

Editorial

With this issue *CriSTaL* moves into its third year of publication and over the past two years we have been delighted to see increases in readership around the world. *CriSTaL* is now read in over 70 countries worldwide. This reflects a growing interest in the more critical studies of teaching and learning on a global scale. Running through so much of the writing on higher education is a concern with language and literacy, particularly student writing, which is understandable as students' written texts continue to comprise the main form of assessment in higher education. In this issue language and literacy is more than simply a thread running through but rather it takes centre stage in two of the articles. Therefore, it seems an appropriate spotlight for this editorial.

The Winberg, Ntloko and Ncubukezi paper considers the language and literacy challenges experienced by post-graduate students who use English as an Additional Language (EAL). Through the use of what they describe as an 'exploratory multiple-case study approach', interviews with four post-graduate students at four different institutions reveal the complexities and struggles related to acquiring both the discipline-specific discourses and the social practices associated with post-graduate study for students who have experienced mostly transmission teaching in their school and undergraduate studies.

The Clarke article focuses on undergraduate writing in an extended first year science course. What is particularly interesting and rather unique about Clarke's research is that he has brought together two approaches sometimes considered incompatible (Coffin and Donohue, 2012). He has used Academic Literacies research methodologies and combined them with a Systemic Functional Linguistics analysis of linguistic data. The strength of Academic Literacies research has been that it has shifted the focus of analysis from texts to the *practices* in which these texts are embedded and as Lillis and Scott (2007) note, this has meant that the pedagogical solutions ensuing from such text-focused research are no longer primarily textual in nature as the issue of practices is foregrounded.

Academic Literacies research has a transformative agenda which is to interrogate and challenge academic norms and conventions as well as institutional policy, particularly in relation to issues of identity and power. However, Lillis and Scott, in their seminal article

defining Academic Literacies research, caution that a focus on practices should not neglect careful and detailed analysis of text and they admit that a limitation of some of the academic literacies work has been a lack of attention to texts ‘as linguistic and cultural artefacts’ (2007: 21). Clarke has successfully brought a very close focus on language together with the ethnographic approach typical of Academic Literacies research in seeking to understand what he describes as the students’ ‘explicit high school related purposes’, thus respecting students’ prior discourses and assisting us in understanding them. But his use of detailed Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) analysis of nominalisation and hedging in the students’ writing allows the reader (and the teacher) to understand how language is working in the students’ texts and how this relates to the discourse of science. These rich insights will assist the teacher in assisting students to access the new discourse while at the same time valuing students’ home discourses.

SFL seldom uses an ethnographic approach as it is essentially a theory of language which highlights the relationship between texts, language in use and the language system whereas Academic Literacies is more interested in practices and users of that system. SFL is often criticised for adopting a normative approach, i.e. an interest in identifying and inducting students into particular conventions and practices currently considered to be appropriate. Disciplines, even the elite discipline of science, are not stable and fixed; they are open to change and students often have the power to change them. We have seen how the discourse of science has moved, albeit very slowly, from the voiceless discourse of the past towards more flexible notions of voice.

Many Academic Literacies researchers have used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (notably the work of Fairclough (1992, 2003) when analysing language in Academic Literacies research projects in order to provide greater insights into the power relations inherent in texts. While the other two papers have no explicit focus on academic literacies, it is interesting that the paper by Jawitz and Williams is very effective in demonstrating the ways in which Critical Discourse Analysis can uncover power relations. As part of a larger project, these authors have examined a research-led South African university’s website for presence or absence of a focus on teaching and teaching development using Critical Discourse Analysis to assist this examination. They conclude that the discourse of teaching appears as a marginal discourse to the dominant discourse of research. Jones and Walters’ paper engages in a reflective way with the literature on flexible learning and finds it very appropriate for the South African context. They put out a call to South African universities to

accept the reality of a diversity of students most of whom are working and studying simultaneously and to focus on flexible learning to provide ‘a third way’ which goes beyond the current practice full time/part time provision. While not specifically focused on literacy development, these two papers provide readers with insights into larger teaching and learning, and institutional, issues that no doubt function at a macro-level to affect what happens in classrooms and in supervision and research spaces provided for students.

Moragh Paxton

On Behalf of the Editors

References

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