ALTC LSES Environmental Scan

1. **Institution**

   Victoria University

2. **Contact Person (and contact details)**

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3. **Name of Program/Initiative**

   3.1 URL:
   Mainstreaming English Language and Academic Skills Development through 'discipline-linked' academic skill development.

   3.2 Start Date/Duration:

   2009 to present

4. **Brief outline of program**

   The program was established to address the learning challenges faced by diverse students studying at the interface of Vocational and Higher Education in Community Services. At its core, the collaboration of Community Services and Language and Learning teachers drew upon their mutual expertise, to develop and teach an embedded English language and academic learning program that knit together knowledge and language teaching and workplace learning and communication.

   An academic skills unit was imported as an elective to the course and was linked to a discipline subject (sociology) for the skills to be contextualised and to integrate simulated workplace scenarios, when appropriate. In addition, writing components of a 'communication' unit were taught by language and learning educators, using sociology content. Some co-teaching with an English language educator enabled targeting of English language teaching, within the discipline context.

   The concepts of 'discourse community', identity and critical literacy underpinned the program and evaluation indicates that it significantly transforms student learning. Developments in student writing illustrate how effectively students 1) learn the 'knowledge' and 'language' of their course; 2) begin to develop a critical perspective to apply in the workplace and 3) make efficient and significant progress in their learning. Close collaboration between discipline teachers and teachers with language and learning expertise is intrinsic to the successful design and enactment of this pedagogy. This collaborative approach can be replicated with other disciplines across a broad spectrum of qualifications.

5. **Purpose/Aims**

   Whilst the government policy of 'widening participation' in tertiary education is welcomed, students who are not traditionally represented in universities and unfamiliar with its tacit values, expectations

and discourse can be at a disadvantage in the learning environment (for example, students who are first in the family to attend university, from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, from low socio-economic backgrounds, with disabilities or are indigenous). Academic knowledge and expectations can be alienating to those unfamiliar with it, and there is a risk of creating an 'underclass' of students who feel more inadequate than empowered. Previous ways of supporting such students - separate parallel language & academic supports, individual consultations and immersion in the discipline – can 'over-assist', single out or alienate students. Not wishing to support a deficit perception of non-traditional students, nor perpetuate systemic disadvantage, this program aims to provide students with the intellectual and social power to enable them to participate in their university and professional worlds. This is achieved by:

- Contextualising language and academic skills learning in the mainstream discipline curricula, in which all students participate to some extent

- Embedding into the course as 'discipline-linked' unit of study for ongoing sustainability

- Collaboration of Language and Learning educators and discipline teachers on all materials and assessment

- Real tasks from the discipline included to introduce text and discourse features of the professional world

6. **Breadth of program** Initially, the program was an inter-disciplinary collaboration for several programs in one faculty, although aspects of the practice were incorporated through the Learning Support Unit. The model has now been extended to other programs in other faculties.

7. **Category   (please select all that apply and provide explanation where necessary)**

Category	Y?	Explanation
Policy		
Curriculum	Y	Curriculum design to reflect and support the learning design principles
Program	Y	
Other (please specify)		

8. **Resources**
   8.1   **Start up budget:** We used an internal learning and teaching Grant ($35,000) to prepare the curriculum design, enabling intensive initial collaboration, building staff capability and for documenting the curriculum as a resource for ongoing sustainability.

8.2   **Ongoing budget:** Built into teaching time, with some additional allowance for collaboration.

9. <u>Outcomes</u>

9.1 Uptake:

It has built expertise and enabled application of the curriculum to other program areas, particularly in the design of new courses across the university, with a focus on transition. The learning from the program has informed broader university transition pedagogy and Language and Numeracy Literacy strategies and approaches.

Two journal articles have been written on the program for dissemination beyond the university, as well as a presentation to the Innovation Showcase, 2011, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.

9.2 Evaluation(s) conducted to date - Informal or formal) – and details of findings:

Evaluation is partially captured in the 1st publication, through analysis of shifts and progress in student academic writing. Some evaluation has been provided through Student Unit Evaluations, which have been very positive.

Formal *qualitative* evaluation was undertaken in late 2011, to be submitted for publication shortly. This indicated that both students and staff experience the program as significantly progressing students toward achieving and exceeding their academic goals. Assignment failures and re-submit rates (in 'Communications' unit) have decreased, although more formal *quantitative* evaluation has not been undertaken.

9.3 Evidence of success:

See above. The most potent of these is seeing samples of students' work and the rapid progress in academic writing.

9.4 Evaluation(s) planned (and dates for this/these):

Quantitative analysis of student course completion rates and results for this program area is hampered by the fact that the sociology unit was newly introduced to the course at the inception of the program. Formal evaluation was not considered in the initial project design. Having learnt from this, I believe other initiatives are planning the curriculum re-design with evaluation in mind.

9.5 Major challenges:

- Building staff capability to understand and enact the pedagogy more broadly.
- Management support of the approach and allowing time for staff inter-disciplinary collaboration.
- Strong and cooperative relationships for the collaboration to be successfully sustained.

9.6 Other (Please specify):

10. **Publications/Reports (including links to those publically available)**

DEECD – Innovation Showcase:
http://www.education.vic.gov.au/edulibrary/public/teachlearn/innovation/showcase/2011vudaddow.pdf

International Journal of Training Research, Vol 10, issue 1, pp 1-72:
http://jtr.e-contentmanagement.com/archives/vol/10/issue/1/article/4536/developing-and-sustaining-new-pedagogies

International Journal of Inclusive Education, 2012 - forthcoming.