Disciplinary Literacy Symposium

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ABSTRACTS

1. Transforming disciplinary literacy: A scaffolded, functional approach to collaborative and contextualised teacher professional development

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Integrating disciplinary literacy into subject-specific teaching can be challenging (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008, 2012). Literacy tasks need to address core subject learning outcomes while developing students' writing skills (Fang & Moje, 2012; Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010). Yet, many teachers feel under-equipped to teach writing skills explicitly. Research shows that sustained, contextualised and collaborative professional learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Core et al., 2023; Hattie, 2023), which builds on teachers' content expertise and boosts their confidence in teaching writing, is vital for changing practice. Adding to these features, we argue that a functional model of language together with a scaffolded approach to pedagogy are key to developing disciplinary literacy programs of work.

This paper presents findings from the *Improving Writing Outcomes* project, a priority grant funded by the New South Wales Education Strategic Research Funds in Australia (Chen, et al., 2021-2024). It showcases a professional development learning model grounded in the Teaching and Learning Cycle (Derewianka & Jones, 2022) and demonstrates how it can support teachers' understandings of the semiotic demands of their subjects. Drawing on interviews, and classroom observations with science and history teachers, and samples of student work, our analysis identifies key factors that have led to changes in teachers' knowledge and practice of disciplinary literacy. The paper concludes with recommendations for professional development that promotes transformative, sustained changes in disciplinary literacy teaching practice.

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2. Exam Questions & Genre in Schools

Helen Handford (Wolverhampton City Council), Gail Forey & Reka Jablonkai (University of Bath)

The power of language is evident in the writing demands of high-stake standardised secondary school exams such as the iGCSE/GCSE/A Level/International Baccalaureate (IB). These exams are extremely challenging for many students and play a crucial gatekeeping role for life, studies and work within and beyond school (Education Endowment Fund, 2021). Building on work in SFL, genre, disciplinary literacy and corpus linguistics, and drawing on initial findings from the BAWESS Project, we discuss the potential genres that are identified in exam questions in three disciplines (History, Biology and Geography). The BAWESS Project is the first discipline-specific corpus of authentic student exam-practice written texts and aims to provide resources that support disciplinary literacy in schools.

Understanding the role of genres as 'staged goal-oriented purposeful activity that people engage in as members of their culture' (Martin, 1984:25) is key in supporting writing across the curriculum (Forey 2020; Forey & Cheng, 2019; Derewianka & Jones, 2022). One area that needs further attention is understanding the exam questions set and the potential genres intended by the questions. As part of the BAWESS Project we have developed a corpus of exam questions, exam specifications, exam mark schemes and model answers shared online by the exam boards to understand the type of questions set for long answers in History, Biology and Geography A-level/GCSE/iGCSE and IB exams. The findings show the range of potential genres that are implied by the questions.

Using automated corpus tagging we can identify the 'power words' found in the exam questions to shed light on the 'power grammar and power composition' (Martin, 2013) required in these three disciplines. We demonstrate how the findings from an analysis of exam questions could provide a clearer understanding of the type of genres associated with different disciplines. Insights into the different genres found in exam questions and their association with disciplines can enhance and raise awareness for teachers, learners and researchers in relation to the disciplinary literacy practices in school exams.

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3. Deconstructing Disciplinary Disadvantage: SFL and Subject Hierarchies
Erika Matruglio (University of Wollongong)

In this paper I demonstrate how Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) can be used to understand disciplinary difference and its effect on senior secondary students' success in end-of-school high stakes examination. In New South Wales, Australia, the senior secondary subject *Community and Family Studies* (CAFS) attracts 90% female students and is scaled negatively in the calculation of students' overall university entrance score with over 70% of students receiving a scaled mark under 50% (Universities Admissions Centre (NSW & ACT), 2024). This means the subject is perceived as less academically rigorous and students who study it are disadvantaged over students who study subjects such as History (Roberts et al., 2019). There is an urgent need to understand how subjects are positioned differently in high-stakes curriculum, and how students in all subjects can be supported to achieve highly.

In this paper, using CAFS as an example, I show how SFL can be used to look at disciplinary practice in order to understand the nature of a subject as it is taught. I draw on various SFL tools and multiple data from a long-standing project, including student writing for end-of-school examinations, textbooks, teacher-produced handouts, video-recorded classroom interaction and teacher interviews. Beginning with an analysis of student writing, I show the difference between how students write in CAFS and how they write in other humanities/social sciences subjects. I then demonstrate how their common-sense writing is echoed in textbook material and handouts. Finally, I show how SFL analysis of classroom discourse demonstrates that students are regularly involved in common-sense, contextually-dependent meaning-making rather than being supported to make technical, condensed and abstract meanings. Throughout, I not only demonstrate how SFL can uncover the nature of existing practices around disciplinary literacy, but also how it illuminates opportunities for reimagining disciplinary literacy in CAFS and similar subjects internationally.

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4. Tupac and SFL-informed Pedagogy
Critically Teaching Disciplinary Literacies in Multilingual Classrooms

Meg Gebhard,
(University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Massachusetts, USA)

This plenary responds to the changing nature of teaching and learning disciplinary literacies in the context of challenging times in the United States (e.g., persistent systemic inequities related to race, class, gender, and immigration status; ongoing debates regarding teaching reading; attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion programs). To respond to these challenges, this presentation has three parts.

First, I summarize ten high-impact teaching practices which educators can use to teach multilingual learners how to critically read, write, and discuss challenging texts across grade levels and content areas (Gebhard, 2019). These ten practices are based on Halliday's theory of systemic functional linguistics and the teaching and learning cycle (e.g., Derewianka & Jones, 2023; McCabe, 2021; Rose & Martin, 2012). They are also based on extensive classroom-based research conducted in the United States (e.g., Accurso & Gebhard, 2020; Brisk, 2022; Gebhard & Accurso, 2023, Harman, 2018; Schleppegrell, 2004). Collectively these practices provide a research-based approach to inform how all teachers, regardless of the age and language proficiency of their students, can design curriculum, instruction, and assessments that actively draw on their learners' linguistic and cultural resources, prior knowledge, and intrinsic motivations. These practices also simultaneously support students in working toward state and national language, literacy, and content standards.

Second, in presenting these ten practices, I provide concrete examples of how a teacher working in an alternative middle school for multilinguals with limited and/or interrupted schooling supported her students in reading, writing, and critiquing poems model after Tupac Shakur's (2002) *The Rose that Grew from Concrete.* Specifically, I provide examples of teacher-made curricular materials, video clips and transcriptions of students engaging with these materials, and analyses of student writing.

Third, I conclude by inviting attendees to reflect on how they already may be implementing some of these ten practices and how they might experiment with new ones so they can effectively and critically apprentice their students to reading, writing, and discussing content-based texts for authentic social, academic, and political purposes.

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5. Literacy in Industrial Technology: Reading and Writing in the Construction of Physical Objects

Yaegan Doran (Australian Catholic University)

This talk will present initial results from a large study of the literacy demands involved in the design and construction of physical objects in senior secondary school. In particular, it will focus on a subject in NSW, Australia, called Industrial Technology, centred on designing and constructing major works in timber, metal, automotive, graphics, multimedia and/or electronics. Industrial Technology is a major subject in NSW, one of a suite of similar subjects in Australia and a range of countries across the world, and links closely with advanced literacy skills required to operate digital platforms managing complex systems in product design, quality assurance and marketing. It enrols 10% of senior high school students in NSW, and its students display the 2nd lowest socio-economic status of all subjects in the state. These students largely move into the workplace after school rather than university but do so while being on average in the lowest quintile for literacy in every standardised assessment through their schooling career. Nonetheless, reading and writing are deeply embedded in design and construction. For example, for their major project, students must produce an up-to 80-page folio illustrating and explaining their design and construction. This folio involves complex multimodal demands, as students integrate writing with diagrams, photos and technical drawings, plus numerical data and project funding. With literacy research largely neglecting this vital subject area to this point, this talk will overview Industrial Technology's highly multimodal literacy demands as an instance of the broader literacy demands of design and construction. It will also reflect upon how we can design disciplinary literacy pedagogy in a subject that primarily occurs within a workshop (of timber or metals etc.), rather than a standard classroom.

6.   An analysis of presence in CLIL students' writing in science across school levels

Ana Llinares & Tom Morton (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid), Nashwa Nashaat-Sobhy (Universidad Politécnica de Valencia)

The aim of schooling is to equip students with disciplinary literacies. This encompasses the ability to produce coherent text and express both concrete and abstract knowledge. This requires the ability to generalize and express abstractions alongside concrete examples, construe experiences, negotiate possibilities, and use reference effectively (e.g., deixis). In bilingual education scenarios, this is particularly challenging as students are expected to produce disciplinary appropriate texts in additional languages.

In this presentation, we analyze the written texts produced by students in Year 7 and Year 10 (beginning and end of compulsory secondary education) in a content and language integrated learning (CLIL) setting in Spain, where the language of instruction is English. The students responded to a prompt eliciting the same Cognitive Discourse Functions (CDFs) (Dalton-Puffer, 2013) on the same topic in a biology course. Using the SFL concept of presence (e.g., Hood, 2020), we examine its three aspects—iconicity (the degree of abstraction or concreteness in encoding ideas), negotiability (the arguability of propositions), and implicitness (how much meaning is recoverable from the text alone). Following previous studies that have applied SFL to the analysis of students' production of CDFs (e.g. Nashaat-Sobhy & Llinares, 2023; Llinares & Morton, 2024), the present study aims at comparing the students' use of presence in the CDFs *define* and *explore* across levels of schooling, as well as relating our analysis to English and biology teachers' assessment of the texts using comparative judgment. Preliminary results show more variation in presence profiles between the two CDFs than between school levels. The analysis also suggests that higher levels of presence are not always associated with higher ratings in teachers' judgments. We identify pedagogical implications regarding the role of concept dependency as a component of disciplinary literacy in bilingual education. We also discuss possible conceptual modifications to the model of presence arising from our analysis.

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7. Designing instruction to develop teachers' Disciplinary Linguistic Knowledge for science and health literacies

Sally Humphrey (University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia)

This presentation builds on recent developments in SFL theory on the nature of language resources in disciplinary knowledge of schooling and on developments within genre pedagogy to explicitly teach those resources in the context of teacher professional development.

Resources and workshops designed to develop teachers' disciplinary linguistic knowledge (DLK) frequently foreground deconstruction of disciplinary texts and modelling of practical classroom-based sequences from genre pedagogies, such as the Teaching Learning Cycle (TLC) or Reading to Learn (R2L). Deconstruction activities in professional learning contexts typically focus on explicit modelling of a particular feature and its disciplinary work in one or more model text/s, followed by small/whole group practice to identify and explain selected discourse and/or grammatical features, using text/s of the same genre.

In this workshop I focus on addressing ongoing challenges in developing teachers' linguistic knowledge and confidence, relating to:

- How SFL metalanguage can be best connected to existing ways that teachers talk about meaning making in their discipline.
- How teaching and learning activities can provide sufficient visibility of the language feature under investigation without undermining teachers' capacity for independent 'semiotic labour'.

I demonstrate task-based instructional cycles that have been designed to address these challenges through recent collaborative design of professional learning textbooks and workshops in secondary science and critical health literacy. These cycles focus on revealing patterns in discourse semantics in relation to register meanings of concern to teachers and on revealing characteristic mis-matches between discourse semantic and lexico-grammatical resources to ensure maximal visibility for all learners in linguistically diverse classrooms.

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8. Towards a disciplinary literacy approach: establishing a school/ Trust-wide new way of working across the curriculum

Natalie Cheers, Hadrian Briggs & Andy Leather (Royal High School Bath)
Gail Forey (University of Bath, UK)

This paper presents an innovative framework, integrating Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) with Data-Driven Learning (DDL) (Johns, 1991) to introduce a culture of disciplinary literacy in a UK independent girls' secondary school trust (including 26 schools). Focusing on the role of register in the classroom (Halliday, 1986/2007; Martin, 1993) and drawing from authentic language data, we examine how DDL can support teachers and students in developing their understanding of disciplinary literacy.

The study explores the practical implementation of SFL and DDL to enhance teachers' confidence, linguistic awareness of their disciplines and pedagogical practices. DDL empowers teachers and students to become language detectives, using corpus tools to investigate both familiar and unfamiliar patterns (Yoon & Griers, 2016). Alongside the introduction of DDL, SFL's register framework was explicitly taught to scaffold learners' awareness and understanding of meaning-making and linguistic choices across the curriculum. Teachers also adopted register as a teaching and learning resource, as well as a lesson observation tool (Gebhard, 2019). Data were collected through interviews with teachers, lesson observations and an analysis of teaching resources. The analysis of the data sheds light on the implementation, benefits and challenges faced by teachers when engaging with corpora, DDL and register. We discuss how the teachers' insights related to disciplinary literacy effectively informed lesson planning and learning objectives.

In addition, we examine how enhanced linguistic knowledge and awareness informed curriculum design and lesson observation feedback. The findings contribute to the development of a corpus informed discourse analysis model, fostering a more evidence-driven and analytical whole-school approach that better supports student outcomes.

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9. Enhancing Secondary Literacy Education through Genre-Based Pedagogy: A Synthesis of Research on Diverse Student Populations and Writing Development

Winfred Wenhui Xuan (Hong Kong Metropolitan University, Hong Kong SAR China)
Cassi Liardet (Macquarie University Sydney Australia)

Utilizing research synthesis methodology, this paper systematically reviews 67 studies on the application of genre-based pedagogy (GBP) in secondary language education, with a specific focus on writing instruction from 1999-2023. The primary objectives of this synthesis are to: (1) examine how GBP has been implemented in secondary education contexts and identify the types of writing problems addressed and the contexts in which they occur; (2) summarize the accumulated findings in this area; and (3) evaluate the effectiveness of GBP and understand the mechanisms behind its impact.

The studies collectively highlight the efficacy of genre-based pedagogy in enhancing students' writing skills, disciplinary literacy, and academic performance across various subjects, including English language arts, science, and history. Key findings indicate that GBP supports the development of students' linguistic and metalinguistic awareness, enabling them to navigate and produce complex academic texts.

The research underscores the challenges and successes of implementing genre-based pedagogy in various educational settings, including urban, rural, and international contexts. It also explores the role of technology-enhanced environments in supporting genre-based instruction and the potential for genre pedagogy to address social justice issues through critical literacy practices.

Overall, this synthesis demonstrates that genre-based pedagogy is a powerful tool for improving secondary students' writing abilities and academic success, particularly for those from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The findings suggest that continued research and professional development in this area are essential for maximizing the benefits of genre-based approaches in secondary education.

10. Source acknowledgement in undergraduate writing: why, when and how
Hilary Nesi (Coventry University)

The skills needed to cite meaningfully, accurately and appropriately in academic research contexts are notoriously difficult to acquire. Outside academia, most professional writers address non-experts or experts in a different field, and generally these readers trust to the writers' professional expertise and accept that there exists established evidence for their claims. Thus, because it is a peculiarly academic practice with no exact equivalence in journalism or teaching materials, students often enter university without much experience of the purposes and mechanics of citation, although once at university they may be expected to acquire these skills simply through exposure to academic reading material and through the guides available in libraries and writing centres. This paper will present findings from an analysis of the British Academic Written English (BAWE) corpus, and will explore the ways in which proficient student writers develop their citation practices according to the conventions of their disciplines, the purposes of the texts they are writing, and the roles they want their sources to play. Students were found to cite more as they progress through the years of undergraduate study, but they were not expected to cite sources in every type of assignment they wrote, and although they did use citations to support their own arguments and engage with others (as published academic researchers do), they were also likely to cite for a range of other reasons. Sources cited in the BAWE corpus could be objects of study, for example, as in literary or linguistic analysis. Alternatively they could be "shorthand references to procedures" (Hyland 1999: 347), or simply "authorial demonstrations of due diligence" (Swales 2014: 119). Citation forms (integral and non-integral, with and without direct quotation) were found to extend well beyond those described in standard writing guides, indicating the complexity of choices open to students, all of which could affect the communicative success of their writing.

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11. Text types and disciplinary literacy

Philip Durrant (University of Exeter)

A central task for student writers is learning to craft their language for different audiences, purposes and topics. Very different language is required to, for example, report experiments, explain phenomena, account for events, and critique poems. Different language is needed when writing for experts or a lay-audience, for colleagues or strangers; to integrate written sources, analyse quantitative data, or foreground the writer's voice. Mastering this variation requires a rich linguistic repertoire and sensitivity to the demands of shifting contexts. To support students in this, educators need explicit knowledge of such variation and the principles that underlie it.

While a range of taxonomies have been proposed for student writing, there is little agreement about the main text types that exist or how frequently used terms (such as *exposition* or *evaluation*) should be defined. More fundamentally, I will argue that the very attempt to define text categories is problematic. Most real academic texts do not belong unambiguously to a single category, and it is often the ability to blend or reshape categories, or to work with emergent forms of writing in novel contexts, that marks high-quality writing. Moreover, organising texts into discrete categories makes it difficult to understand the similarities and differences between them and the basic principles underlying variation.

In this presentation, I will illustrate how novel research techniques might offer a more useful way of understanding text type variation. This approach empirically determines key underlying axes of text type variation and maps texts on these axes to define degrees of similarity and difference. This enables us to trace the multiple ways in which texts can resemble or differ from each other; to understand how this variation relates to educational level, academic discipline, and traditional genre categories; and to see how individual writing tasks fit into this broader picture.

12. Corpora in learning about language in pre-tertiary education contexts

Paul Thompson (University of Birmingham)

'Data-Driven Learning' is a term coined by Tim Johns in 1991 to describe an approach to learning about language through the detection of patterns and tendencies in language use using corpus data. It is an increasingly influential approach, predominantly in tertiary education contexts - however, its uptake in primary and secondary education to date has been slow. Early attempts to stimulate interest in the uses of DDL in secondary school teaching can be seen in a two-day seminar funded by the British Association for Applied Linguistics in 2010, coupled with research conducted by Sealey and Thompson in two primary schools in Reading (2002-04), but progress since then has been very limited. In this talk, I will discuss reasons behind the slow adoption, and review the papers on uses of corpora in teaching about language in pre-tertiary educational contexts that have been published in the last twenty years, with the collection edited by Crosthwaite (2019) marking a crucial point in the development of corpus-based approaches.

Most recently, the recent rapid emergence of Artificial Intelligence has led to debates over whether Gen AI will replace the need for corpus-based language learning, even before it is introduced more widely into school teaching. Crosthwaite and Baisa (2023) argue that both DDL and Gen AI have their strengths and that a combination of the two will be maximally productive, while ongoing doctoral research by Rohmatika (with Indonesian EFL students) indicates that learners over course of time find the use of Gen AI unsatisfying and instead identify DDL as a better means to nurture personal voice in their writing.

13. Five educational purposes identified for the BAWE corpus

Hilary Nesi & Sheena Gardner (Coventry University)

The aim of this talk is to introduce the five social/educational purposes identified in Nesi and Gardner (2012) for the BAWE corpus of successful written university assignments. Under the five purposes we identified 13 genre families. Each genre family contains different genres. For example, a discussion essay and an exposition essay both belong to the Essay genre family; a book review and an equipment evaluation both belong to the Critique genre family. Like the BAWESS project, our analysis was informed by Martin's definition of genre as 'the system of staged goal-oriented social processes through which social subjects in a given culture live their lives' (1997: 13).

We did not assume that we knew the purposes in advance or from simply looking at the assignments, rather we investigated the context in which the assignments were produced – we looked at National degree benchmarks; National subject guidelines; University guidelines (assessment, PPD); Departmental documentation; we interviewed tutors and students; and we collected data about each of the assignments in our assignment submission forms.

We considered what was included and what was not included. The graduate attribute expectations pointed to our five social purposes, but here was also mention of International awareness, and no mention of Developing moral citizens. The five social/educational purposes (with related genre families) are:

- demonstrating knowledge (Explanation, Exercise);
- demonstrating independent reasoning (Essay, Critique);
- building research skills (Literature Survey, Methodology Recount, Research Report);
- preparing for professional practice (Case study, Design Specification, Problem Question, Proposal);
- writing for oneself and others (Narrative Recount, Empathy writing)

The main university graduate attributes have probably remained constant, but the purpose of schools today might be different. The purposes we identified can provide a guide, but they should not be assumed. We expect the BAWE project to inform the BAWESS project, but we also expect differences.

14. Disciplinary literacy & corpus-based pedagogy: The BAWESS project

G. Forey, R. Jablonkai (University of Bath), N. Cheers (Royal High School Bath), L. McCallum (Edinburgh Napier University), H. Handford (Wolverhampton City Council), D. Therova, D. Beauchamp (University of Bath)

The writing demands of high-stakes secondary school examinations (e.g., GCSE, iGCSE, A Levels, IB) are challenging for many students and can be formidable gatekeepers in their academic, personal and professional growth. It is, therefore, vital for students to perform well in these gate-keeping exams. To explore the characteristics of secondary school exam writing, the ESRC-funded 'Disciplinary literacy and corpus-based pedagogy project' (2025-2028) is building the British Academic Written English Secondary School (BAWESS) corpus of authentic discipline-specific student exam-practice written texts collected from secondary schools in the UK, and English medium education (EME) international schools. The BAWESS project aims to fill a critical gap in the field of corpus-based educational research on disciplinary literacy by providing insights into the linguistic characteristics of young learners' disciplinary writing and its development in secondary school settings. In this talk, we introduce the BAWESS corpus and examine the challenges and innovations involved in designing and compiling the corpus, highlighting both methodological and ethical considerations. We also outline the initial findings from the BAWESS pilot study, which has informed the main study. In order to examine salient linguistic features underpinning the development of disciplinary literacy, preliminary interviews were conducted with subject teachers to understand the literacy demands of their subjects. Building on the interview findings, the subsequent corpus analysis focused on single words, lexical bundles, discipline-specific prefixes and suffixes, and keywords in different subjects. The corpus analysis informed subject-specific materials for exam preparation which were collaboratively developed with schoolteachers. In this talk, we will share examples of these corpus-informed teaching and learning materials. We will also discuss the applicability of a corpus-based pedagogy for fostering disciplinary literacy in secondary school settings.

15. Introducing the Language and Literacy Network in Education

Bev Derewianka and friends (University of Wollongong, Australia)

Developing out of the work in Sydney, there has been a groundswell of interest in creating a community of educators and researchers concerned with the promotion of SFL in educational contexts. This has culminated in the creation of the Language and Literacy in Education Network (LLEN).

Already a great deal of formative work has been undertaken in terms of developing a number of working groups around:

- encouraging collaborations between teachers interested in implementing a functional approach in schools;
- providing teaching resources and professional learning around applying functional theory;
- undertaking research into the teaching of/about language in schools and sharing our findings with policy makers;
- providing a space for those working in teacher education to collaborate and share ideas and materials on the teaching of language and literacy;
- initiating discussions with educators and researchers working in the field of language and literacy around the world with a view to forming international collaborations;
- creating an interface between the Network and the outside world, primarily through the establishment and maintenance of a Network website.

The Network will be introduced at the Symposium. The formal launch will be held at the The 50th International Systemic Functional Congress in Glasgow 7-11 July.