, for example of particular types of text such as 'essay', or pedagogic labels such as 'writing-intensive' necessarily entail pedagogically. The benefit of the type of fine-grained analysis carried out here is that it is possible to recognise that superficially similar statements or actions can actually have very different meanings and implications depending on the contexts in which they arise. For example, essays can be taught in a highly

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prescriptive way (Sapna), or they can be contrasted with more 'technicist' genres and used as a space in which students' critical thinking can flourish (Clive): the pedagogic affordances of different genres, and the nature of those genres themselves, vary from one very localised classroom context to another. A writing-intensive classroom pedagogy can be template focused, used to transmit knowledge and designed to replace textbooks, or can be oriented more towards students' own sense-making and the encouragement of active participation. Individual teachers' practices are driven by a range of motivations and mingled discourses and vary from class to class, and over career time. The implications of these findings are that it is important to understand university teachers' practices in their detailed context and from their emic perspectives, not only through documentary analysis, or from the angle of students' experiences, vital though these perspectives are. Existing research, including much critical research on academic language and literacy, fails to pay sufficient attention to university teachers and their actual lived discourses and practices. There is thus a tendency to oversimplify lived pedagogy through abstractions, for example, through ideas of discrete discourses such as skills, socialization, or dialogue which are usually positioned as at odds with each other. A failure to maximally engage with the very people who could transform key practices in HE is problematic in research terms but also may in fact account for limited change in practices. This points to the need for further detailed ethnographic research which centres lecturers, but also suggests a dialogic approach to academic development in which a central practice is to talk in depth with lecturers about what they would really like to achieve with and for their students, in order to work out together how best to support the rightly more ambitious goals of a genuinely accessible HE system.

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[i] In this paper we use the term black in an inclusive sense to refer to population groups defined by apartheid policy as either 'African', 'Coloured' or 'Indian'

[ii] Students at UoTs primarily gain access to diploma courses, roughly equivalent to a Foundation degree or Higher National Diploma in the UK system. Only once they have completed a diploma can they apply for a BTech (equivalent to a BA/BSc Hons).

[iii] All participant names are pseudonyms.