

Crossing Boundaries: Recruiting Experience into Academic Writing

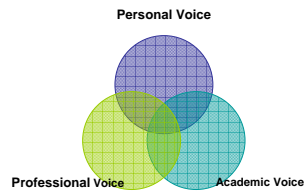
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Diploma in Education (Adult Education)

- Formalised 1995
- Aimed at adult educators and trainers
- NQF level 5
- 'Alternative access'
- Work experience a requirement
- Key historical tension: access vs. practitioner/professional development

'Critical incident'

- Assignment marking and comments to students – linked to academic literacy



Adult Learning at a HEI

- Adult Learning has a rich history in Higher Education but the experiences of adult learners and their success has not been well documented. The majority of the studies have looked at the perspectives of traditional first year students.
- The focus of our study is on adult learners since there is a growing need to increase access for adult learners to higher education.
- It therefore becomes important to understand the complex and different experiences of adult learners since it influences their learning and the curriculum design.

Defining an Adult Learner

- For the purposes of this paper an adult learner is 23 years and older
- Diploma in Education Learners
 - Gender: Majority Female
 - Age: Ranges from 23 to 54 years
 - Race: 60% coloured, 30% african and 10% white
 - Educational Levels: Grade 10-12 with some post matric learning

Curriculum



Learners Voice

Positionality

Teaching, Learning and Curriculum

- Theories of learning
- Critical Reflection
- Validating experience
- Education is political. "Adult Educators cannot be politically neutral. The very nature of their voice is to activate the people and arouse their consciousness". Julius Nyerere

Modules

- There are 3 cohorts of learners-Seta, Community and Telkom
- The mode of delivery and duration is different
- There are 6 modules

First Year	Second Year
Adult Learning	Fields and Sites of ETD Practice
Organisational Development	Foundations of Adult Learning Theory
Designing and Facilitating a Learning event	Field Study

Adult Learning

- Personal experience
- Learning and context
- Language barriers
- Diversity
- Adult learning theories
- Critical theory of Paulo Freire

- Through this process of engaging with their own learning they begin to **develop an understanding of themselves as learners with a 'voice'**. A voice which helps them to write about their experience. This creates the space for marginalized students to raise their 'voice' and break their silence.
- They **are introduced to another 'voice' through the theory** and learn how to integrate the theory into their writing through an introduction to referencing.
- We are however very conscious of **students own anxieties** about anything that talks about the academic and thus gently introduce them to this new and threatening space.

Organisational Development

- Learning within organizations and groups.
- Theories of organisations and groups
- The voice is cautious but critical since it challenges their perception of their organization and how learning happens in that context.

Designing and Facilitating a Learning Event

- Educational Design
- Theoretical lens
- Identity and Positionality as facilitators
- Their voice becomes more assertive since they reflect on their own professional experience which they feel confident about.

Foundations of Adult Learning

- Social Theory and Perspective Building
- Adult Education and Globalization.
- A voice begins to emerge that helps them make sense of their personal and professional voice. A voice that is sometimes angry, questioning and assertive.
- They begin to develop an “academic” voice through the readings and are encouraged to have a conversation with the writers through their assignments.

Fields and Sites of ETD Practice

- Education, Training and Development
- Contextual understanding
- Understanding the impact of policy on learning
- Their practitioner lens is sharpened and their voice is confident, critical and positive when they realize that the legislation is also enabling but not always implemented.

Field Study

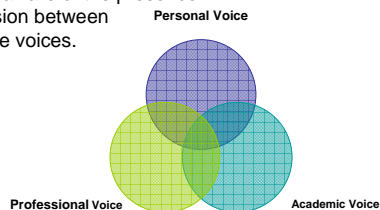
- Role Specialization
- Deepens their theoretical understanding
- A strong professional voice emerges linked to the personal and academic voice.

Curriculum in Summary

- The **modules are not taught in isolation of each other** and this encourages coherence.
- Teaching of **academic literacy is integrated into the curriculum.**
- The **thread** joining the modules is developing critical reflective practitioners
- The **theme** that cuts across the curriculum is the dialectical/two way relationship between learning and context

Key Issues

Through our teaching and learning we have grappled with the notion of voice and have become aware of the presence and tension between the three voices.



- This has sparked a question for us as we work on this course and with these adult learners:
- **“What exactly is the ‘voice’ we seek to develop as we recruit experience into academic writing?”**

Identifying Unique Features of the Dip. Ad. Ed. Curriculum

*It enlists the prior knowledge and experiences of learners - not, as mere stepping stones on the way to acquiring 'superior' literacies or 'brand new identities', but as the relatively stable and enduring platform from which current learning will take place.

*It reinterprets the concepts of RPL and Open Access. In this case, Recognition of PL denotes acceptance that learners are already socio-culturally, politically and professionally positioned, and that they will 'accost' the curriculum from pre-established positions.

Reviewing the curriculum from the literacy development perspective

- The curriculum 'implants' learners 'more firmly' on the ground on which they already stand 'preserving' their 'erstwhile' identities, but at the same time, 'fortifying' and 'empowering' those identities by seeking to give them 'voice'.
- Learners speak, write, think and generally behave as positioned individuals – positioned at the interfaces of their personal, professional and academic 'life worlds'.
- It thus undercuts conventional binaries: between literacy and oracy (Pennycook 2001); and between primary and secondary discourses (Gee 1996).
- It deconstructs the 'literacy myth' (Gee 1996), which presupposes a disembodied, sterilised and often homogenised 'literacy' – enshrouding the academy – which every learner must acquire, 'or else'!
- It fosters critical engagement: learners respond to the theories, concepts and ideals imparted by the curriculum as 'positioned individuals'. At the same time, it is reflexive: learners are continuously encouraged to reassess those positions, and to 'shift' or 'adjust' position' on the basis of new evidence/knowledge/experience.

Vernacularisation, Serialisation and Splicing of Discourses

- A result of the 'positioning' of learners at the interface of their personal, professional and academic 'life worlds' is that academic discourses are 'vernacularised' (i.e. recontextualised, translated into 'localised' accents and subjected to 'personalised uptake').
- Genres serialised e.g. an assignment in which students record personal impressions of the uses of language around them; identify and explain patterns which emerge (e.g. who uses what kind of language, when); and then invoke theoretical sources to buttress their analyses. Thus we have a movement from narrative to expository and through to discursive genres. A felicitous effect of this serialisation of genres is that it creates an impetus for the projection of 'personal voices' which is sustained right through to the discursive part of the assignment.
- Genres also spliced, particularly in the personal journal, where students do memoirs which are a blend of personal narratives, reports and expositions as well as theoretical engagements.

Conceptualising my role as literacy development facilitator

- A shift from 'scaffolding' – which has connotations of 'hoisting upwards' – to 'affirmation' or 'reinforcement' – which suggests 'strengthening' or 'giving voice' to something already 'implanted'.
- Demystification – where the structures and conventions of academic writing examined – not to facilitate *imitation* but to facilitate *translation*, and effective vernacularisation
- Affording students the resources to project 'voice' i.e. this curriculum fosters a certain identity, positioned at the peripheries of the academy in that it also extends into the personal and professional domains. This identity might remain *implicit*, or *latent*, unless 'outwardly' projected in the texts which these students generate in the course of their learning. My role is therefore that of providing the technical means to outwardly project and *clinich* this emerging identity.

Interventions

In order to demystify academic discourses:

Nystrand's (1989) taxonomy was used to unpack levels of skill in writing. The taxonomy identifies graphic, lexico-grammatical, semantic, textual and contextual layers of text. We moved through this taxonomy, elaborating some of these levels of skill e.g. punctuation; citation/referencing conventions; strengthening lexico-grammatical competencies; the concepts of cohesion and coherence; avoiding semantic ambiguities in writing and elements of context such as 'genre' and 'voice'.

Voice

Normatively defined (e.g. by Hyland 1999) as the constructed persona – credible, scholarly and engaging - that 'talks out of' a well crafted paper. However, recalling what Gee (1996) described as the literacy myth, this is a synthesised 'disembodied', 'sterilised' but nevertheless endorsed 'voice'.

For our purposes, voice (particularly in the reflective journals) redefined and described as:

- Grounded in the personal and professional 'life-worlds' of students.
- Subjectivised – expressing what events, concepts, theories, experiences etc. related to the curriculum mean to the *student* rather than mean objectively
- Evaluative and appraising (expressing attitudes, judgments, etc.)
- Delicately balanced between the personal, professional and academic domains – not too much of the diary, or too much of the report, and not too much of the academic essay – but somewhere 'in between' through either the serialising or splicing genres
- Consciously apposed/juxtaposed to conventional academic 'voice' and creatively different from the latter.

Final thoughts

- The 'alternative' identities developing in the Dip Ed students are empowering. They have a 'What's in it for *me*' and 'What does this mean to *me*' element.
- I have learnt to teach 'voice' in ways that empower specifically positioned learners. When successfully projected, voice is the means whereby identities become 'realised' or 'clinched'.
- Thank you.