Teaching explicitly that which is tacit - the challenge of disciplinary discourses

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- OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATION:
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Background to the study

- **Focus** – the explicit teaching of disciplinary discourses
- **Aim** - examined how university lecturers across a range of disciplines, as well as academic developers, constructed their understandings of the teaching of disciplinary discourses
- **Study** – explored how the shared expertise that disciplinary lecturers and academic developers brought to their teaching, heightened their awareness of the tacit nature of their disciplinary discourses and facilitated the explicit teaching of this rhetorical dimension of knowledge

Discourse

- *"Ways of combining words, deeds, thoughts, values, bodies, objects, tools and technologies, so as to enact and recognize specific socially situated identities and activities.* (Gee, 2001)
- Academic disciplines good examples of discourses
- Lecturers need to induct students into these disciplinary discourses
- Knowledge of disciplinary discourses has a tacit dimension, therefore difficult for lecturers to articulate, and for students to learn.

Theoretical Framing

- New Literacy Studies & Rhetorical Studies
- Sees knowledge as socially constructed through shared acts of collaboration that cut across disciplinary borders
- A rhetorical theory of literacy - sees literacy as socially constructed, the linguistic resources individuals draw on to produce text (whether spoken or written) are shaped by a lifetime of interaction with others.
- Discursive systems of disciplines largely invisible (tacit knowledge for experts) - generally not made available to students explicitly until the end of their studies
- Lecturers (experts) need to make this visible and explicit for students (novices) from year one.
- Disciplinary lecturers (inside the disciplinary discourse)
- Academic developers (outside the disciplinary discourse)
- Shared expertise facilitates the explicit teaching of disciplinary discourses

Methodology

- **Case study**
- **Narrative methodology**
- **20 lecturers** (disciplinary lecturers and academic developers)
- **Data production strategies**
  - Participant observation
  - Survey of documentation
  - Memory rooms
  - Free writing
  - Personalised project portfolios
  - Visual representations
- **Data**
  - Unstructured individual narrative interviews
  - Focus group sessions
- **Discourse Analysis**

Examples from the data - 1

- *We needed someone from the outside to be able to see because once you are inside, you're the player, you don't see everything. But the person, the spectator so to speak, can see the whole game as it were, and that perspective is important. Just to bring you back and say, 'Look this is what I can see', and maybe you can't because you're so focussed, you just see your own role and not how it fits into the broader picture.*

Examples from the data - 2

- *'... just working with (an academic developer), you suddenly realise that you're veering way into the discipline, like talking out from the discipline rather than bringing people in with you into it, that's, that's always sort of hard when you're in something because it's like sitting just in this, some kind of cocoon in a way, I suppose, and then talking through, then talking to someone outside, saying and then describing what's around you and you're very familiar with all these things and this other person can't actually see them, the person can't actually see it because you're looking at it around you and it's like talking to someone through some kind of porous cocoon, they can hear you but they really aren't sure what you're actually meaning and it's only, only when you move outside it like that …'*

Examples from the data - 3

- *'… that's where I found (the academic developer) helped a lot more … students don't tend to question … you say: 'Do you understand that? Does it make sense to you?' And they will just say 'yes' … whereas (the academic developer) saying to you: 'Sorry, it is not really very clear at all', that I found very, very helpful because it would test something.'*

Implications

- **Peer classroom observation among disciplinary lecturers and academic developers**
- **Collaborative design of curricula that integrated the teaching of disciplinary discourses explicitly.**
- **Team teaching among disciplinary lecturers and academic developers**
- **Joint task design and assessment of projects**
- **Collaborative development of classroom materials**
- **Classroom strategies to make the tacit explicit.**
- **Creating and sustaining transdisciplinary 'communities of practice'**