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Investigating the effect of Writing Centre interventions on student writing

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Abstract

Writing is one of the main means of assessment in tertiary institutions and helping students with writing could improve their overall academic performance and could ensure that students proceed to graduation. More and more, Academic Development initiatives are being ‘driven to demonstrate their ‘success’ by substantiating the rhetoric of their mission statements with researched evidence of performance’ (Yeld and Visser, 2001, 6). This paper describes in detail one study investigating Writing Centre interventions by looking at improvement in assessed writing in the context of the curriculum. The context-embedded nature of the methodology coheres with an ‘academic literacies’ approach to student writing (Lea and Street, 1998), rather than a skills-based approach. The study was achieved through interviewing forty first year students on their perceptions of the Centre and its influence on their writing; looking at consultants’ comments; looking at grades; comparing independent assessments of the students’ first and final drafts. This multi-faceted approach enabled a holistic and contextualized picture of student writing to emerge.

Key words

Student writing, access, academic literacies.

Introduction

Writing is one of the main means of assessment in tertiary institutions. In some cases, support in writing helps students improve their academic performance and may mean that the student stays in the tertiary system, and proceeds to graduation. The teaching of writing / academic literacy practices in Higher Education is thus inextricably linked to student access, which includes both retention and throughput. Street (1996) shows how joining a particular 'literacy club' can be problematic for those trying to learn its rules of entry from non-dominant or disadvantaged positions in the power structures of the university and the society in which the university is embedded. Lillis (2001) argues that confusion is often an all-pervasive experience for 'non-traditional' students in Higher Education, that it signals an 'institutional practice of mystery' (53) which can work against those least familiar with the conventions surrounding academic practices. Social, political and economic power is closely associated with knowledge of certain discourse forms and Writing Centres need to play a vital role in equity redress in tertiary institutions. Having said this, it must also be noted that Writing Centres are not *only* involved in access issues. The philosophy of the Writing Centre at the University of Cape Town (UCT) is that all students can improve their writing, whether they are highly experienced academic writers or complete novices. So, students may not be 'at risk' of exiting the system, but may consult the Writing Centre to improve their academic performance. Any investigation into the effect of a Writing Centre on student writing would have to take this into account.

There are numerous challenges involved in trying to ascertain the influence of Writing Centres. Firstly, the one-to-one basis of the Writing Centre is rather unique in the tertiary context and is also difficult to 'measure' in any systematic way. Secondly,

there are many factors affecting student writing other than visits to the Writing Centre, and it would be artificial to attempt to construct a 'control group'. Students write in a range of courses, get feedback, do a range of reading, and it would be difficult to ascertain the extent to which one or two visits to the Writing Centre had impacted on their writing within this larger context. Thirdly, Writing Centre practice tends to be somewhat ad hoc, with some students coming for once-off consultations and others maintaining a relationship with the Centre throughout their degree. A methodology of evaluation that focuses on a few in-depth case studies of student writing is thus probably more appropriate in this context than looking at breadth of impact.

Given the challenges considered above, this paper argues that we need to look at student development in terms of assessed writing and consequent performance in particular courses. It outlines a study conducted at the Writing Centre at UCT. The focus was on improvements in student writing, both perceived and actual. This was achieved through interviewing forty first year students on their perceptions of the Writing Centre and its influences on their writing, looking at consultants' comments on the student's writing, and noting the marks obtained for the essay in question and for the course as a whole. Finally, independent assessments of the students' improvement from first to final drafts were made using three criteria: organisation, voice and register, and language use. The detailed findings of this study are presented in a report compiled by Author and Klein (2001).

UCT WRITING CENTRE

The Writing Centre at UCT began in 1994. It is based within a larger Language Development Group which focuses on research-driven developmental work, particularly through curriculum involvement. 'Language development' is understood to include teaching, research and curriculum development centred on the discipline of Applied Language Studies and the related idea of academic literacy (see Thesen and Van Pletzen, 2006). Both the Language Development Group and Writing Centre aim to promote and facilitate access to higher education, within an ethos of social justice and national redress. The Centre itself is designed to provide a walk-in, one-on-one consultancy service to students from all faculties and all academic levels of the university. Most commonly, students bring a draft of their essay, which forms the basis of the consultation. Some students also come before they start writing in order to analyse the task and discuss what the essay requires. Specifically, the Writing Centre at UCT aims to assist by:

- increasing students understanding of writing as a process
- enabling a 'thinking-through-writing' approach
- helping students to focus on the task
- heightening students' sense of 'audience' in writing
- alerting students to academic writing conventions and disciplinary discourses
- educating students on academic voice and plagiarism
- helping students to understand how to select information from a variety of sources
- improving students' sense of coherence, cohesion and logic in writing
- equipping students to self-edit their work and improving their ability to proof-read for some common grammatical errors.

When investigating the effect of the Writing Centre on student writing, evidence of improvement in these specific academic literacy practices needs to be demonstrated, whilst taking cognisance of the larger institutional and socio-political context.

The consultants are postgraduate students from a range of disciplines and they undergo an initial 20 hour training course and ongoing training throughout the year. The focus of this training is an introduction to the theoretical underpinnings of Writing Centre work, including issues around access and redress, and the practical application of these. Specifically, we outline an ‘academic literacies’ approach to student writing which takes into account institutional relationships of discourse and power and the contested nature of writing practices (Lea and Street, 1998). We use the term ‘practices’ rather than ‘skills’ in order to emphasize the social nature of what we do as writers. The term ‘skills’ suggests a set of neutral techniques, separate from the social context that favours them. Also, ‘skills’ seems to represent a deficit view of the learner writer as someone who does not have the desirable package of techniques. The concept of ‘practice’, on the other hand, offers a way of linking writing with what individuals as socially situated actors do, both at the level of context of a specific situation and at the level of context of culture (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999, 21).

APPROACHES TO INVESTIGATING EFFECT ON STUDENT WRITING

One way of trying to investigate our interventions on student writing in the past was to get students to fill in evaluation or feedback forms after each consultation. Students were asked to comment on the most and least useful aspects of a consultation and then place these anonymously into a box at the entrance to the Centre. In collating these

responses, it became clear that there were a number of problems with this approach. Firstly, we were obtaining information on students' perceptions of the consultation, rather than on their actual writing. It is clear that student's perception of improvement may not necessarily translate into demonstrably improved writing. Secondly, the actual student responses were often thin and did not allow for in depth data analysis. This could be due to students' time pressures, but also the actual construction of the form (Author, 2002). Thirdly, there may have been a bias in the evaluation process to give positive feedback since the students filled in the forms at the Writing Centre. And finally, since not all the consultants encouraged their students equally to fill in the forms, the evaluations did not reflect the services of all consultants equally. While the forms gave an indication of the general level of satisfaction with the Centre service, they were not rich in helping us gain more detailed insight into what aspects students found particularly helpful or less helpful.

In attempting to evaluate our practices in this way, it also became clear to me that this approach was incompatible with our theoretical point of view and view of writing. UCT Writing Centre is theoretically based in New Literacies Studies (NLS) which gives a social practices account of literacy (Heath 1983, Baynham 1995, Barton and Hamilton 1998, Gee 1996). According to this view, to be 'literate' does not simply mean having acquired the technical skills to decode and encode signs and symbols, but having mastered a set of social practices related to a set of signs and symbols which are inevitably plural and diverse. The extent to which students learnt particular roles, forms of interaction, and ways of thinking was difficult to ascertain from the 'feedback form' approach to measuring assessment. The forms were not contextualized in or framed by the context of the students' actual writing practices.

Thus, in order to triangulate students' perceptions and to obtain a more holistic picture, I decided to also look at consultant's perceptions, the grades obtained, and the actual student writing.

COLLECTION OF DATA

Forty students were selected for the study (15% of the total number of students seen in that semester). These students were selected for a number of reasons. Firstly, they were selected to represent different faculties, including Humanities, Science, Commerce, Engineering and the Built Environment. In the period of the study, 69% of the students who attended the Writing Centre were from the Humanities faculty. We targeted essays from courses from which we see many students, especially including the 'foundation' courses in Humanities, Science and Commerce. Secondly, first year students (19 men and 21 women) were chosen as the focus group because one of the goals of the Centre is to enable access to the institution as well as to academic and disciplinary discourses. Also, generally about 60% of the students who use the Centre are first year students. Thirdly, we were interested in issues pertaining to English Second Language (ESL) students. About a third of the group claimed to be first language English speakers, with the others speaking Setswana, Tsonga, Shona, Venda, French, Sotho, Xhosa and Zulu.

Data was collected in the form of information from interviews with the forty students, consultants' comments (which are recorded and stored in a database after each consultation), marks for essays and examinations, student comments on perceptions of the effect of the Writing Centre on their work. Finally, we conducted an independent, critical comparison of the drafts and marked assignments according to

set criteria. Three undergraduate student assistants were hired to assist with the research, particularly the interviews, in the hopes that the students would perhaps feel less threatened about saying what they felt if they were talking to peers. The information gathered on each student from interviews, consultation records, grades and essay drafts was compiled into small 'vignettes' or student profiles.

CRITERIA FOR JUDGING IMPROVEMENT IN STUDENT WRITING

I decided to pursue a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach to analysing the data. Although the marks of the 40 students across a range of courses were collected, it was not possible to say anything conclusive based on these figures. The sample of students was too small and amorphous, and they were all from different courses. In addition, these marks represented different marking criteria, which did not necessarily include writing proficiency.

For these reasons, I realized the need to develop a template to track individual improvement in student writing and to compare student writing across the disciplines (see Appendix A). Marks out of ten were given for three categories, namely organisation, voice and register, language use. 'Organization' is a key issue in all student writing and refers to the focus and structure of the writing, including paragraphing, coherence and cohesion. Crucially, organization is related to questions of 'argument' which is the basic tenant for all academic writing. 'Voice and register' refer to the appropriate ways of representing social relations between the writer and reader. This category also refers to the ways in which the writer establishes a presence in the text in relation to the subject matter, sources and constructed audience. It thus includes integration of secondary sources and issues of plagiarism.

As Angelil-Carter (2000) has demonstrated, plagiarism is often a reflection of students grappling with mimicking the academic discourse. Voice and register are inextricably linked to notions of context and appropriacy and often form key components of the ‘institutional practice of mystery’ (Lillis 2001) mentioned earlier. The last category, ‘language use’, refers to the mechanics of the text, namely vocabulary, punctuation, sentence construction, use of tenses, articles, pronouns, prepositions. I will now present two student ‘vignettes’ or profiles, in order to provide a flavour of the data, before moving on to identify some of the key trends and findings.

STUDENT VIGNETTES

The first vignette is typical of a struggling first year ESL student who just managed to pass his first essay with 52%. The essay was a requirement for one of the big Humanities foundation courses.

| | |
|--|---|
| Consultant’s response | The student was concerned about referencing and bibliography. |
| Student’s response | The Writing Centre taught me to have a point of view (agreeing or disagreeing), that is supported by a strong argument and that is clearly referenced from books obtainable from the library or from course material. |
| Final essay mark | 52% |
| Final course mark | 52% |
| Student perception of writing centre impact | At first I used to get less than 40% in my essays, but now I do manage to get more than 50%, which is a great improvement for me. The Writing Centre encouraged me to work before the time because they always stressed that it is better to bring a draft to each and every consultation. Visiting the Writing Centre has disciplined me to work before the time and I now have courage in doing my work even though I would still contact the Writing Centre. |
| Organization | First draft: 3 Final: 5 The final essay has a more focussed introduction with specific time frames and goals even though it includes some irrelevant detail. There is also evidence of a conclusion, however, loosely substantiated. This was not found in the draft. The paragraphs show a main idea which they attempt to develop. Much work still needs to be done on developing and sequencing ideas. |
| Voice and register | First draft: 2 Final: 3 The bibliography is now present but referencing still needs attention. The essay is still too reliant on generalizations. |
| Language | First draft: 3 Final: 4 The language needs work. |

Figure 1: Profile of a struggling first year student

Although this student expressed concern about the ‘skill’ of referencing and the bibliography, this masked the larger and more problematic academic discourse concern identified by the consultant, namely ‘point of view’ and ‘strong argument that is clearly referenced’. According to the external marker, there was only a minimal improvement in the student’s use of secondary sources with the student being ‘too reliant on generalizations’. However, the sense of an ‘argument’ improved a little in the final essay, which has a more focused introduction. The student also mentioned that the Writing Centre helped him in terms of time management. The comment about time management or managing the writing process came up again and again in students’ responses. This indirectly points to the success of our aim of raising students’ awareness of writing as a process, rather than a product.

It is interesting to compare the above profile with that of a stronger student writing the same essay on the same course (see figure 2 below). This student did not have a language problem, although English was also his second language. His difficulties lay more in structure and organization, as well as in academic voice.

The student emphasizes the dialogic aspect of Writing Centre work, and the fact that we often need to engage at the level of ideas first, before we turn to issues of form. The consultant’s response coheres with that of the student’s, as they both emphasize the need for more focus and improved organization. The external marker picked up on the resultant improvement of focus in the writing. The data thus triangulate to provide a credible and nuanced picture of the effect

of the Writing Centre intervention on the student's writing. In general, across the data, the issues identified by the consultants as the main issues to be addressed were similar to the students' responses. I will now look at the students' perceptions of Writing Centre interventions in some more detail.

| | |
|--|--|
| Consultant's response | He had good statements but needed to focus more on the case study rather than giving examples outside of the Shaka case study. I suggested that he use topic sentences to introduce new ideas. |
| Student's response | Before I went to the Writing Centre, I had a lot of information but did not know how to put it in the essay. However, after the consultation I knew where to start. When you have an idea the consultants show you the correct way to put across that idea and you eventually come up with good writing. |
| Final essay mark | 75% |
| Final course mark | 67% |
| Student perception of writing centre impact | I became open to more interpretations of how I should write my work. They told me to put more insight in the essay and told me that there is no idea that is wrong as long as one puts it correctly. There is an improvement in my ways of brainstorming the question and my marks have improved as well. |
| Organization | First draft: 5 Final: 7 The focus on the task improved in the final essay with the inclusion of a statement of intent and a focus on the texts which would be explored. Important information was better contextualized to allow for fluidity of thought. The conclusion has also been 'tightened' by summarizing the findings with regard to the three texts. |
| Voice and register | First draft: 4 Final: 7 Colloquialisms or fatuous statements were fewer in the final essay. There was still no use of footnotes. |
| Language | First draft: 7 Final: 7 |

Figure 2: Profile of a good student.

STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF WRITING CENTRE INTERVENTIONS

None of the 40 students in this study failed the essays they consulted on, although some did fail the course as a whole. The main areas of assistance that the students identified in the interviews were increased focus on the task, voice and register, macro-structural issues (introductions, conclusions, paragraphing) and micro-structural issues (arrangement of sentences, language usage).

Task analysis was identified by both students and consultants as crucial in getting students to focus. This is how one student described the process of task analysis:

The consultant clarified what the important words meant and he emphasised that I should always break the essay question into different parts so that I would be able to understand what the essay requires ... The input he gave resulted in me understanding what I was required to do in the essay because I was clearer on the task.

From an academic literacies perspective, task analysis is also a crucial activity to help students understand the 'bigger picture', which includes thinking about why the course and discipline frame particular essay questions, and what those questions say about the knowledge practices that discipline values.

In terms of voice and register, many students commented on how the consultants encouraged them to develop a 'point of view' in their writing. According to one student, the consultant had

corrected my essay on the fact that I did not state my point of view, I just wrote on what the authors were saying not paying attention to what I thought of the topic and I did not take a side (agree or disagree).

This emphasis on student voice and point of view highlights an important aspect of Writing Centre work. Many students approach academic writing without a sense that they have anything worth saying. Feeling the right to exert a presence in the text is related to personal autobiography and is often associated with the gender, class and ethnicity of the writer (Clark and Ivanic, 1997, 136). Although problematic in some of its uses (see Cope and Kalantzis, 1993, for a critique of the notion of voice), voice in 'progressivist' pedagogy is a critical term for formulating an alternative pedagogy. According to this view, making a space for student voice entails 'replacing the authoritative discourse of imposition and recitation with a voice capable of speaking in one's own terms, a voice capable of listening, retelling, and challenging the very grounds of knowledge and power' (Giroux in Cope and Kalantzis, 1993, 50). One of the roles of consultants is to help students adopt a new identity, that of educated

people who have something important to say. An assignment written within the university community is the result of serious reflection about a specific topic. The act of writing about the topic makes public the reflection and the assignment becomes part of an ongoing dialogue among scholars. Consultants act as guides to help students understand and assume those new roles.

The students identified macro and micro structural issues as a key area of assistance from the Writing Centre.

I had a better understanding what was actually required in the essay and how to structure my points in a more coherent manner ... In changing the structure and helping me focus, the Writing Centre made me pick up certain points and follow them through.

Dealing with structural coherence is perhaps one of the more straightforward aspects of Writing Centre work and provides the most immediate and rewarding results.

Within an individual consultation, we prioritize a hierarchy of needs beginning with the macro issues, including focus on topic, construction of audience, overall argument, planning. If there is time, we turn to the micro issues, such as grammar and spelling. Students tend to become demotivated by approaches that focus too heavily on grammatical errors, especially in essays which are riddled with second language errors. This focus can leave students feeling inadequate and also with a misguided sense that improvement in writing is on the level of syntax, spelling and grammar.

When talking about Writing Centre interventions, students mentioned improved writing and working practices, increased confidence in their writing abilities, improved understanding of requirements, improved performance in other courses, and the ability to work independently. These aspects point to the students' perceived

ability to transfer what they have learnt from one context to another. One student commented on transference and independence-training in a useful way:

It was just a case of putting everything together into one essay but the way she said I should do it impacted on my ability to write another essay, which I passed with flying colours. After this essay I wrote another one which I did not bring to the Writing Centre, but I obtained 70%. This is because of the tips the consultant gave me.

In general, it was encouraging to see that more than half of the students found their marks had improved, and this improvement was felt across courses. Students' perceptions of the Writing Centre's interventions show that the consultations leave them with an increased awareness of their own writing, and an ability to articulate their own writing processes.

IMPROVEMENTS FROM FIRST DRAFTS TO FINAL ESSAYS

The average improvements across drafts are reflected in figure 3 below.

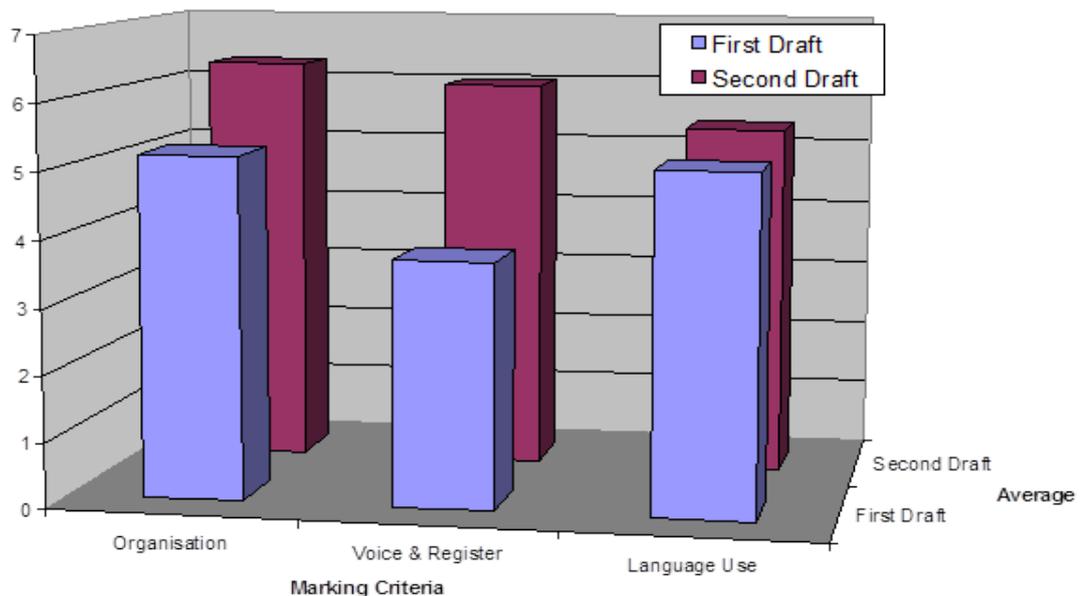


Figure 3: Average improvement from first drafts to final essays

Both consultants and students identified organization as the most commonly addressed aspect of writing. Encouragingly, the comparison of first and final drafts revealed that the majority of students did show an improvement in the organisation of their essays. The average mark out of 10 for the first drafts was 4.8 and this average improved in the final essay to 6.2. Many students came to the Writing Centre to understand the topic and analyse what the essay required, or to get feedback on whether they had tackled the topic in an appropriate way. Most students found that once they learned how to separate a topic into its components, identify the key concepts and focus, they were better able to tackle subsequent essays. Development of arguments was another commonly encountered issue, inextricably linked to the organisation of an essay. It is clear that many students do not have a good understanding of structure or genre when they come into the university and start writing, but that most of them grasp the basic concepts relatively easily and manage to improve on essay organisation.

In looking at the average marks given by the external marker to the three categories, it appears that the Writing Centre seemed to help this group of first year students most in the area of acquiring academic discourse within particular disciplines. Students seemed weakest in this regard in their first drafts (the average mark was 3.1 out of 10) and improved substantially through consultation with the Writing Centre (the average for the final essay mark was 5.9). Students coming out of school tend to be unfamiliar with the academic discourse of their discipline and unsure about what style and language are appropriate. The use and correct citation of references is also something students learn at university and often battle with at the beginning. It is thus not

surprising that consultations at the Centre resulted in improved marks in the ‘voice and register’ category.

However, improvements in voice and register can also be indicators of a process of ‘acculturation’ at first year level. I have already made the point that discursive practices are ideological in the ways they serve to maintain existing social relations of power. On the one hand, it would be in learners’ interests if they could conform to the expectations of the institution. On the other hand, by doing so, they are to some extent reproducing the ideologies and inequities of the institution and society at large. So, for instance, learning ‘genre’ is about learning what conventions are at work in a domain of practice. ‘Genre’ straddles both the categories of ‘organization’ and ‘voice and register’ in that it describes the relation of the social purpose of a text to the textual structure. Kress argues that the learning of genre is ‘intimately linked with the codification of knowledge in a society’ (Kress, 1982, 123). Learning how each discipline presents students with appropriate knowledge, appropriate ways of organizing that knowledge and appropriate ways of representing social relations between the writer and reader can either lead to acculturation into those knowledge practices or critical awareness thereof.

Language and grammar problems are often the main reason lecturers send students to the Writing Centre, yet few consultants and students mentioned language and grammar as key components of their consultations. The external examiner’s assessments also found that the smallest improvement took place in the ‘language use’ category. We find that students who ask for help with grammar often have overriding problems with structure, voice, register and general understanding of the

task. In these instances, working with language and grammar is of secondary priority until the student has a better grasp of the key concepts and academic literacy practices. Also, even when language problems are addressed in a consultation, this by itself is unlikely to lead to a notable improvement of students' grammar, especially among second language speakers. While students who come to the Centre learn to express themselves in a more appropriate tone and style (as reflected in the 'voice and register' marks), improving grammar is a more long-term development as a result of increased practice in reading and writing.

CONCLUSIONS

I have attempted to describe one study in the hopes that this will contribute to the debate of how best to investigate Writing Centre interventions on student writing. I have shown how forty first year students were tracked by looking at individual student development as writers, multiple drafts of assignments, the marks of the students across a particular course. From this study, it does appear that the Writing Centre UCT contributes to the Academic Development Programme in terms of its goals of research-led development, widening access, promoting excellence through equity, ensuring the provision of key abilities in graduates. However, a weakness of this study was perhaps the lack of comparison of student writing across disciplines. A business report is rather different from a technical description, which in turn is not the same as a discursive essay in the humanities. It is hard to gauge from this study the extent to which the Writing Centre answered to the specific needs of students from different disciplines, or to see where students experience similar problems across the curriculum. This would, however, perhaps be better conceived as a separate study in order to probe the disciplinary questions in any depth.

One student maintained that the Writing Centre “changed the way I thought about putting information into essays”. Perhaps this comment summarises the Centre at its most useful, where it assists students to become adept at negotiating the epistemology of a particular subject, and inculcates a meta-understanding of how knowledge is linked to appropriate form. Many students indicated a shift towards a greater sense of autonomy and agency in their work. This move towards independence is difficult to quantify as a less dependent student may well get lower marks, especially in first year, but will almost certainly make a better researcher and critical thinker later on.

It is interesting that although the UCT Writing Centre is embedded in an academic literacies approach to student writing and takes into account institutional relationships of discourse and power and the contested nature of writing practices, the students’ responses tended to reveal an outcome more akin to ‘academic socialization’.

Academic socialization is about induction into the institution’s dominant norms, values and cultural practices. The students’ comments about genre, organization and structure, and the technicalities of referencing all point to this induction process.

Competence in academic literacy practices, on the contrary, includes the ability ‘to switch practices between one setting and another, to deploy a repertoire of linguistic practices appropriate to each setting, and to handle the social meanings and identities that each evokes’ (1998,159). To some extent, this study did interrogate these aspects of student writing by looking closely at student voice and register. However, it did not overtly question the extent to which the students had become critical or gained meta-awareness, and also did not engage in a systematic analysis of affective and identity issues which emerged in students’ comments.

It is evident from the assessments of the essay drafts as well as the students' responses that the Writing Centre provides an invaluable service to undergraduate students, particularly in introducing them to academic literacy practices in a supportive environment. This is reflected in the students' marks, often making the difference between passing and failing assignments and even the whole course. From the students' responses, it is clear that the Centre is appreciated for the way in which it makes writing a less anxious and solitary activity, and also for the transferability of the academic literacy practices acquired in a consultation. For first year students, who find themselves in large classes with little contact with their lecturers, having undivided attention for the duration of a consultation could help them come to terms with the unfamiliar and often seemingly anonymous, academic environment. Many students reported increased confidence in their own abilities to understand and write an assignment. This confidence is particularly important for students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds who feel overwhelmed by their own perceived lack of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu, 1991). The Writing Centre appears to validate students' voices and in this way makes the grading of essays into only a part of a more complex, polyvocal and reciprocal conversation about knowledge.

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Appendix A

Template for measuring improvement from students' first drafts to final essays

| Item | Score Range | Criteria |
|--------------------|-------------|--|
| Organization | 8-10 | <p>EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student focuses on the task and answers the question. • There is a clear and detailed introduction and conclusion. • Ideas are clearly stated and supported. • There is a logical sequencing of ideas and paragraphs. • Paragraphs have a strong internal structure, namely one main idea, topic sentences, connectors. • The essay is coherent (including links between paragraphs). • Graphs or other visuals have been explained in the written text. |
| | 5 - 7 | <p>GOOD TO AVERAGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The essay is less focused on the task and has some irrelevant detail. • There is a fair introduction and conclusion. • The essay is loosely organized, but the main ideas stand out. • The paragraphs are fairly well-formulated. • The argument is logical, but there is problematic sequencing at times. • There is elaboration and support for arguments, but not enough. • Graphs or visuals are not adequately explained in the written text. |
| | 3 - 4 | <p>FAIR TO POOR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The essay lacks a clear focus on the task. • There is a weak introduction and conclusion. • The ideas are confused and disconnected (rambling, repetitive). • The essay lacks logical sequencing and development. • There is insufficient elaboration. • Graphs or visuals are not referred to in the written text. |
| | 0 - 2 | <p>VERY POOR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is hardly any focus on the task. • There is no organization or not enough to evaluate. • There is no clear paragraphing. • There is no link between written text and graphs / visuals. |
| Voice and Register | 8 - 10 | <p>EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The language used is appropriate for an academic context (i.e. no colloquialisms or slang; no inappropriate jargon). • The writing is not long-winded, verbose, repetitive. • There are few euphemisms, cliches, or exaggerations. • The first person or third person voice has been used appropriately and consistently for the particular audience. • All the sources have been correctly referenced. • There is a clear bibliography with all the relevant information. |
| | 5 - 7 | <p>GOOD TO AVERAGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An attempt has been made to reference in-text, but there may be problems around the mechanics of this. • The language is generally appropriate for an academic context. • The essay has a bibliography with some of the necessary information missing. |

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| | 3 - 4 | <p>FAIR TO POOR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student has used some secondary sources, but has not referenced them correctly. • The language is inappropriate to the audience and academic context (overly personal style, emotional adjectives, colloquialisms). • There is not enough referencing to external information and too much reliance on own experience. • The bibliography is sketchy and does not follow standard conventions. |
| | 0 - 2 | <p>VERY POOR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student has plagiarised secondary readings – using phrases from these readings without referencing. • The language and organization is inappropriate for an academic assignment. • There is no bibliography. |
| Language Use | 8 - 10 | <p>EXCELLENT TO VERY GOOD</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are few errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization. • The piece is written in clear, complete sentences. • Effective complex sentence constructions are used. • There are few errors of agreement, and tenses, articles, pronouns, prepositions are used correctly. • The sentences are neither too long nor too short. |
| | 5 - 7 | <p>GOOD TO AVERAGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student uses effective but simple sentence constructions. • Some minor problems in complex constructions exist. • There are several errors of agreement, tense, articles, pronouns, prepositions. • There are occasional errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, but the meaning is not obscured. |
| | 3 - 4 | <p>FAIR TO POOR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are major problems in simple / complex constructions. • Frequent errors of negation, agreement, tense, concord, articles, pronouns, prepositions, sentence structure occur. • There are frequent errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, poor word processing. • The meaning is confused or obscured. |
| | 0 - 2 | <p>VERY POOR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is virtually no understanding of sentence construction rules. • It is difficult to understand the meaning. • The writing is dominated by errors of spelling, punctuation, capitalization. The poor word-processing hinders meaning. |