

# Using literacy narratives to scaffold academic literacy in the Bachelor of Education: a pedagogical framework

**A B S T R A C T** The purpose of this paper is to propose a framework that might serve as a foundation for designing and developing academic literacy curricula for pre-service teachers. First, the main challenges that face course designers and lecturers of academic literacy in teacher education programmes are outlined. This is followed by an overview of theoretical approaches that might underpin the framework. Two applications of multimodal narrative pedagogy in composition classrooms are then discussed. Subsequently, the proposed framework, which infuses narrative pedagogy and a particular version of transformative pedagogies into a new literacies model, is presented and discussed. The application of the framework is demonstrated through the analysis of a literacy self-narrative by a South African scholar. I conclude the article by reflecting on the benefits of the framework in response to the challenges stated at the beginning of the paper.

**Keywords:** academic literacy, language pedagogy, literacy narratives, multiliteracies, multimodality, teacher education

## 1. Background and purpose

The purpose of this paper is to provide a framework that might assist lecturers in designing and developing a participatory academic literacy curriculum that builds on students' literacy self-narratives. Such a participatory curriculum draws upon students' capabilities, while assisting them to grapple with a variety of literacies, multilingualism and identity in a diverse society. I first address the challenges that face course designers and lecturers of academic literacy in teacher education programmes. An overview is then given of relevant theories from applied linguistics that might underpin a framework for using literacy narratives in the academic literacy curriculum. Two examples of successful interventions that utilised and evaluated

literacy narrative pedagogies are discussed. This is followed by the exposition of a conceptual framework for multimodal literacy narrative pedagogy in the context at hand. Subsequently, I argue that the framework might benefit from infusing principles and practices from overtly transformative pedagogies. The article concludes with a reflection on the extent to which the proposed framework responds to the three challenges to academic literacy teaching in programmes for teacher education that served as triggers for the design of a framework.

## **2. Challenges in teaching academic literacies in teacher education courses**

Devereux and Wilson (2008) identify three challenges facing teacher educators in contemporary higher education settings: diverse cohorts of students; the expanding contexts of literacy; and maximising learning through literacy. Each of these challenges will be discussed briefly.

### *2.1 Diverse cohorts*

The expansion of access to higher learning since the 1970s has been well documented (compare Coffin, Curry, Goodman, Hewings, Lillis & Swann 2003; Zipin & Brennan 2006). It is also widely accepted that the teaching of academic literacy practices – writing in particular – has a crucial role to play in retention and throughput (compare Archer 2011: 387). In particular, there have been discussions about the impact that academic literacy has on the preparedness of teacher trainees to study successfully, and to teach literacy while their own literacy abilities may be lacking (Seligman 2011).

The problems of access and throughput are compounded by the normative discourse that still dominates many western universities (Turner 2011: 10). This deficit approach is also referred to as “essay-text literacy” (Heath 1983); “the essayist literacy of the academy” (Lillis 2001); “the Socratic dialogue” (Williams 2009); and “logocentrism” (Archer 2011). Deficit approaches typically ignore or devalue the types of literacy that non-traditional students bring with them to the university, such as understanding and speaking a variety of languages; and constructing meaning via other modes than text, for example poetry, singing, dance and visual communication. A myopic focus on the ability to engage in academic discourses, often with a strong focus on understanding and writing academic arguments within the framework of a specific discipline, sustains the recognition of particular literacy practices while disregarding others. The marginalisation of non-traditional students may be increased by their compulsory enrolment in academic literacy courses, which overtly or covertly address a generic set of literacy skills. On the other hand a logocentric focus takes for granted the preparedness of students who have been privileged to be taught essayist literacy practices at school.

Another dimension of literacy that is often ignored is that many students from monocultural school and community backgrounds have very little experience of co-constructing knowledge with peers from ‘other’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds. For teacher trainees a lack of multicultural exposure and understanding of multicultural communication constitutes a major barrier, as it is almost certain that they will have to teach multicultural classes and work together with teachers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Thus, on the one hand we cannot ignore the social justice imperative for teacher trainees to be literate in the standard literacies and dominant discourses of the university, in order

to “redistribute the power [...] to those who do not inherit such ‘cultural capital’ from their families” (Zipin & Brennan 2006: 334). On the other hand it is important for students from monocultural, logocentric backgrounds to learn how to handle diversity and use other non-linear modes of communication.

## *2.2 Expanding contexts of literacy*

The increased use of information and communication technologies as part of our everyday lives has necessitated the need to be multiliterate in order to participate fully in society (Zammit 2011: 205). Language and print literacy can no longer provide the full meaning of the multimodal content that is necessary for communication (Cope and Kalantzis 2000: 5; Williams 2009: 7). The variety of genres students are expected to master has increased substantially – each with its own set of preferred modes of delivery and sets of required literacy, including multimodal presentations, web-postings, posters, pamphlets and web-pages (Devereux and Wilson 2008: 124; Macken-Horarik, Devereaux, Trimmingham-Jack & Wilson 2006). From her experience working in a writing centre Archer (2011: 387) confirms that students’ assignments require increasingly complex multimodal competencies and that certain subject-fields increasingly make use of visuals as evidence. In addition, it has become a requirement of academic literacy to construct multimodal texts.

Thesen (2001) highlights the challenges students have to face when analysing as well as producing multimodal texts. For instance, *analysis* of multimodal texts in Humanities disciplines requires students to engage with the medium of instruction (English), academic discourse, mode-specific language and critical analysis.

*Producing* or composing multimodal texts, is equally difficult for students. Among others, it is not just about selecting multimodal semiotic resources, but it is also about the weight given to each mode in a particular text.

Thus, academic literacy interventions and support facilities can no longer ignore the need for students to access and interpret information offered via multiple modalities, and express themselves confidently in more than one modality (Singh 2004).

## *2.3 The relationship between literacy and learning*

The critical relationship between literacy and learning has been highlighted by numerous researchers. Devereux and Wilson (2008: 124) argue that the development of a range of literacy practices required for a particular discourse community, e.g. teachers, is essential because of the close connection between literacy and learning. As readers students need to be able decode a text, make meaning from it, understand the relationships between text function and text structure, draw inferences, and develop the ability to critique. As writers, they need to externalise thought in coherent, linear text as well as through non-linear multimodal literacies. For these authors (Devereaux & Wilson 2008) one of the most important challenges for tertiary educators in a Bachelor of Education programme is to devise forms of learning support that will afford students with opportunities to develop their understanding of salient concepts through literacy.

In light of the three challenges outlined above, the following key questions may guide the design of a framework for academic literacy courses for BEd students beginning their training

at institutions for higher education (adapted from Devereaux and Wilson 2008: 125):

- How do we respond to the diverse cohorts of students with widely varying previous experience of literacy practices?
- How do we address the increasingly complex and multimodal nature of professional and academic literacies? and
- How do we maximise the potential of literacy-based scaffolding and assessment to enhance student learning?

In the next section I draw upon a number of theoretical approaches to literacy learning to inform the proposed literacy narrative pedagogy: the new literacy studies (including the academic literacies approach), multiliteracies and multimodality.

### **3. Theoretical underpinnings: academic literacies, multiliteracies and multimodality**

During the 1990s scholars and lecturers of academic literacies started to move away from the study skills approach, which assumes that the purpose of the lecturer is to “fix” problems); and the academic socialisation approach, which, although rooted in constructivist education, assumes that academe constitutes “a relative homogeneous culture, of which the norms and practices have simply to be learnt to provide access to the whole institution (Lea & Street 1998: 159).

The academic literacies approach, which is closely aligned with the new literacy studies, gained ground in the 1990s under the leadership of scholars such as Lea (1994), Street (1995) and Stierer (1997). The academic literacies approach focuses on student identity, institutional relationships of discourse and power, and the contested nature of writing practices. Pivotal to this approach is an emphasis on agency and power, and the ultimate goal to provide diverse students access to academic practices in ways that utilize and value their resources. Student writing, in particular, is regarded to be concerned with the processes of meaning-making and the contestation around meaning, rather than with skills or deficits.

The notion of multiliteracies, as it emanated from the New London Group (1996; 2000), is closely associated with the new literacies, and focuses on the multiplicity of communication channels as well as the salience of linguistic and cultural diversity (Cope & Kalantzis 2000). It challenges the autonomous view of literacy – as the mastery of linguistic rules (Stein & Newfield 2006). Multiliteracies recognise the multiplicity of ways in which students make meaning, and promote pedagogies that afford both traditional and non-traditional students equal opportunities to learn in ways that allow them to participate in public, private, community and economic life (Newfield & Maungedzo 2006). Being ‘multiliterate’ also implies having the capacity to move between discourses and across genres, to switch practices between one setting and another, to deploy a repertoire of linguistic practices appropriate to each setting, to handle the social meanings and identities that each evokes, and to make meaning for different audiences (Devereux & Wilson 2008: 121; Lea & Street 1998: 159). This mobility requires the acquisition of new academic and professional literacy practices, as well as extending and enriching students’ “everyday” literacies (Macken-Horarik, Devereux, Trimmingham-Jack & Wilson 2006; and Northedge 2003, cited by Devereux & Wilson 2008: 122).

In turn, these multiple ways of learning, and the flexibility to adapt to field, tenor and mode (in the Hallidayan sense) accommodate and promote multimodality – a combination of semiotic modes, including image, gesture, oral performance, artistic, linguistic, digital, electronic, graphic, etc. (Pahl & Rowsell 2006; Kress & van Leeuwen 2006).

#### **4. Literacy narrative pedagogy**

Largely influenced by studies in multicultural rhetoric, these pedagogies seem to have arisen concurrently with the new literacies, multiliteracies and multimodality. According to the canonical definition literacy narratives are stories “that foreground issues of language acquisition and literacy” and “sometimes include explicit images of schooling and teaching” (Eldred & Mortensen 1992: 513). They originate in a rich diversity of social, cultural and religious practices, and draw upon the personal and community literacies that the writer brings to the classroom.

Narrative approaches in pedagogy and applied linguistics research mark a clear deviation from the view that first-person accounts on language learning is “incomplete, biased, unreliable or naïve” (Kinginger 2004: 220). Although they often rely on individual case studies, and cannot be understood apart from the person who relates the story, they are not primarily interested in the uniqueness of a particular life story but in the larger networks and social relationships in which the person is engaged (Bourdieu 1982, cited by Busch n.d.: 9). From a theoretical point of view it could be said that biographic approaches “mediate between the macro level of sociolinguistics interested in the roles and functions of languages in a larger social context and the micro level of the individual angle, the psycholinguistic approach” (Busch 2007: 9).

Since the 1990s a number of scholars have highlighted benefits of using literacy narratives in the classroom – for both students and lecturers. A first benefit for students is that of complicating students’ understanding of literacy. By reading and writing literacy narratives students are guided into a more complex understanding of the nature and acquisition of literacy (Fleischer 1997, cited by Williams 2003: 342). They come to realise that literacy is more than simply the ability to read and write. A more nuanced understanding of literacy, in turn, helps students grapple with multiculturalism in diverse societies (Clark and Medina 2000: 64). A second benefit is the ability to reflect on their own literate identity, literate history and literacy practices. To this benefit Coffey (2011: 16) adds the ability to make conscious choices about how to represent themselves and their identities. In other words an author of a successful literacy story goes beyond recounting ‘what happened’ to foreground the distance between an earlier and a present self conscious of living in time (Soliday 1994: 514). A third benefit that is mentioned in the literature is making students’ “passages between language worlds” explicit through literacy narratives “when the self is on the threshold of possible intellectual, social and emotional development” (Soliday 1994: 511). A fifth important benefit of reading and writing literacy narratives, mentioned by Corkery (2004; 2005), is confidence-building. He contends that

One of the most appealing features of the use of literacy narratives in a writing classroom is its witness to the process of making the transition into a new, more empowering linguistic community. [...] These stories present the students with proof that the struggle to attain a desired but foreign form of literacy is manageable (Corkery 2005: 49).

Coffey (2011: 16) takes Corkery's notion of confidence building a step further, and asserts that through the reading and writing of literacy narratives students gain "increased agency as writers and university students". She then elaborates on this theme with specific reference to disciplinary discourses.

Also for lecturers students' literacy narratives, and the pedagogy within which these are embedded, have advantages. First, students' narratives have the potential to provide lecturers with a sense of their prior literacy experiences and of their general feelings toward a particular type of literacy. Second, these narratives may shed light on the identities that students construct for themselves and their teachers, and help uncover their cultural constructions of literacy (Kamler 1999, cited by Williams 2003: 342; Clark & Medina 2000: 64-65). By looking carefully at the identities toward which students gravitate in their literacy narratives, and by responding overtly to these identities in their work with literacy narratives, teachers can uncover how literacy has influenced their students' lives and devise strategies to alter such patterns in the future (Williams 2003: 343). A third benefit for teachers is that students' literate histories may guide lecturers to better understand their learners' beliefs and assumptions about learning a particular literacy, and their understanding of the literacy journeys of learners from other cultures. In the fourth place, literacy narratives may offer lecturers insight into possible student resistance to pedagogical goals and approaches: Instead of telling the lecturer outright which types of texts, types of reading and written genres they dislike, they may tell how and why they disliked a particular kind of literacy practice at a given time. Finally, lecturers' can use what they learn from students' responses to reading and writing literacy narratives for curriculum reform. Corkery (2005: 48) explicates this benefit when he notes that lecturers' experiences in teaching literacy narratives have the potential to "relieve the alienation between lecturer and student by making students' literacy experiences and views part of the syllabus". Ball (1989: 153) and Soliday (1994: 523) focus on inclusiveness with regard to curriculum reform, and express the belief that the insider perspective could contribute to the broader goal of building a more dialogical, multicultural curriculum. This benefit has been proven empirically by Clark and Medina (2000: 73).

Clark and Medina 2000: 65) are of the opinion that teachers can best reach learners if they do it against the background of their own life stories. This view is shared by Drake, Spillane and Hufferd-Ackles (2001: 2), who believe that "stories, as lived and told by teachers, serve as the lens through which they understand themselves personally and professionally and through which they view the content and context of their work, including any attempts at instructional innovation". Herein lies a syllogism: Literacy lecturers of teacher trainees should initiate the constructive-reflective process by sharing with their students their own literacy histories, which should assist in creating a space in which their students are comfortable to tell their own literate histories, which in turn, will spur the current teacher trainees on to use literacy narrative pedagogy in their own classrooms, in order to reap the variety of benefits mentioned above.

Although there are many benefits associated with literacy narratives, there are also potential pitfalls. Coffey (2011: 22ff) mentions the following: The emphasis on differences between literacy practices in the classroom as well as in communities may create a polarizing rhetoric, and reinforce stereotypical views about culture instead of complicating the notion of literacy

(also compare Soliday 1992: 22). Furthermore, students may be alienated by reading literacy narratives, instead of being acculturated into the discourse of academia. This is because many of the models that are used by lecturers (the canonical literacy narratives, such as Richard Rodriguez' *Hunger of memory*) have the following characteristics (compare Coffey 2011: 48ff.): The author and narrator is typically a male person from a poor minority background who overcomes adversity, e.g. by successfully crossing language worlds and getting a university education, finally becomes a successful professional (the hero stereotype), and who then writes from a position of privilege. According to Corkery (2005) reading only canonical literacy narratives may be more off-putting than comforting for some students.

Despite criticisms about their domain of successful application both Corkery (2005) and Coffey (2011), independently, conclude that reading and writing literacy narratives are not beneficial only to "at-risk" students, and that all students, regardless of background, can benefit from reading and writing in this genre. The solution lies in providing students with as many models as possible, including examples with women and people from privileged backgrounds as agents, and emphasising non-formal learning using various modes of communication. After an intervention used for researching their own practices Clark and Medina (2000: 73) included the reading of a number of shorter narratives in the syllabus instead of one book-length narrative in order "to prevent students from gaining a 'wholesale understanding of difference' through an encounter with one text".

From the above evidence it can be asserted with confidence that literacy narratives are useful tools to assist students, lecturers and course designers to grapple with (multi-) literacy, multilingualism and identity in a diverse society. They are also a unique vehicle for conveying theory and practice about teaching, and they are useful tools to assist lecturers in designing and developing curricula that both draw upon students' capabilities and initiate them into academia and their chosen professions.

## **5. Multimodal approaches to literacy narratives: two practical examples**

Recently, writing pedagogues have started to accommodate multimodal renderings of literacy narratives in composition classrooms to engage students in recognizing and applying the affordances of different media as well as to start taking cognizance of students' uptake of a wider range of semiotic resources (Frost, Myatt & Smith 2009: 181-182). Coffey (2011: 14) argues that literacy narratives that include mixed media or rely heavily upon visual elements to convey meaning have become widely used, also by teachers "as examples and as possibilities for students conveying meaning within the composition classroom".

Not much evidence of comprehensive empirical research on including multimodal and multiliterate narratives in writing curricula is available in the published literature. However, two accounts of projects have been found that provide innovative ideas for application in the context of academic literacy interventions for BEd students: a project undertaken by Kittle (2009) and another by Frost *et al* (2009).

Kittle (2009) infused the use of technology with the teaching of writing in English to third-year pre-service teachers. He assigned to his students the task of creating a multimodal document that represented their own learning, and which articulated that learning to one or more of the

principles identified in James Paul Gee's (2003) book *What video games have to teach us about language and literacy*. In their narratives, embedded in analytical writing, the emphasis was to be on 'personal voice' and 'rigorous academic thinking' (Kittle 2009: 168), and thus Kittle overtly infuses personal writing with reflective writing (retelling of a story versus meaning making). However, this type of assignment may be too ambitious for the first few weeks of the first-year BEd curriculum. The purpose of writing during the first few weeks of a teacher trainee's academic career is not in the first place to define the significance of subject matter for readers – although the academic literacy lecturer may begin to introduce students to reflective writing. Rather, the lecturer wishes to induce them gradually into academic writing by allowing them to tell their own stories of learning in the modes of choice, and then perhaps conclude with a sentence or two on the personal meaning they derived from the composition of their own (multi-)literate history.

Frost's (Frost *et al* 2009) research is particularly appealing in terms of possible replication in the context of first-year teacher training. She linked the composition of multimodal literacy narratives with writing traditional essays (Frost *et al* 2009: 183). Students had to compose a multimodal profile essay (literacy narrative) describing and commenting on one individual's experiences with literacy. Two or more mediums of composing had to be used, and the students had to conduct some primary research, which included gathering information on the subject through interviews, personal documents, photographs, etc. The classroom pedagogy used to scaffold the assignment included reading and discussing in class selections of scholarly writings by several rhetoric and composition experts concerned with challenging cultural, pedagogical, and classroom-specific definitions of literacy, such as Barton and Hamilton (2000), Brandt (1998), and De Rosa (2004). An assessment rubric, of which the features were discussed with the students long before the assignment was due, contained items on content, research, critical reflection, structure and medium. Following the multimodal assignment students had to compose a narrative essay, using the same content as for the multimodal compositions, and scaffolded by means of a series of questions. They were both to *describe* and *comment on* the individual's experiences with literacy. Important findings were the dominance of print in students' work, print-based approaches to placement of pictures and hyperlinks, and an inability to link the affordances of the chosen media to purpose and audience.

Against the backdrop of the three guiding questions arising from the work of Devereaux and Wilson (2008); theoretical underpinnings contributed by the academic literacies, new literacies, multiliteracies, multimodality and literacy narrative approaches in applied linguistics and language teaching; and practical applications by pedagogues such as Kittle (2009) and Frost (Frost *et al* 2009), I propose a framework for including literacy narrative pedagogy in the academic literacy curriculum for first-year BEd students.

## **6. A framework for multimodal literacy narrative pedagogy**

A pedagogical model for teaching literacy narratives has not been fully developed yet (compare Coffey 2011: 95). In her dissertation on literacy narratives across the curriculum Coffey (2011) suggests building on the work of the new literacy studies "to inform and develop a model for teachers to use when teaching this new genre in first-year courses and WID courses". She particularly draws upon the work of Barton and Hamilton (2000), who in turn build upon

literacy scholarship from Brian Street and James Gee on literacy as a social practice. Barton and Hamilton (2000) distinguish four main components of literacy: literacy practices, literacy events, literacy domains and sponsors, which I shall briefly discuss.

- Literacy practices

Literacy practices are what people *do* with literacy. According to Barton and Hamilton (2000: 7) “they are not always observable units of behaviour since they also involve attitudes, feelings and relationships, such as people’s awareness of literacy and discourses of literacy, how people talk about and make sense of literacy”. Other characteristics of literacy practices mentioned by Barton and Hamilton (2000) are:

- ~ Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others.
- ~ Literacy practices are embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.
- ~ Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making.

- Literacy domains

Domains are the more abstract spheres of life, e.g. home, school, the workplace, etc. There are different literacies associated with different domains of life. According to Barton and Hamilton (2000: 11) the home is a “primary domain” because it is so central to the development of social identity. Coffey (2011: 98) adds that each domain is populated by particular discourse communities, where people are “constituted in their use of language, actions and values”. Domain may sometimes coincide with ‘setting’, which is the concrete situation in which a literacy event takes place.

- Literacy events

Barton and Hamilton (2000: 8) suggest that literacy events are “activities where literacy has a role”. Coffey (2011: 79) adds that these are the “repeated actions that students engage in when writing within a course or discipline”.

In addition to literacy events Hamilton (2000) also distinguishes ‘activities’. Activities are the physical actions performed by participants in literacy events. Activities may also include pathways that facilitate or regulate actions, such as rules of appropriateness and eligibility (who is allowed to engage or not). Thus, similar to the relationship between domain and setting, an activity is a specific action performed within a literacy event.

- Sponsors

Key participants in the narrative, excluding the narrator, are termed ‘sponsors’ by Barton and Hamilton, following Brandt (2004: 19), who defines these as “any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy”.

Hamilton (2000) uses the more generic term ‘participants’, which I find to be useful, as it includes all human agents populating the narrative – also the narrator. The notion of participants can be linked to Williams’s (2003) ‘identities’, which refers to the images that students portray of themselves and other participants in their literacy narratives. Williams (2003: 844) identifies three identities that student writers often assume for themselves, viz. the

hero (including the “child prodigy” and the “literacy winner”); the victim (of bad/insensitive teaching); and the rebel (who violates conventions and dismisses the values of mainstream education). The identities students construct for their teachers include heroes, martinets, nurturers and buffoons. However, since these identities are not explored in any further detail in Williams’s article, it is proposed that research aimed at understanding the literacy identities of narrators and their ‘sponsors’ in any particular context should further explore the participant types populating the narratives.

A fifth notion, borrowed from Hamilton’s work on analysing photographs (2000), are ‘artefacts’, “the material tools and accessories involved in the interaction”. Although the artefacts involved in literacy practices are normally texts, they also include other resources brought to the literacy practice, including non-material resources, such as values, understandings, ways of thinking and feeling, skills, knowledge.

In order to demonstrate how the framework based on Barton and Hamilton (2000) and Hamilton (2000) may be utilised as a set of heuristics, a published literacy narrative is analysed. The analysis is given in Figure 1 below. The author of this particular narrative is Emmanuel Mqgqwashu, a South African scholar who is a product of the former Bantu Education system in South Africa, and currently a professor of English Studies at a reputable South African university. The narrative comprises a chapter of his doctoral thesis, which has also been published as a research article (Mqgqwashu 2009).

The framework (or schema) and its application demonstrate that a literacy narrative emanates from a **narrator** (the vertical bar on the left) – the participant who tells a story of how he/she engaged with one or more **literacy practices**, over a period of time. Each practice is situated within one or more abstract **domains** (the black bars). Within a particular domain there may be more than one physical setting where the particular practice plays itself out, for example the school classroom, the home, a relative’s house, etc. There are also specific **activities** related to the practice and its domains, which are facilitated (or hindered) by other participants, termed **sponsors**. In the framework the symbol ☑ is used for sponsors who enable, support and model, whereas the symbol ☒ is used for sponsors who suppress or withhold literacy. Lastly, there are **artifacts** used by the sponsors or available in the setting to facilitate (or suppress) literacy development.

The framework has the benefit that it can be used for the discussion of the elements of a literacy narrative in an academic literacy class, for instance to check students’ understanding of what a literacy narrative comprises, and in this way to prevent students from deriving a “reductive model of culture” that is derived from reading or viewing only canonical examples of literacy narratives. After explanation of the framework classroom practice may include the application thereof to analyse published literacy narratives, and movies, and serve as a guideline to generate content for the composition of students’ own literacy narratives.

However, an obvious limitation of the framework is that it represents a fairly static cognitive schema of the content of a literacy narrative. No indication is given of the pedagogy in which it is (should be) embedded; in other words how it should fit into the broader academic literacy

Figure 1: Schematic representation of the literacy practices involved in the literacy development of Emmanuel Mgqwashu during his high school years

NARRATOR: EMMANUEL MCQWASHU	<b>Literacy practice 1: Learning English in high school</b>	
	<b>Period 1: prior to high school</b>	
	Domain and setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• school</li> <li>• classroom</li> </ul>
	Sponsors (and characteristics)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• not overtly mentioned</li> </ul>
	Events and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• learning, studying</li> </ul>
	Artefacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• grammar-translation method</li> </ul>
	<b>Period 2: Grade 8</b>	
	Domain and setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• school</li> <li>• classroom</li> </ul>
	Sponsors (and characteristics)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> teacher</li> <li>• driven by obsession to complete syllabus</li> <li>• unhelpful: "I am not your walking dictionary"</li> </ul>
	Events and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• finding word meanings</li> </ul>
	Artefacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• not overtly mentioned</li> </ul>
	<b>Period 3: Grades 9 and 10</b>	
	Domain and setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• school</li> <li>• classroom</li> </ul>
	Sponsors (and characteristics)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> teacher</li> <li>• never smiles</li> <li>• 'surveillance' method</li> </ul>
	Events and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "oral period"</li> <li>• teacher reads aloud</li> <li>• no interaction</li> </ul>
	Artefacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stick</li> <li>• transmission pedagogy</li> <li>• prescribed novel (only teacher has copy)</li> </ul>
	<b>Period 4: Grade 11</b>	
	Domain and setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• school</li> <li>• classroom</li> </ul>
	Sponsors (and characteristics)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> student teacher</li> <li>• absenteeism</li> </ul>
	Events and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• copies 'good' essays on blackboard</li> <li>• reads novel</li> </ul>
Artefacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• model essays (mismatch between models and exam questions)</li> <li>• novel (not enough copies of for whole class)</li> </ul>	

<b>NARRATOR: EMMANUEL MCQWASHU</b>	<b>Period 5: Grade 12</b>	
	Domain and setting 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• school</li> <li>• classroom</li> </ul>
	Sponsors (and characteristics)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> class teacher</li> <li>• absenteeism</li> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> peer group tutorials</li> <li>• English as communication medium</li> </ul>
	Events and activities	<p>Teacher</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• does one novel and one play throughout the year</li> <li>• translates English text into isiZulu (hinders English vocabulary development)</li> <li>• refuses to teach grammar (believes students should have mastered it in Grade 5)</li> </ul>
	Artefacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• one play and one novel (not indicated whether all students had copies of the text)</li> </ul>
	Domain and setting 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• neighbour's home</li> </ul>
	Sponsors (and characteristics)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> neighbour: English teacher from Catholic school</li> <li>• excellent, dedicated teacher/tutor</li> </ul>
	Events and activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• writes essays in English/isiZulu and translates them into Afrikaans</li> <li>• neighbour reviews his work</li> </ul>
	Artefacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• not overtly mentioned</li> </ul>

curriculum, and may be used in the teaching-learning situation. The pedagogy should ideally focus on creating a suitable learning environment for non-traditional and marginalised students. A sizeable number of new first year BEd students in the Faculty of Education from which this study has originated (approximately 50% of the students, as determined by a standardised academic literacy test with a very high validity and reliability, viz. the Test of Academic Literacy Levels) has been found to be lacking the essential literacy abilities to study successfully. This resonates with findings from a study on students' literacy narratives conducted at a large residential university in Cape Town, viz. that the majority of students in first-year academic development programmes come from relatively poor, working class, rural backgrounds (Wroots 2002: 79).

Zammit (2011) proposes a 'transformative pedagogy' for learners from low SES backgrounds (which may also apply to students with low academic literacy test scores – AC). The type of transformative pedagogy Zammit proposes offers different possible paths to improving learning in order to create a more equal society. It emphasises explicit teaching, the flexibility of pedagogical stages, teaching of metalanguages and affordances associated with different modes and mediums of representation, as well as scaffolding students into independent creation of multimodal texts (Cope & Kalantzis 2000; Zammit 2010). In relation to teaching and learning multiliteracies Zammit (2011: 205) argues that teachers of learners from low SES backgrounds need to consider an approach that shifts all the components of the pedagogical discourse so

that it reinforces positive, engaging messages to students about being learners. In other words teachers of such marginalised students should endeavour to “disrupt disengaging messages and shift them towards engaging messages”. For Zammit (2011: 205) engaging messages incorporate five different ‘discourses’: knowledge, ability, control, place and voice. These discourses, and how they may contribute to a literacy narrative pedagogy, are discussed below.

**Knowledge:** Students’ views of what counts as knowledge can be changed through recognition of the content every participant brings to class; through changing the curriculum content (including literacy narratives as a syllabus theme); and in the way knowledge is assessed (giving recognition to the narratives told, and the meaning derived from telling the stories).

**Ability:** While teaching and learning through literacy narratives, students are constantly reassured that no literacy experience is unworthy of being recounted, and can be used to make meaning. All students perceive themselves as capable. They are encouraged to try out new technologies, and to invite their peers’ assistance to learn how to operate these technologies, e.g. to use PowerPoint for showcasing their literacy narratives, even if the product is not technically advanced and aesthetically pleasing.

**Control:** Students should experience that they have control over what they share in groups and in front of the class. Viewed from a different perspective, they share the control of the pedagogical space (the regulative discourse) with the lecturer when given the opportunity to share their literacy narratives, either verbally in class, or via postings to the Blackboard site for the module.

**Place:** Students experience feelings of belonging and ownership of learning, among others through their ‘projected identities’ as participants in a larger project, which includes the sharing of literacy histories with their peers and the teacher of the academic literacy class.

**Voice:** Students learn what it means to develop their own voices in an environment of discussion and reflection about learning, while students and teachers play reciprocal roles in creating meaning.

In light of the framework or ‘literacy narrative schema’ adapted from Barton and Hamilton (2000) and Hamilton (2000), as well as the dynamic aspects of transformative pedagogies literacy narrative pedagogy should ideally be embedded in

- a flexible teaching-learning cycle that initially introduces rigid scaffolding, and then gradually removes the scaffolding to guide students to independence, e.g. providing students with a structural-compositional schema for a particular genre, supplying appropriate metalinguistic terms for salient categories, and explication and demonstration of the affordances of different media;
- a discourse that contains empowering and engaging messages;
- classroom practices and lesson plans that support a transformative pedagogy.

These criteria resonate with the academic literacies perspective to teaching writing, which focuses on student identity, institutional relationships of discourse and power, and the contested nature of writing practices (Lillis & Scott 2007, cited by Archer 2011: 388).

## 7. Conclusion

Based on the discussion of the literature and the proposed pedagogical framework I believe that literacy narrative pedagogy has the potential to address all three critical questions formulated for designers of academic literacy courses aimed at BEd students (adapted from Devereaux and Wilson 2008):

***Challenge 1: How do we respond to the diverse cohort of students with widely varying previous experience of literacy practices?***

By accommodating and valuing all the literacies that students have acquired in formal and informal contexts the playing field is levelled for students with different abilities and from different backgrounds, thus addressing the ‘ability’ and ‘place’ dimensions of the discourse of ‘power’ outlined above. The response to Challenge 1 also includes recall of and reflecting on their literate identities by using media of their own choice in a context that suppresses criticism, enhances appreciation and values diversity. In addition, students learn to appreciate literacies other than those associated with schooling and high prestige value, which in turn should cultivate tolerance and acceptance when interacting with persons from different backgrounds at university, and eventually in the schools where they will teach.

***Challenge 2: How do we address the increasingly complex and multimodal nature of professional and academic literacies?***

By sharing their literacy narratives in class, doing group work and through referral for technical support students who have had little exposure to the new media gain knowledge and skills that will help them build a context for learning to operate in an increasingly multimodal world, and become sensitive to the affordances of different media. The ‘knowledge’ discourse is partially addressed by these and similar pedagogical strategies.

***Challenge 3: How do we maximise the potential of literacy-based scaffolding to enhance student learning?***

Literacy narratives provide an ideal context for gradual induction into the conventions, genres and literacies of the academy. Students are provided with a framework or schema to analyse published/unpublished narratives, to construct their own, and reflect critically on different identities; they learn the value of research in order to provide evidence for statements; and are led from dependence to independence, e.g. by first analysing existing narratives, then planning their own loosely structured multimodal literacy narratives with the assistance of the lecturer, while benefiting from peer interaction; and finally writing a formal narrative essay, using the same content. While addressing the challenge of scaffolded learning in this way, the pedagogical discourses of ‘knowledge’, ‘control’ and ‘voice’ are simultaneously addressed.

In a book chapter submitted for publication, a particular application of the proposed model is discussed (Carstens & Alston, forthcoming). The chapter focuses on the analysis of first-year BEd students’ autobiographical narratives, with particular emphasis on narrator identities. We offer suggestions on how the findings may be used to inform academic literacy curricula and classroom exercises that accommodate the diversity of literacy profiles represented in our classrooms.

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