Leaps into Cyberspace: A Case Study for Scaffolding Argumentation in a Hybridized Academic Literacy Module

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Abstract: This study critically reflects on the effectiveness of a new hybrid curriculum implemented in a heavily populated academic literacy module aimed at first-year students from the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences at the University of Pretoria. Lecturers were asked to gauge their experiences and identify the enabling and constraining aspects of transitioning from a predominantly contact and hardcopy mode of pedagogy to one that incorporated a significant increase in online applications. These responses are interpreted alongside data from the learning management system. Among other variables, this data highlights active time spent by students and the learning tools that generated the most traffic. The study concludes that the curriculum in question is successful in its pragmatic approaches to hybrid learning, but it also shows that there is room to create more embodied spaces for interaction that allow students to thread their diversities into their academic performance.

Keywords: Hybrid Learning, Academic Literacy, Argumentation, Scaffolded Curriculum

Introduction and Background

A hybrid learning strategy offers valuable ways of providing students with "quality, relevant and impactful education" (University of Pretoria 2019a) that competes globally and prepares them for the workplace and beyond. As an educational model, its uses are expansive and enabling. But, as Professor Duncan of the University of Pretoria (UP) points out, "getting the learning mix right" (University of Pretoria 2019a) is paramount to student success. This study, which is contextualised in a heavily populated first-year academic literacy module (LST 110) in South Africa, is an example of the experimental nature of blending and balancing classroom and online interactions in higher education. As an ongoing case-study, its purpose is to critically reflect on the effectiveness of implementing an increasingly hybridized curriculum in a large-scale first-year module in order to evaluate where adaptation, enhancement or redesign of the curriculum, and teaching and learning strategies, might be necessary. Via the analysis of statements from academic literacy instructors and quantitative data emerging from a learning management system (LMS), the aim is to highlight enabling and constraining aspects of initiating a hybrid curriculum in a first-year module which hosts over 1,400 students in a single semester.

The curriculum in question is designed for the development of students in the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Science at UP in conventions associated with academic literacy, and has a strong focus on teaching the principles of argumentation. While previous iterations of the LST 110 curriculum employed e-learning modes that moved towards hybridization, the recircularization aimed to align the module's online presence with UP's official policy on hybrid learning. Therefore, between 2018 and 2019, the curriculum structure was transformed from being predominantly paper-based to increasingly adopting characteristics of a hybrid learning model. Online technology was employed to enable student access to content and to supplement contact sessions with digital modes of interaction. All course content was hosted on the Blackboard LMS, and all student assignments were uploaded and assessed online. An additional key feature of the restructured LST 110 curriculum was its methodological aim to teach argumentative concepts and processes in a scaffolded mode. Carstens (2016, 3), drawing on Bruner and Watson's (1983) theory, defines pedagogic scaffolding as "a process of creating space for facilitating access to the learner, and then gradually removing support as the learner becomes skilled enough to manage the task independently". The current analysis describes an attempt to apply this method in an online learning space.

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Academic Literacy

In the South African higher education context, academic literacy remains a critical field, which is indispensable to the success of first-year students (Eybers 2018; Van Schalkwyk, Bitzer, and Van der Walt 2010). There are two key factors that position academic literacy as a discipline with long-standing relevance in the South African tertiary sphere. Firstly, in South Africa, most first-year university students utilize English as a second or third language (BusinessTech 2015). English is only one of eleven languages officially recognized by the South African government and is not the first language of the majority of the population. While all South African students are required to complete secondary-level English instruction, either as a first-additional or home language, they do not possess equal competency by the time they reach tertiary institutions. Yet, English is the official language of pedagogy in most universities.

Mayaba, Ralarala and Angu (2018) stress that because English is increasingly being adopted as the official language of instruction across South African universities, students who emerge from homes or communities where it is not applied as the primary tongue are required to learn in spaces where the cultural characteristics of their own languages are often void. University policies requiring English as the sole mode of instruction for teaching and learning have implications for academic literacy facilitators and curriculum designers. While these actors are mandated to aid with intellectually developing students in the current social dispensation, they are challenged to do so in a manner which draws on students' identities and epistemic diversity (Hayes and Doherty 2017). Due to South Africa's diverse ethnic and cultural populations, implementing epistemically plural curricula that mirror the nation's characteristics has presented challenges. There is a perception that South African tertiary institutions have not sufficiently implemented methodologies which are inclusive of all their students. Evidence of tensions that result from demands for curricula and structures which incorporate students' agency can be seen in the relatively recent #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall student protests (Nyamnjoh 2016; Chaudhuri 2016). Though these protests largely stemmed from dissatisfaction with fee structures and access to tertiary education, they are indicative of the broader concerns regarding inequalities in the system. In an effort to address such issues, the LST 110 curriculum aims at incorporating more platforms where cultural diversities and student agency are acknowledged. It also necessarily aids in developing students' academic writing and reading skills in English to mitigate the discrepancies in language competency when students enter university. This is seen as part of the University of Pretoria's larger drive for transformation.

Academic Literacy and Student Retention

Furthermore, another critical factor necessitating implementation of first-year academic literacy modules results from the crisis of attrition in South Africa's tertiary system. Though there are institutions in South Africa that offer diploma and certificate courses, this study specifically focuses on the structure of universities, such as the University of Pretoria, that offer a three- or four-year undergraduate degree program. Each year, roughly 25,000 first-year students either drop-out of their institutions or fail to successfully complete their curriculum (Young 2016). The thesis of this study is that in order to effectively arrest this attrition and improve the retention rates of first-year students in South African universities, development of their competencies in academic literacy practices should be approached and constituted as an integral mechanism in interventions designed to keep them in the system. While various disciplinary fields and departments may diverge in incorporation of content or theoretical foci, they are unified in that senior and junior practitioners alike must apply academic literacy practices. Some of these practices include problem solving, critical reflection and "revision that results in a completed manuscript" (Defazio, Jones, Tennant, and Hook 2010, 34). Additional and unavoidable academic literacy practices which first-year students must master involve the comprehension, synthesis and application of new knowledge (Defazio et al. 2010).

This study looks at the LST 110 curriculum, which focuses on a scaffolded teaching approach that aims to improve students' competencies in argumentation – specifically

argumentative writing. Argumentation is a broad discipline that draws on multiple related disciplines in the analysis of knowledge generation. With reference to Hmelo-Silver and Pfeffer (2004), Tawfik, Law, Ge, Xing and Kim (2018) state that problem solving in intellectual argumentation requires claims, data and warranting of qualitative and quantitative elements. The effective construction of knowledge claims or arguments that may be applicable in future research constitutes the production of "flexible knowledge", which incorporates disciplinarily shaped and located theories and concepts (Hmelo-Silver & Pfeffer 2004, 127).

Scaffolded Argumentation

Within the context of facilitating an argumentation-focused academic literacy module for natural science students, one of this study's aims is to highlight the views and experiences of lecturers responsible for facilitating these academic literacy processes. The study seeks to feature their recollection of successes and challenges in transitioning from a traditional paper-based mode of instruction towards a hybridized method of developing students' argumentative competencies. Dickson, Chard and Simmons (1993) describe scaffolded learning as a systematic sequencing of content, learning tools, tasks and support to maximize learning. It is a learning model that implements teaching tools which are chronologically employed at deliberate intervals (Larkin 2002). Scaffolded instruction, according to this theory, directs students through relatively simple to more complex tasks or scaffolds. Carstens (2016, 4) states that "in discipline-specific academic literacy modules, the overt aim is to design curricula with concrete outcomes serving as top-level scaffolds". The top-level outcome and scaffold in this project, in relation to developing and assessing students, is production of a cohesively structured and effectively warranted argumentative essay. To reach top-level pedagogic outcomes via a scaffolded method, Carstens (2016, 4) refers to Van Lier's (2004) model of scaffolded learning, and describes how students go through phases of initially needing assistance from senior actors to collaborating with peers; from increasingly drawing on inner resources such as knowledge and experience to more autonomous approaches of knowledge generation.

The curriculum analyzed in this study aims to guide students through such a learning process. The scaffolds (assessments) applied towards reaching the top-level outcome, which in this case is an argumentative essay, constituted the writing of an essay topic that unambiguously generates or indicates an argument; developing a thesis statement that indicates the stance in the argument; identification of data that warrants the essay's claims; design of an essay outline to ensure cohesion in the argument; and correct referencing of expert voices. In attempting to steer learners through this process, lecturers employ what Dickson, Chard and Simmons (1993) describe as systematic sequencing of content, learning tools and tasks. This reflects the view that scaffolded learning structures are compatible with pedagogic methods aimed at developing students' argumentative abilities, because the development of scholarly arguments resembles a scaffolded process. Researchers must work through processes of identifying premises, data and warranting strategies suitable to their discipline and intended audience. Van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2005) list chronological phases associated with argumentation as entailing confrontation between recognized stances: an opening stage in which premises and rules are established, a stage in which warranting occurs and a conclusive phase in which resolution is sought (Van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2005). Participants in critical discussion – whether in written or verbal modes – must progress through phases which Van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2005, 83) describe as a process of "strategic maneuvering". This analysis aims to highlight the successes and setbacks experienced in attempts to apply such principles and methods of scaffolding argumentation in an online LMS.

Hybrid Learning

In order to consolidate all of the above concepts the curriculum must acknowledge the diverse identities and proficiencies of its target audience – thus the integration of hybrid learning strategies. Because students are so immersed in all forms of technology, it is apparent that their

expectations as members of the millennial generation must be met with its inclusion in higher education (Sahni 2019, 623). A simplified definition of hybrid learning is the blending of digital technology and online interaction with learning tools used in traditional face-to-face instruction (De George-Walker and Keefe 2010; Boelens, Voet and De Wever 2018; Sahni 2019). Much of the original reasoning behind implementing such a combination involves issues of students accessing resources for higher education with the flexibility and convenience of choosing the time and place (Boelens, Voet and De Wever 2018, 198). In this sense, perceptions of hybrid modes are, as Du Toit and Verhoef (2018, 1) term it, instrumentalist. They further suggest that technology in higher education is not without its concerns. One such issue is the "achievement gap" (Du Toit, and Verhoef 2018, 2) that is borne out of socio-economic differences in students. The concern here, specifically in the South African context, is that students from varying socio-economic backgrounds possess unequal proficiencies in digital literacy due to difficulties such as poor infrastructure in the school system. Therefore, though the overwhelming assessment is that it is a positive addition, the argument exists that it is imperative that technology is not viewed as an isolated artefact or tool and that it does not ignore the lived experience of the individual.

"Technology can play a major role in the transformation of higher education in general," say Du Toit and Verhoef (2018, 1), "but if transformation is understood in concrete social and bodily terms – as is the case in South Africa – a more holistic and embodied understanding of technology is needed." A purely instrumentalist view can, arguably, merely extend some of the problems faced in large-scale higher education modules into the online domain – such as administrative constraints limiting individualized interaction due to the volume of students. It is conceivable that if lecturers are so inundated with the management of technology use – or if they assume equal access and ability in terms of the students – they are perhaps at risk of perpetuating a homogeneous approach to individual students that does not promote equity.

Nevertheless, Sahni (2019, 624) highlights the link between student satisfaction, student engagement and student retention, and suggests that "planned technological intervention" has been shown to increase students' commitment to and involvement in their own learning. For this reason, provided that it is embraced in an embodied manner, as suggested by Du Toit and Verhoef (2018), it can also become a tool for acknowledging and equipping student diversity. Boelens, Voet and De Wever (2018, 197–198) indicate that the literature suggests an increasing belief that hybrid learning allows for more "personalised learning trajectories" and "differentiated interaction". Additionally, Waghid and Waghid (2016, 2) maintain that the inclusion of digital technology aids in the enhancement of inclusivity and equality, and argue with reference to Charles Wankle's work that in the higher education context it may provide the grounds for stimulating both social interaction and critical reflection among students who are encouraged to engage with one another in "deliberative events", while at the same time encouraging their excitement and involvement. The contention then is that skills such as argumentation, which demand critical reasoning and higher order thinking, can develop in the digital space where students are comfortable communicating because they are able to participate with each other as individuals. However, for this to occur, it is crucial that those who facilitate these interactions are not only adequately trained, but that they are also sufficiently immersed in the philosophy that underpins the use of hybrid learning as not only a means to an end, but as a dynamic agent of transformation that allows for collaboration between the varied personalities that make up the student body. In other words, finding the balance between technological intervention and contact sessions must necessarily acknowledge what Du Toit and Verhoef (2018, 4) call the "richly intertwined and mutable dialectical relation" between the human and technological role players.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to analytically juxtapose data that was generated via qualitative and quantitative devices. The qualitative data was derived by probing lecturers in a first-year academic literacy course to gauge their thoughts on possible enabling or

constraining factors associated with hybrid learning. Questionnaires form part of survey research. As tools for data acquisition they are effective for researchers who aim to describe the perspectives of a sample of participants via a relatively quick method (Ponto 2015). In this vein, the qualitative arm of our mixed-method approach constituted a brief questionnaire to elicit lecturer responses towards a new hybrid learning project within the context of academic literacy facilitation. The questions were emailed to seven lecturers to give them time to determine their perspectives regarding enabling or constraining factors that emerged out of switching from a predominantly paper-based curriculum to a hybrid model. The qualitatively captured concerns of lecturers were then juxtaposed with quantitative data depicting student interaction, which is embedded in the LMS. Analysis of quantitative data was applied to scrutinize the extent to which the lecturers' perspectives and concerns about the efficacy of applying an LMS in the facilitation of academic literacy may be empirically reflected in or validated by quantitative data. This was purposely done to offset the natural informality of the emailed responses. The questions posed to lecturers revolved around their perceptions of the impact of hybrid learning on students' participation levels, as well as on the quality of their interactions with students and the effectiveness of hybrid learning in developing students' argumentative skills. They are listed below:

1. How many years have you been teaching LST110?
2. Pre-hybridization (the move towards online teaching & learning), do you recall any significant changes in the curriculum or teaching strategies?
3. Before its implementation, did you experience any apprehension towards the idea of hybrid-learning? If so, why?
4. Did hybridization enhance or detract from the efficiency of your individual teaching approach (time-management, assessment, contact-time)? Please provide reasons for your response.
5. What were the most significant challenges, or where are improvements necessary with the current approach to hybrid-learning in LST110?
6. From a teaching point of view, do you perceive any benefits of hybrid-learning in terms of student participation and the quality of work submitted by students?
7. Were there any significant student challenges related to hybridization that surfaced from any interactions with your students?
8. In terms of the argumentative essay, were there any enablers or constraints that emerged from the scaffolded approach? Please specify these.

The responses were collected at intervals suited to the lecturers' schedules. They were then compared to identify any patterns or divergences that appeared.

Findings and Discussion

Since the shift towards a hybrid curriculum came with some drastic changes, the lecturers were asked if they experienced any apprehension towards the idea before it was initiated. In response to this, one of the concerns that was raised by multiple lecturers was that in the new hybridized learning curriculum students' access to learning material may be constrained as a result of a lack of access to computers and the Internet. Lecturers also specifically articulated concerns about the ability of students to effectively navigate the LST 110 module in the LMS as they held the perception that not all students are equally literate in the digital domain. As mentioned previously, this phenomenon is of particular relevance to implementing a hybrid module in the South African context where resources, and consequently computer and digital literacy, are unequally distributed. This is reflective of the "achievement gap" that Du Toit and Verhoef (2018, 2) suggest is a valid factor that curriculum designers must consider when evolving their methods of instruction.

However, at UP's Hatfield Campus, where the module is hosted, there are five computer labs. These five labs contain a combined 2,045 computer workstations for students' usage (University of Pretoria 2019b), each with a connection to the Internet. Additionally, the university provides students access to free on-campus Wi-Fi, as well as on-campus support for students struggling to navigate the LMS. In 2019 there were roughly 1,400 students enrolled in LST 110. Since UP is a contact institution, the position is that even if students did not possess an electronic device of their own to access the LMS, the university has at least sufficiently provided the necessary material resources on campus. As a result, the initial concern that lecturers expressed over material resources did not prove to be a perceivable problem. Of course, that does not mean that these problems did not exist.

That said, there are instances where lecturers indicate that they had to help students who had some trouble navigating the online LMS. For example, there was more than one instance where a student did the required assignment, but did not distinguish between the "save" and "submit" buttons and so their assignments did not upload to the Grade Centre where they were to be marked. This meant that the students missed the submission deadlines. While cases such as these appeared to be in the minority, there is still a call for clarity in instructing the students on how to upload assignments. In light of cases such as these, from a teaching perspective, it is important that lecturers and support staff are not only comfortable in the LMS, but are able to adequately transmit these skills to their students.

Nevertheless, in studying the lecturer responses, it is evident that the shift towards online assessment and interaction had been positively received by the lecturers. Each response featured some version of the idea that predominantly using the LMS over a paper-based assessment strategy was beneficial, largely because of issues of efficiency. The responses show that, with the exception of a few students, hardcopy late submissions were avoided and the instructions were clear and uniform across the groups since the students received everything from the same access point.

Furthermore, the data generated by the LMS indicates considerable student engagement with various tools and content areas, which at the very least suggests that students had access to the course content that was posted online. The *course item activity* report, generated by Blackboard (the LMS), indicates that the LST 110 *Content* folder – containing uploaded inputs including readings, multimedia content items and rubrics – was the most accessed domain within the online module. Blackboard reports that this folder received over six million minutes of engagement during the first semester. Each of the items in this folder received an average engagement of 398 minutes per student. For the purpose of the analysis of this data, access, which refers to any time the link to the tool is opened and navigated, is defined as *interactions*. In addition, each of the content items received interactions averaging 116 per student. The two most accessed folders in the content area were the *Assignments* folder and the module's *File* folder. For the assignments folder, there were 66,439 interactions. Blackboard indicates that students spent an average of 227,160 minutes in this folder. In addition, each item in the assignment folder had an average of 14.5 interactions per student. This data is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1: Top 3 Domain Accesses in the LST 110 Module

LMS Domain	*Item Access*	*Access Minutes*	*Average Item Interactions per Student*
Content folder	97,077	6,221,136	68.3
Assignment folder	20,535	227,160	14.5
File folder	20,679	98,416	14.5

To clarify, a cohort of 1,421 students spent 103,685 hours accessing the LMS. This equates to a rough average of 73 hours per student spent navigating *only* the content folder in the LMS throughout the semester. Blackboard (2019) defines content areas of an LMS as "top-level containers that organise and store course content, such as lecture notes, assignments and tests". By this definition, content areas are valuable for providing the students with information, but they do not offer students the opportunity to interact with one another or with their lecturers, which necessitates class time and the use of other online learning tools. However, this raises the challenge of maintaining a reasonable expectation of the notional hours students are to spend on this module. Since this is a six-credit module, the average student is expected to spend roughly sixty notional hours engaged with the course material over the course of a thirteen-week semester. Class time, online engagement and homework hours are included in these. As the data indicates, students are spending more time than expected in the online domain.

This correlates with the lecturers' concern over the balance of interaction required to attain teaching objectives. Interactivity in pedagogic environments, according to Çakiroğlu and Erdemir (2019), requires different roles for instructors and students. Instructors are expected to develop and facilitate the implementation of learning tasks and assessments that actively incorporate students' agency in their engagement of course content and skills development activities, while students are expected to interact with each other and expert disciplinary voices and theories embedded in the curriculum (Çakiroğlu and Erdemir 2019). In 2019, the explicit aim of implementing a hybrid curriculum that employs online technologies was to enhance the enactment of the above-described roles to generate learning experiences that are interactive – that is to say, interactive in the sense that students would be interacting with each other, the curriculum and their instructors.

Additionally, the curriculum aimed to facilitate interaction that adopted a scaffolded methodology. Blackboard distinguishes between synchronous and asynchronous interactions. In the first model, interactions occur in real time, while in the second, "interactions occur over extended periods of time [enabling students to] produce more reflective communication" (Blackboard 2019, 1). The curriculum under analysis solely employed tools in asynchronous modes. Teaching tools that are embedded in the LMS and are identified by Blackboard developers as enablers of interaction, and which were employed in the 2019 LST 110 curriculum, include announcements, blogs, discussions and journals (Blackboard 2019). Data generated by the LMS's analytics tool indicates the following interaction-related statistics: the top three tools employed in the LST 110 module which Blackboard identifies as generating interactivity are the discussion board, the blog and the journal applications. Table 2 (below) highlights student and instructor interaction statistics in these domains. With respect to the module's aim of scaffolding the processes by which students develop an argumentative essay, the data is significant for what it indicates, but also for what it cannot indicate. Firstly, application of discussion boards was the most effective of the three assessment-related tools for generating interactivity. However, with respect to the module's overt aim of developing argumentation competencies, this tool and the blog and journal may not be considered due to the acknowledgement that, in designing the curriculum, these were not designated as argumentation related; that is, there was not an explicit intention to apply these tools for development of students' argumentative skills. Significantly, the main Blackboard tool, *Assignments*, which was applied to engage students in scaffolded argumentative tasks, and is not identified by Blackboard developers as generating interaction, received an average of 45.1 student interactions. These interactions, it must be noted, were predominantly for purposes of submitting assignments online.

Table 2: Top 3 LST 110 Interactivity Generating Domains

Tool	*Total Lecturer Interaction Count*	*Average Interaction Count per Lecturer*	*Total Student Interaction Count*	*Average Interaction Count per Student*
Discussion board	361	36.1	116,438	81.9
Blog	231	23.1	15,963	11.2
Journal	216	21.6	6,408	4.5

The above data is significant for curriculum developers in the academic literacy sphere. It indicates that discussion boards or forums are effective tools for engaging students in course content in an interactive manner. It also illustrates that the potential which the online space holds for transformative action has not necessarily been used to full advantage in the curriculum in question, since students were not encouraged to use the tool for social interaction, which could stimulate critical and deliberative events specifically with regard to their argumentative tasks. In our reflective self-criticism, we acknowledge that the absence of explicit schematic and ontological frameworks, which Carstens (2013) and Eybers (2019) argue are essential for designing curricula that aim to draw on students' pre-tertiary experiences in an interactive mode, has led to an instrumental application of the LMS. In engaging new knowledge, humans draw on their self-schemas (Ng 2005). Schemas are internal knowledge structures which aid us in developing meaning in new epistemic encounters by drawing on our previous knowledge and experiences (Liu 2015). Ontological pedagogic frameworks are theoretical models that explicitly aim to draw on local cultures and agency when planning learning experiences (Archer 1995). In a scaffolded curriculum that aims to incorporate students' identities and self-schemas, it is therefore necessary to effectively correlate the application of LMS tools and assessment strategies in a manner that induces interactivity. This model of scaffolded and blended learning is illustrated below.

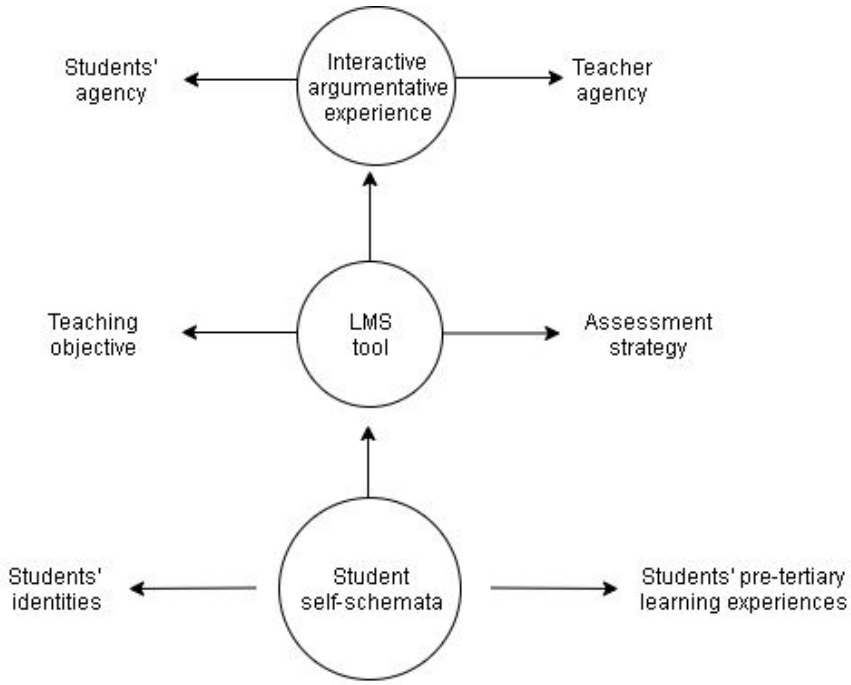

Figure 1: Interactive Model of Scaffolded Learning

The assertion here is that while the LST 110 curriculum enabled interactive engagements in activities where students drew on and shared their previous experiences of using multiple modes of literacy with each other, it should equally enable such interactions as lecturers guide students through phases of formulating argumentative topics, thesis statements, identification of evidence for claims and applying necessary referencing conventions.

Drawing on Jones's (1992) theory, Knutson (2001, 1139) states that in order to effectively develop students' linguistic competencies, especially second- or third-language speakers who constitute a large cohort of the LST 110 students, it is necessary to create learning conditions which induce "communicative stress". Such stress is sometimes required to enable students' mastery of academic literacy practices, as communication in scholarly environments often involves pressure, challenges and struggles in warranting arguments (Swain 1985). Therefore, it is argued that an online discussion board, as embedded in Blackboard, enables application of academic literacy practices in an interactive environment, which in turn generates communicative stress. Because discussion boards foster learning experiences in an open environment, students may be forced to contend with their own vulnerabilities while sharing and being exposed to each other's ideas and questions. In the 2019 LST 110 curriculum, application of the discussion board was located in the 'Science, Culture and Identity' content area. Given that this task exposed students to the diversity of their peers and encouraged a broadening of perspectives, since they were interacting on a social platform, it is not a stretch to contend that the discussion tool would be a useful addition to the scaffold for argumentation.

However, to consider adding another task to an already overburdened assessment schedule is problematic. A major concern that is reflected in the lecturer responses is that, while scaffolding argumentation is a good way to systematically introduce students to concepts of argumentation, there is a need to reduce the number of tasks being assessed under this approach. Their reasoning mostly stipulates an apprehensiveness towards the increase in their marking loads, but also suggests that some of the tasks tended to overlap in their purpose. Despite this, their perspectives mostly show that the overall quality of work improved as a result of the emphasis on process writing. Additionally, the responses show that the online component aids in the feedback process.

Lecturers are pleased with the immediacy with which students are able to access their feedback. Consequently, with the feedback that they receive at each stage of the scaffolding process, the students are given opportunities to adjust their trajectory if necessary, resulting in submissions of higher quality.

While lecturers are keen to see the approach continued, they do identify what appears to be a disjuncture between the theory of scaffolding and some of the students' understanding of why it is a progressive way of approaching their work; however, some lecturers admitted that this could be due to a miscommunication on their part. From the perspective of some of the lecturers, a section of students seemed confused by the approach and could not see how the individual parts make up the whole. One possibility for the perceived confusion could stem from the sensed correlation between students who view and follow up on their feedback and the higher likelihood that they are regularly attending classes. In fact, poorer class attendance also appears to be of concern. The theory is that the convenient access to resources makes students more prone to miss class, which compounds already poor attendance records. This impacted on the quality of work submitted by those students who did not attend class, since they were not present to hear the specifics of what the lecturer required. Lecturers noted that the number of submissions increased, but that the quality was not always consistent with the expectations voiced to their groups in class.

Finally, the lecturer responses demonstrate mixed feelings regarding contact sessions. Some explicitly expressed a fear that since all the resources were online, they, as lecturers, might become obsolete and are concerned that they might eventually be relegated to the role of "online tutors". Linder (2017, 12) identifies similar concerns among instructors of hybrid modules who fear that technology in the classroom will eventually replace "the professor", but argues that student retention and success is dependent on guidance and interaction that facilitates navigating the consistent bombardment of information that students encounter. As the data in Table 1 indicates, the majority of the students' time is spent in the content areas. So, since some of the express outcomes of the LST 110 module are to equip students with the necessary skills to negotiate meaning and extrapolate relevant information, it would be imprudent, especially at the first-year level, to leave students to cope with large amounts of information on their own.

In light of this, face-to-face instruction becomes invaluable. In the questionnaires, a small cohort of lecturers indicated that they struggled to make class time worthwhile for the students. This could arguably be a consequence of the assessment-driven focus of the module, where lecturers feel that they need to constantly be teaching towards assessments and rarely stray from this purpose. But a significant proportion of the lecturers expressed that they were able to spend time on more philosophically nuanced concepts because class time was not hindered by administrative and logistical concerns. In other words, class time could be dedicated to abstraction and critical interaction between students and lecturers. These lecturers also indicated that the increase in available class time meant that providing in-class opportunities to interact with individuals and give targeted feedback was more feasible. In this way, the classroom became an area where students were able to receive more individual attention than they had in previous years.

Conclusion

These disparate experiences illustrate a crucial area where misunderstanding of the theory of hybrid learning could become a potential pitfall to successful implementation. What has been learnt from this inquiry is that there is always going to be a gap between expectation and reality, which is why this kind of empirical inquiry into the curriculum design could be beneficial. From it, we can see that the design of a hybrid curriculum is not a singular event and that we need to be flexible enough to incorporate the changing needs of the student body and the capabilities of the LMS.

Therefore, before we emphasize any kind of concluding statements, it is imperative that we reiterate that this study is not complete, since research that includes student responses will also

be necessary. But the benefit of this inquiry lies primarily in the opportunity it provides to adapt and enhance future iterations of the LST 110 curriculum. The analysis of the data in this first part of the study focuses on the experiences of the staff involved in the implementation of these curriculum changes, given that transitioning between traditional and hybrid modes of learning has significant implications for teaching and learning strategies. Staff had to juxtapose their interactions with students in meaningful ways with the buzz of student activity occurring in the online domain.

It is concluded that while hybrid learning is undoubtedly an enabling model for enhancing individual learning through a scaffolded process, it is necessary for the practical applications employed by instructors and learners alike to be accompanied by an explicit sharing of the teaching philosophy that the hybrid methodology supports. That is, curricula designers, lecturers and students should equally understand the values and principles which underpin the various methods that emerge from an academic curriculum of this nature, since a disjuncture between philosophical modelling and practical application may stunt the aim of effectively providing a quality experience for students.

Consequently, the 2019 curriculum must be criticized for its expectation that online presence in the LMS is equal to hybrid learning that enables transformative action. While this iteration of the curriculum certainly was a successful leap into cyberspace, this inquiry shows that there is room to create more embodied spaces for interaction that allow students to thread their diversities into their academic performance. This is especially true of an academic literacy module, since it not only provides intervention and support for students who will carry these principles for the remainder of their academic careers, but is especially significant for impeding the crisis of attrition that continues to inhibit student growth in South Africa.

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