

**Teacher-team reflections on the quality and modes of thinking in  
Writing Intensive courses at the University of the Witwatersrand  
during the first year of the global COVID-19 pandemic**

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**Abstract**

Writing Intensive (WI) courses depend on student engagement and continuous responses to student work. The sudden move to online learning in the face of COVID-19 presented profound challenges to this model. This is unsurprising since it is widely accepted that globally the quality of learning, particularly the acquisition of deep literacy, declined significantly throughout the pandemic (OECD, 2021; Garfinkle, 2020). This paper draws on the reflections of three course teams in different disciplines and follows the method pioneered by John Bean and Barbara Walvoord in the evaluation of writing programmes (Bean, et al., 2005). It mines iterative and comparative teacher team reflections but does not seek to provide quantitative data on 'proof of impact'. From the evidence of these three courses, it is suggested that student learning and problem solving can be enhanced through the explicit teaching of the types of reasoning required, in these cases analogic, empathetic, and inferential. The argument is located within wider international arguments on the crisis of deep literacy and the work of The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development on developing literacy skills in a digital world (OECD, 2021).

**Keywords:** Writing Intensive, critical thinking, writing programme development

**Introduction**

The pandemic and the immediate switch to online learning brought a global crisis of quality in learning, particularly in the quality of critical thinking (OECD, 2021). This crisis struck at the core activity of Writing Intensive courses in the Wits Writing Programme (WWP) which is to develop effective disciplinary writing and thinking within disciplines. We explore this crisis of criticality through a discourse-based analysis of teaching team reflections on three WI courses which ran during 2020. The focus on reflection suggests principles of adaptation for the whole programme, both in terms of the reflective method of analysis and in the identification of



salient modes of critical thinking, which while present in each course had not been previously explicitly recognised.

In this paper, the context of the crisis of criticality, its relevance to the emerging pedagogy and structure of the WWP, and an explanation of the methods are set out before mapping the richly textured teaching team reflections. The salient modes of reasoning as identified from the reflections are examined, and lastly, practical suggestions are offered for how to employ these modes of reasoning in future iterations of these courses.

### **The crisis of criticality**

In his cross-disciplinary argument about the erosion of deep literacy through constant online communication, written during the early stages of the pandemic, Adam Garfinkle (2020) describes the extensive reach of the crisis of criticality. Garfinkle (2020) draws on the work of reading expert Maryanne Wolf to define deep literacy as a learning process which changes the mind of the learner through focused conversation with the text:

what happens when a reader engages with an extended piece of writing in such a way as to anticipate an author's direction and meaning, engages what one knows already in a dialectical process with the text'.<sup>1</sup>

Most importantly, this deep processing, and the intellectual fusion of writer and reader, capacitates successive new insights, because the mind forms itself, establishes new neural pathways, as a direct result of its experiences of learning (Wolf, 2007). With the resort to anxious and rushed online learning, Garfinkle (2020) argues that we are in danger of losing our ability to develop deep processes of learning.<sup>2</sup>

The 2021 OECD PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) report, *21st-Century Readers: Developing Literacy Skills in a Digital World*, confirms the crisis of criticality, noting that only 9% of 15-year-old children in OECD countries possess the reading ability to distinguish between fact and opinion (OECD PISA, 2021: 5)<sup>3</sup>. Andreas Schleicher, the OECD Director for Education and Skills, has argued that,

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<sup>1</sup> Also see Wolf (2009: 32) who describes deep reading as 'the array of sophisticated processes that propel comprehension and that include inferential and deductive reasoning, analogical skills, critical analysis, reflection, and insight'.

<sup>2</sup> Garfinkle (2020), following an observation from Henry Kissinger about strategic thinking only being possible after knowledge is aggregated, suggests that original thought is only possible through processing and connecting thoughts through these three modes. He writes that the 'deep-reading brain excels at making connections among analogical, inferential, and empathetic modes of reasoning, and knows how to associate them all with accumulated background knowledge' (Garfinkle, 2020: 6).

<sup>3</sup> See also the WWP handbook 2019, that distinguishes between fact, inference, and opinion as one of the common goals of all WI courses.

Literacy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was about extracting and processing pre-coded and – for school students – carefully curated information; in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is about constructing and validating knowledge ... The more knowledge technology allows us to search and access, the more important it is to develop deep understanding and the capacity to navigate ambiguity, triangulate viewpoints, and make sense out of content. (OECD PISA, 2021: 3)

In his presentation in the webinar which introduced this report, Schleicher argued for the importance of recognising that the skills necessary to critically navigate the growing digital world, must be taught (OECD PISA, 2021).

### **Local learning context: moving WI courses online without preparation.**

We all remember that day we had to leave the office with the sense of catastrophe at our heels and the urgent need to find ways to enable teaching to continue. For the WWP, the challenge was how to maintain networked channels of communication, to engage all students, to help them build on tacit knowledge to think further, to experiment, and to practice communicating their understanding effectively within their disciplines.

The WWP had been gaining momentum. It was formalised in 2018, thanks to a government grant, with over 40 Writing Intensives (WI) courses recognised, all faculties represented, and each WI course supported by Writing Fellow senior student tutors (WFs), numbering over 300 at the beginning of 2020<sup>4</sup>. This is the first formalised WI programme at any South African university. It has been supported by the Campus Writing Programme at the University of Missouri, Columbia, and particularly by Professor Martha Townsend, who has offered crucial guidance.

Annual WWP reports since 2018 have included comments from lecturers that they could not now imagine teaching any other way, and from Writing Fellow (WF) tutors that they wished that they had been taught in this way themselves<sup>5</sup>. However, the sudden necessity to move to remote teaching and learning at the end of March 2020, in an extremely unequal country with an unstable national electricity grid and extremely high data costs,<sup>6</sup> was a challenge for which we were not prepared. The sudden removal of the physical campus, with its equalising access

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<sup>4</sup> See WWP Annual Reports 2018 – 2020 (available on request from [pamela.nichols@wits.ac.za](mailto:pamela.nichols@wits.ac.za)) and <https://www.wits.ac.za/media/wits-university/learning-and-teaching/documents/ReviewTeachingLearning2015-2019.pdf>). For more context also see Nichols (2017) and Nichols, et al, (2019).

<sup>5</sup> Annual Reports 2018 - 2020.

<sup>6</sup> The costs of data remains a huge obstacle to online learning in South Africa, which has the highest data costs in Africa (Bottomley, 2020). The university has attempted to secure deals with a service provider to provide students with free data while on the university's learning management system, but students still experience problems. See WI lecturers' reflections 2021 in WWP Annual report 2020.

to books, quiet spaces, data-free internet, and conversation, dramatically posed the question of how the WWP could maintain the commitment to engaging each student.

Each WI course was acutely aware of this challenge. In order to be recognised as WI by the Writing Board of the Faculties, each course had been redesigned around habitual forms of engagement, such as regular informal writing and reading exercises and problem-solving assignments<sup>7</sup>. The engine of a WI course is learning to explore, wrestle with, and then perform effective thinking and its communication in each discipline; it relies on regular reflection on, and response to, student writing made possible by Writing Fellow (WF) tutors. Each course employs writing-to-learn activities (low-stakes activities to produce generative and reflective writing and thinking) as well as learning-to-write activities (high-stake tasks which teach students how to produce effective discipline-specific texts). All courses are in this way *developmental*, striving to enhance cognitive development, as well as *rhetorical*, teaching writing, reasoning, and ways of communicating within a discipline.

Such active learning cannot be developed through rote learning. The programme has always been explicit in its rejection of passive learning, which remains an inherited presence in the national education system through the traces of authoritarian classroom practices created through 'Fundamental Pedagogics' (Enslin, 1984), apartheid's philosophy of education. WI courses, in explicit contrast, are taught through activating each student, finding their entry points of engagement, coaxing them into asking questions and refining those questions, gaining an ability to analyse arguments, including developing an awareness of the implied audience and purpose of each text, so that they can position arguments and respond accordingly. WI courses thus seek to introduce students to increasingly scholarly conversation with the texts that they read, with each other, with the WFs, and with their lecturers, through developing their ability to engage in disciplinary-specific arguments. How to re-create this 'resonant classroom' (Nichols, 2016) and maintain such conversations within and between WI courses online became our central concern.

### **Teaching team reflection as method**

The discussion below provides a window into the continuing struggle to maintain engagement in three previously successful WI courses, located respectively in Arts, in Social Work, and in Engineering. The argument is drawn from the teaching team reflections of WI lecturers and WF tutors, following the discourse-based method of the Writing Across the Curriculum pioneer Barbara Walvoord (Nichols, 2016)<sup>8</sup>. This method does not seek to correlate teaching team reflections to student data, but rather focuses on how teacher perceptions are developed and refined through metacognitive writing and discussion.

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<sup>7</sup> See WWP Handbook 2019 for a comprehensive description of the processes of the programme, much of which were developed from the processes of the flagship WI programme at the University of Missouri, Columbia, in the United States.

<sup>8</sup> Endorsed, discussed, and applied by Bean, et al. (2005)

We deliberately chose not to conduct surveys or to attempt statistical research during the pandemic when our students and colleagues were overburdened and described themselves as overwhelmed, as they experimented and inevitably made mistakes in responding to profound external challenges. Rather, we developed a method which built on required processes and gave the opportunity for each teaching team to listen to each other and think together about what happened and how the course could be revised. The research on the impact of courses is part of an ongoing WWP evaluation. This project invests in teacher talk, sifted, and formalised through iterative conversation, to develop course revision internally and collectively.

A common procedure was adopted in each course:

- As part of normal WWP required practice, each WI lecturer and WF tutor responded to 18 reflection questions.
- Each teaching team read their other team members' responses.
- Focus groups were held by each team, led by the WI lecturer, to discuss their answers. These focus groups were recorded and transcribed.
- Each WI lecturer wrote a summary report of their group' s discussion, which was shared with the group, discussed, and revised, and then submitted to the WWP Head.
- From the reports, transcripts and recordings, original reflection question answers, the WWP Head looked for patterns of identified course strengths and weaknesses and drafted an overview reading.
- This reading was shared with the WI lecturers who suggested revisions and discussed the implications for strategic planning.

The method seeks to build each team' s collective agency and ownership, and community of thinking across WI courses. It understands writing, talking, and revision as an iterative, connected process of individual and collective thinking. It creates the opportunity for the WFs and WI lecturer to listen carefully to each other, to think about and to compare their recent teaching experiences and to consider what they might do differently. It also builds on the WWP Head' s outsider role<sup>9</sup> to suggest common patterns and strategies, which are then presented to the WI lecturers for revision and amendment. The method extends the skills of active listening, characteristic of a writing centre consultation, into collective, programmatic development.<sup>10</sup>

All of the quotations in italics in the teaching team reflections below, are taken from either the submitted end-of-course reflections or from the focus group transcripts.

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<sup>9</sup> See McLeod (1995) and Flash (2021) for further explication of the role of the WAC administrator as the intellectual foreigner who can pose useful questions to the discipline specialists.

<sup>10</sup> This emerging principle of programmatic sustainability and growth through collective development, draws both on the OECD' s identification of collective thinking as a principle for post-COVID-19 recovery (2021) and from the work of Ostrom (1990).

The courses selected had a relatively small student enrolment, and respectively worked with postgraduate, third year, and first year undergraduate students. They were also selected because each lecturer was in the process revising their course, so again pragmatically, this analysis does not create extra work but rather builds on existing interest.

The starting point of these reflections was an assessment of what was working well and what required attention in 2019. Each team then considered, in the light of these reflections, what worked well or what did not in 2020.

### **Teaching team reflection 1: Learning to write and think like an expert-insider in cultural management courses**

WI team: lecturer, Ms. Avril Joffe; 2 WF tutors, 1 Teaching Assistant (TA)

#### ***Course background***

The first teaching team reflection is based upon two consecutive MA courses in the Wits School of Arts which together form a year's course in Cultural Policy and Management. The first, *Cultural Policy and Leadership*, draws on cultural policy theories and on the 2003 and 2005 UNESCO conventions to consider the governance of culture and, specifically, cultural policy in Africa. The second, *Creativity, Culture, and the Economy*, considers the interactions between cultural policy and the cultural and creative industries, 'city making', digital technologies and models of entrepreneurship. Both courses have been recognised as WI since 2016 and have the smallest student enrolment (12) in the whole programme. The students are mostly from an older age group, successfully established in their professional careers in the creative sector (until Covid-19) but unfamiliar with scholarly research and writing<sup>11</sup>.

The primary critical thinking aim identified by the lecturer was to develop the perspective of the 'expert insider' (Macdonald, 1994) in the students' working roles as a cultural policy advisor or an arts strategist. The courses were designed to help the students to learn to write and think as an informed and scholarly advisor or practitioner. For the lecturer, the two courses represent the first stage in developing a fully WI MA programme in the department, with all courses recognised as WI and clear learning paths between them, focused on the dynamic between scholarship and material realities in the creative industries and the wider cultural sector.

#### ***Starting point***

In the year before the pandemic, an external examiner noted that writing in this course, specifically student ability to compose scholarly arguments, had improved<sup>12</sup>. Further work was deemed necessary to ensure greater transference of writing skills acquired through course work into the students' final research reports, and to introduce better time management skills

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<sup>11</sup> See Joffe (2019) for further discussion of these courses and their influence in the sector.

<sup>12</sup> WWP Annual Report (2019) – available on request.

among the students. The course teaching team also noted tighter intellectual connections between the course material and the individual careers of the students.

### ***2020 adaptations: What worked***

With the move by the University to 'Emergency Remote Teaching' in March 2020 there was a reduction of material covered and a reframing of objectives to consider the impact of Covid-19: on the governance of culture; on participatory policy making in the structuring of Covid-19 relief; on human rights and gender considerations in the sector; and on ways in which cultural agencies might reimagine their mandates.

What worked with the immediately adapted courses was the ability to stay in contact online and to maintain a focus on developmental responses. Writing consultations with Writing Fellows were also reported to work. When the students submitted drafts for consultation, and resubmitted revised drafts, the WFs thought most student writing improved. Flexible and immediate online meetings among students, WF tutors, and the lecturer allowed for greater responsiveness to learning issues. The habitual learning rhythms and regular requirements implicit in the WI course structure was reported as helpful. While writing improvement was not as evident as in previous years, the WI structure ensured that the students knew that they should write regularly, were required to submit reflections, and to be in regular contact with the WI teaching team.

The WFs in this course reported that their work was essentially unchanged online, though intensified. One WF noted that the

*key elements of my online role were to ensure that I facilitate continuous dialogue between students, academia, as well as a continuity in critical engagement with their work, and feedback for their writing. This role did not change extensively ... However, ... the human level was exposed through the informal interactions on WhatsApp ... which assisted ... an even more tailored approach to each student. In addition to this, a platform like WhatsApp facilitated a quicker, instant form of communication.*

As in previous years, the WFs knitted the course together, providing students with the guidance and sympathy of a more experienced peer. A WF remarked that:

*they all would always revert to me for any assistance, elaboration, explanations ... In addition, the added benefit of having gone through the course allowed them to also ask for coping mechanisms which lessened the weight of fighting to survive.*

The WFs saw the benefit of this work to their own emergent scholarship. A WF commented that working on this course:

*has made me aware of my own style of writing, locating my own voice and experiences within those of other scholars in the discipline. This became evident as I was writing and*

*completing my research report in 2020. ... Lastly, it allowed me to immerse myself in multiple perspectives and reflections of existing theory as well as new, personalised experiences of each practitioner [referring to students on the course].*

This observation was echoed by another WF, who commented that she learned to:

*read my work as a reader and not as me, the writer. That separation was not always clear to me. I respect the process of writing more and note some of the mistakes that students make, I also fall victim to.*

### **2020 adaptations: What needed work**

However, while the WFs reported that they were able to improve their scholarship, the students were less resilient. In fact, their ability to study appeared to have been dramatically reduced. A concerned WF tutor observed that the students were so stuck in this explosion of this disastrous event of Covid-19 that they completely ignored even the basic act of making sure that you read at least five articles per week.

Disengagement became evident. The lecturer noted the students' lack of interest in a specially arranged continental webinar:

*We had organised students' participation in three webinars held on the continent (Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania) in a space of 10 days around the time of this assignment. We had hoped the students would be inspired to hear how artists and creatives in other African countries were responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, how their governments were supporting the sector (or not) and their innovative strategies to survive.*

One WF's explanation for this lack interest was that the

*students were unable to position themselves objectively within the sector as they were so immersed in their own challenges of not being able to hustle (earn income in an ad hoc manner in this gig economy). They also ... [appeared] disinterested in what others were saying, whether on social media or the news in general.*

The lecturer added that the circumstances of the pandemic appeared to have damaged students'

*ability to absorb what was happening in real time to the sector, and relate these issues to the sector, [together with an] inability to think in a distanced way about the impact of COVID on issues explored by the course.*

She added that this pandemic-induced damage, also meant an inability to read:



*I would say, 'right let's discuss - what did we mean by this?'. But nobody had read. Nobody said a word. Nobody speaks up. It was just too painful; it was just too painful.'*<sup>13</sup>

The teaching team understood this 'paralysis' (as described by a WF) as arising from a combination of personal circumstances, emotional distress, restricted access to data, and an unavoidable pressure to spend time on economic survival. Students on this course had typically worked part-time while studying. However, with the pandemic and repeated lockdowns, there was little or no short-term work available in the cultural sector. The lecturer estimated that 80% of the students struggled to keep up with the demands of the course.

Such disengagement frustrated the WI principle of constant responses to student work. Most students submitted work late or at the last minute, despite the generous extension of deadlines. The WFs then faced a bottleneck, so, as one WF noted, their work changed from promoting the development of scholars, to making sure final submissions were properly packaged<sup>14</sup>. The second semester course relied on group work; however, these groups experienced multiple issues of miscommunication and an unequal distribution of tasks, so that only a few students carried the load for others. Disengagement and underperformance became a cumulative problem and by semester 2, Covid-19 fatigue was apparent<sup>15</sup>. In semester 2, the lecturer observed that,

*the majority of the students withdrew from the process and rhythm of work we had established at the beginning of the year. Most students needed to be reminded of earlier feedback, as they were reverting to past mistakes. The quality of their work was compromised as it was merely submitted to fulfil course requirements.*

These two masters level courses in Cultural Policy and Management, which had been show-cases for highly prepared learning and innovative teaching,<sup>16</sup> became, through no fault of

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<sup>13</sup> The OECD PISA (2021: 22) Readers Report connects a lack of interest in global events to the inability to read: 'Reading is key to the growing and changing needs of an interconnected world. PISA 2018 showed that global competence – the ability to easily move between local and global spheres- is strongly correlated with reading performance. This is not surprising as both reading and global competence require weighing the reliability and relevance of information, reasoning with evidence and describing and explaining complex situations and problems'

<sup>14</sup> Writing understood as 'packaging' rather than thinking is something that WI courses seek to avoid (Bean, 2011),

<sup>15</sup> Other WI courses in semester 2, 2020 reported evidence of COVID-19 fatigue. For example, in a Law course, the WI lecturer reported that the same students who had performed well in the first semester slumped in the second, for no apparent reason other than Covid fatigue. See Jean Moore, WI lecturer reflection semester 2, 2020 in WWP Annual report 2020.

<sup>16</sup> See Joffe (2019) and the Wits Faculty of Humanities and School of Education, Presspause webinar series, 2020.

their own, traumatic experiences for their experienced, concerned, and conscientious WI team. The teaching team did their best for the students, and some students benefited from the developmental aspects of the course and improved their writing. However, learning for most of these students was severely impaired by the pandemic. The creative sector was savaged by Covid-19, by lockdowns and by very limited government support<sup>17</sup>. Unsurprisingly, there were devastating psychological and economic effects on the students enrolled in this course. The challenge for the teaching team was how to begin to support and to refocus these shattered students, so that they could return to learning how to write, to read and to think like 'expert insiders' .

## **Teaching team reflection 2: The importance of wellness and empathy in a Social Work course**

Health and Well-being, Dr Roshini Pillay, 4 WFs, 1 TA.

### ***Course background***

The second example is a short first-year Social Work course established in 2009 and recognised as WI in 2018. It runs for half a semester and considers models of health care in South Africa, and the role of the Social Worker, previously with a focus on the health management of people living with HIV/AIDS. There were 57 students enrolled for the course in 2020. The critical thinking skills identified by the lecturer were to:

- compare and contrast models of health care,
- critically describe and analyse the South African public and private health systems, and
- identify values at play in health and wellness provision and in health work teams.

### ***Starting point***

In 2019, the course was offered in a blended format, part online and part face-to-face. The course lecturer, Dr Pillay, has a particular research interest in the use of technology-enhanced learning to further inclusion and values of social justice (see Pillay & Agherdien, 2021).

### ***2020 adaptations: What worked***

As with the Cultural Policy and Management courses, the subject content of the course in 2020 was reframed around the impact of Covid-19. Here, however, it appeared that the pandemic rather than being experienced primarily as a disruptor, allowed a sharper focus on content and delivery.

Following a professional Social Work approach, the first step to adaptation after lockdown was a needs-assessment survey. From the 53 survey answers it was understood that

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<sup>17</sup> Debates over limited government support, and corruption engulfing what support was available, became ever fiercer within the sector.

25 students would access the course through a smart phone, 24 via a laptop, 4 via a tablet. Only 7 students reported constraints on access to connectivity and only 2 students had no internet access at all. However, 22 students reported that they had sufficient data for online learning. The class was split into 5 groups, each led by either a WF or a TA, in line with the existing strategy of learning through collaboration and mесо<sup>18</sup> Social Work practice, and to ameliorate different capabilities to access the course.

Small group work was confirmed as an important constant. Immediate adaptation of the course in response to the pandemic included: reducing content, developing videos for students and placing them on the learning management system, creating online discussion forums, and improving communication channels with the class representatives. The group assignment was reframed around COVID-19, allowing both students and staff to draw from their current challenges, which for many included being health workers on the front-line in the battle against the pandemic.

The focus on collaborative groups as both teaching method and professional practice, as well as on issues of wellness and social justice, may explain why the students and teaching team worked particularly hard to stay in contact with each other. WhatsApp served them well as the cheapest, most immediate, and most efficient way of maintaining constant communication between the lecturer with the WFs, the WFs with other WFs, and the WFs with their group of students. WhatsApp allowed for the sharing of files as well as more personal conversations and was seen as vital to maintaining student engagement. Writing Fellows sometimes made use of their own personal funds to maintain these WhatsApp connections. One WF comments that

*communication increased a lot because of technology. The lecturer was also on WhatsApp, the lecturer was responsive and available for us all the time.*

Another WF added that

*I didn't feel lost at any point, Doc. You were always available. Anytime you were ready to answer any questions to clarify any confusions.*

In this course, the WFs also reported that responses to student drafts, and other concerns including questions about readings, intensified. The WFs believed that offering the opportunity for repeated feedback on the same draft resulted in improved writing. This service was going

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<sup>18</sup> Mесо practice in Social Work involves working primarily with groups, 'Although mесо social workers may offer direct individual services, their primary focus centers on problem-solving on behalf of groups of clients, or "client systems" ' (Social Work Guide, 2020). Mесо practice has been described as an essential intervention for students of social work to master, as it is powerful, positive, empowering, affirming, and provides opportunities for mutual aid (Shulman, 2016).

beyond their brief but was offered because they saw the value to the students. One WF commented that

*The way they [students] present their arguments improved because of these feedback sessions and I think ... some students after discussing the feedback ... volunteered to resubmit.*

Another noted the value of redrafting after consultations:

*I had to make them submit twice – they [the students] were willing and you know it was a good experience.*

Unlike most courses in the WWP, discussion forums were active. A WF noted that he asked students to post their questions on the forum rather than send questions directly to him. He saw this as a strategy that both established professional boundaries and encouraged peer learning. He further observed that

*I saw lots of students collaborating, via WhatsApp on the last assignment with the activity that required an interview. ... So you would see them [students] engaging in that WhatsApp group without the WF - this showed how technology supported collaboration.*

It was also reported that the WFs took initiatives, sourced strategies, and methods, and improved their own knowledge of learning technology, for example, creating short videos which were greatly appreciated by the students. As most WFs were students of Social Work themselves, the pandemic appeared to integrate writing support with professional values. One WF for example commented that the

*'ethic of care that you were taught as a social worker... unconsciously you apply them [in WF work] ... [I] try to learn as much as possible so that I can be the best tutor for the students' .*

Another WF noted an ethic of care in this course, and that it extended to WF team members. She observed that there was comfort in *'doing something collectively, you feel like it is legit'* . This felt sense of the value of each member and of their collective work, facilitated responsive thinking and solutions, such as the use of WhatsApp voice notes. All the WFs appreciated the sense of caring for the wellbeing of the team and of the students.

The WFs demonstrated this caring themselves by providing insight into the living situations of the students. One WF brought to the attention of the team,

*The reality of how bad it is for people to work from home. Some people stay in informal settlements, some in a house full of people. They do not have time. The only time they have is evening, after hours.*

Another noted that students had to study at night that

*most of them will do their schoolwork at night because of their living arrangements, so they will post a lot of questions on the group at about 1 AM*<sup>19</sup>.

He added that if he was awake, he would respond. Many students lived in places with weak connectivity, so online sessions were frequently disrupted with students dropping out and then trying to re-enter a session. Several WFs consequently created WhatsApp voice notes which could be accessed at any time at little data cost. The WFs took note of which students were absent and periodically checked on them.

The WFs were empathetic to the plight of students, perhaps because it was familiar from their own experiences. One noted that

*I was empathic because I understood the difficulty of transitioning from lecture room to home and online.*

This sympathy<sup>20</sup> was a factor in strengthening communication.

As with the Cultural Policy and Management courses, the WFs noted improvement in their own writing and research skills, in their confidence as educators, in their ability to give effective feedback to student drafts, in their sense of their own scholarly identity, and, because of the subject matter of this course, in their understanding of the pandemic.

### ***2020 adaptations: What needed work***

The lecturer took a holistic view and divided challenges into the personal, technological, structural, and administrative. These issues at first consideration appear to go beyond the classroom, but, of course, with remote learning, all these issues intersect with learning, which the lecturer decided needed acknowledgement. Hence while acknowledgement did not provide a solution, it did allow emotional distress to be recognised, contextualised, and addressed.

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<sup>19</sup> The university offered students 10 Gigs of daytime data for study purposes and 20 Gigs of past midnight data during 2020.

<sup>20</sup> The word sympathy here is used in layman's terms to indicate common feeling. Dr Pillay uses the word empathy and relates it to Carl Rogers' concept of walking next to someone, while constantly checking your understanding of their journey (see: <http://cultureofempathy.com>)

There were, however, casualties among the students. The WFs noted that some students were unable to cope. One WF noted that

*I had one student that deregistered because he was failing to cope and even though we tried to encourage him to continue, he just decided that this online thing is not for me.*

Many students were handicapped by insufficient data and so were unable to join or remain connected to Microsoft Teams meetings. This weakness of connection was frustrating, as WFs needed to re-admit students, repeat information, or ask the students to repeat. With the university's provision of data through a private service provider, more students were able to connect but not at the same time, as many students only had access to night-time data. There were reports of plagiarism with a WF noting that first drafts often had information that was cut and pasted and so he would '*give them a scare and tell them that the policy on plagiarism might result in exclusion*'. WFs also noted a deterioration in the quality of students' reading.

In terms of the teaching by WFs, there was a danger of emotional exhaustion and a blurring of boundaries. A WF reported that sometimes she felt that the ease of contact through WhatsApp created an overreliance. While

*WhatsApp as a platform made communication easy, ... at the same time it gave too much access, and sometimes I felt like I needed a break ... (I) don't want them to feel abandoned because it's their first experience with online isolated learning. But I still want boundaries to be clear (so) that there (need to be scheduled) times for this ... Anyhow, I took it in my stride because I was appreciating that they are feeling lost, abandoned, and disconnected.*

Clearly this course benefited from the collective professional desire to understand and to promote wellness, which included an ongoing need to protect the team, to find ways to make empathy sustainable, and to deepen student learning while acknowledging the inequities made starkly visible by remote learning. While there was an acknowledgement of increased plagiarism, and of shallow reading, a lesson learned here was that sustainable empathetic thinking can lessen the degree of disengagement.

### **Teaching team reflection 3: Learning by doing in Engineering Design**

Industrial Engineering Design

WI team: lecturer: Ms. Bontle Tladi, 2 WFs, 4 TAs

#### ***Course background***

The final example is a third-year undergraduate course on the theory and techniques of industrial engineering design which requires students to apply industrial design principles to various projects and tasks, both within groups and individually. It runs for a year and has been WI since 2018; in 2020 it had 28 students enrolled, supported by 2 WF tutors.

The WI lecturer for the course described the critical thinking aim as to learn to reason within the discipline.

*Design ... is a practice of thinking critically. Most of the coursework is project based (we learn and practice design by “doing” it – the course has a strong “learning by doing” pedagogical approach). However, the ability to demonstrate the design competence in the course is heavily dependent on communication – my ability to assess is directly correlated to my ability to access what is being shared. Thus, the course also has a strong emphasis on being able to effectively communicate the quality of critical thinking that has gone into the various design projects.*

Underneath this primary aim of understanding, practicing, and communicating design as thinking, she describes subsidiary aims to:

- familiarise students with a repertoire of design principles,
- integrate and apply skills learnt in the first two years of the degree,
- explore and understand problems within the industry and the broader community, and
- practice and reflect on professional teamwork.

As with the courses in Cultural Policy and Management, and in Social Work, familiarity and understanding of the current professional landscape is as important as understanding scholarly writing within the field, but this course is slightly different in that in terms of content and delivery, it seeks explicitly to teach processes of reasoning within the discipline.

It is also a gateway course, as it is the first year in which students specialise in Industrial Engineering. For most students, the previous two years focused on the common curriculum for all Mechanical, Industrial, and Aeronautical Engineering students; the other students came from other disciplines within the faculty. So, both the subject of this course and its programmatic position, required inducting students into common scholarly and professional practice, which require the identification, practicing and developing, and reflecting on discipline-specific processes of reasoning.

### ***Starting point***

The strengths of the course were reported as the class discussions and afternoon group-based workshops; client-based project briefs; the ongoing integration of WF support into the course activities; WF response to drafts; WF workshops with small groups of students; and students taking the initiative to visit the Wits Writing Centre, and to engage with the WFs of their own accord. What needed work, the WI team believed, was embedding the WF assistance, so that it

was integral to the course; developing a regular rhythm of continuous low-stakes writing rather than over-weighting the final project-based report and demonstrating the relevance of the WWP motto of ‘writing as thinking’ to design. This is one of the few pioneering WI courses in Engineering Sciences<sup>21</sup>. The enthusiasm of this WI team has sparked interest within the School and the Faculty.

### ***2020 adaptations: What worked***

Unlike the other two courses, assessments were not reframed in 2020, though content was reduced, and methods of delivery were recalibrated. Again, and unusually in terms of the rest of the WWP, a significant change with lockdown noted by the lecturer was of more engaged student participation in WF led Forums. In earlier years, student responses were cut-and-pasted from other work, but in 2020 these responses were developed through peer discussions of each other’s posts. The forums served both to increase participation and the opportunity for students to help each other. A WF echoed her opinion:

*Forums were a huge success. Students could develop their writing while simultaneously revising their course work.*

The lecturer also emphasised the importance of the ‘summary submissions’ required each week from the students to check their understanding of the course material. The summary submissions revealed mistakes and partial understandings, and so allowed the lecturer to adjust her teaching accordingly. They were also valued by the students as aids to memory and a tool to develop their independent learning.

Again, there were increased requests for WF responses to drafts. Because of their role in maintaining continuous contact and communication, the WFs became more important during the pandemic, with the lecturer understanding their role as the core ‘support for writing’. A Writing Fellow explained,

*We had more responsibility in terms of facilitating WI strategies and embedding writing in the course from the beginning. We had to present more in-depth strategies to students for them to take an interest in writing while juggling our own research and considering that these were abnormal times so we couldn’t pressurise them to participate. The burden was on us to encourage them to read and write, which took a lot of effort. We also availed ourselves on social media (WhatsApp) to limit contact barriers.*

### ***2020 adaptations: What needed work***

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<sup>21</sup> There is large critical thinking course in the Engineering Faculty, but it is based on the reading of literature and is largely taught by Humanities students. It does not teach the critical thinking skills which are particular to engineering.



The WI team identified as a problem the issue of dissonance in feedback, between the lecturer's responses and WF responses. Both lecturer and WFs responded to student drafts, but some WFs reported that students were reluctant to share work in progress with them, and that some students were confused when WF feedback appeared to contradict that of the lecturer.

The WFs in this course were not from the discipline, so there was a possibility, or perception of the possibility by the students, that they might mis-direct students. The lecturer, however, wanted the students to think through the different responses and to make their own decisions. For the lecturer this dissonance in feedback provided an interesting course design problem, and she asked herself,

*How is their (student) agency still supported in a way that does not compromise or override discipline competencies. This has implications on how the course itself is designed to facilitate this (learning through dissonance).*

If the students were used to learning by rote, or with dealing with problems and questions with a right and wrong answer, dissonance, if overcome, could result in increased engagement. The WFs then had a difficult balance to strike: to avoid, at all costs, teaching what they did not know, and helping the students to follow their own thinking and make their own choices.

The challenges of 2020 were those of design. A WF wrote that the experience of 2020,

*has given me lots of ideas. I've started storing/filing all my presentations/writing strategies notes so that I can re-use them next year, I also have ideas of how to embed the WI program within the course so that it doesn't come across as extra work for student. I've created a google doc for my next cohort so that we can begin with it from the beginning of the year. To sum up, I've started thinking of how to continue and prepare in advance for the next group of students.*

*WFs are doing amazing work for the University community, and I think it's important that more of us get the opportunity to present at ... annual seminars such as the [...]one I got to present at early this year with Bontle.*

Both lecturer and WFs wish to assess the impact of WI integration in the course to encourage more WI teaching and learning. They believe that the course still needs to habituate the students into habits of reflective learning and draft sharing. Unlike the other two courses, however, all the students in this course were able to access online materials and workshops. The ongoing teaching challenge is to work further on the avowed focus of the course, which is to develop learning and the course itself through reflective, inferential thinking.

### **Identifying and supporting course-specific modes of reasoning**

The reading of all three group reflections revealed that the pandemic had disrupted previous abilities to study in a deep way and revealed the need to identify more specifically what types of thinking each course aimed to achieve, both in terms of processes of thinking and in terms of learning to write discipline-specific texts.

Reading across these reflections identified the following target salient modes of reasoning in each course.

- Teaching team 1: analogical reasoning of learning how to adopt the role of expert insider, which was the stated aim of the course.
- Teaching team 2: empathetic reasoning, foregrounded by the pandemic, and which could be formalised in terms of professional empathy.
- Teaching team 3: inferential reasoning, already explicitly taught in the understanding of design, but could be formalised further in the learning processes of both students and WFs.

This metacognitive recognition of the specific critical thinking skills necessary to solve disciplinary problems, requires its own vocabulary, to complement (not replace) the vocabulary employed to identify, construct and position arguments.<sup>22 23</sup> These terms for different modes of reasoning provided tools for the lecturers, who could employ all three, or choose which thinking aim to prioritise at a particular point in a course.

Before this research, these three modes of reasoning had not been explicitly recognised by the course lecturers. Coincidentally, these three modes of reasoning were identified by Adam Garfinkle as attributes of deep literacy. Original thought, he suggests, is derived from connections between these three modes of reasoning and their relationship to background knowledge (Garfinkle, 2020).

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<sup>22</sup> For an earlier relevant initiative in science education see Grayson (1996), which outlines the design of a Science Foundation Programme (SFP) at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, which in its preparatory stages, before identifying themes, required all participating lecturers to identify explicitly the thinking skills that they aimed to teach to teach. The SFP also used writing-to-learn techniques, peer-learning, and self-assessment to develop metacognitive confirmation of learning. It was designed for disadvantaged South African students, not as a stepping-stone to studying science at university but rather as a scaffolded experience and reflection on the type of learning and thinking that they would need to succeed as university science students. This paper follows a similar approach though the application of these strategies and principles are for *all* students (a development for the future suggested by Grayson 1997), because the immediate problem of how to deepen online learning is relevant to all students. Also, the theory and approach proposed here are explicitly aligned to the global scholarship and international networks of the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) movement, including Writing Intensive (WI) programmes and Writing Within Disciplines (WID).

<sup>23</sup> Sally Matthews (2015) in discussing her design of her history course at Rhodes University, laments that while critical thinking is a constantly lauded as a teaching outcome, it is hardly defined.

These three modes of reasoning can be understood in the following ways.

### ***Analogical reasoning***

Analogical reasoning is learning through comparison, or, more accurately, the interaction between relational cognition, and symbolic systems, which enhance relational cognition. In the words of the psychologist Dedre Gentner (2010: 752), 'language forms a positive feedback system with relational cognition and this system is a major driver of specifically human learning'. Gentner (2010: 753) describes this process as a boot strapping mechanism of the mind, which allows alignment and mapping, and which 'makes humans uniquely powerful learners'.

### ***Empathetic reasoning within the disciplines***

Empathy is understood to be cognitive, emotional, and compassionate, and was particularly relevant during the pandemic. Elif Shafak, a novelist and lecturer in Political Studies, quotes the inspiration of Toni Morrison: 'I get angry about things, and then get on, and go to work' (cited in Shafak, 2020). What does such 'work' mean for learning in Higher Education? The reading and study of literature is generally understood to improve the ability to empathise and to shift subject positions, but is the mode of empathetic reasoning useful in learning within other disciplines?

### ***Inferential reasoning and tacit knowledge***

This mode of reasoning involves the surfacing of the interactions between declarative knowledge and the cognitive model of the learner. Inferential reasoning is an active process of inquiry to uncover misconceptions and to enable reconfiguration of cognitive models. Such learning requires regular feedback to develop an ability to monitor and reflect on what has been inferred and how that inference changes existing conceptions and anticipates future conceptions. This type of reasoning works with tacit knowledge to test and to build, and, as with the other two forms of reasoning, it is a critical component of writing understood as thinking. Harvey Wiener (1992: 7), the Founding President of the National Council of Writing Program Administrators, argued that:

The role of inferential reasoning is vital for both readers and writers – in weighing audience, purpose, theses, issues of logic and sequence – in short many of the essential elements in composing draw on the confluence between denotation and connotation, implication and inference, suggestion and statement.

Strategies to develop further these salient types of reasoning both within, and across WI courses, are set out below, together with suggestions for the further development of the WF role. The strategies and suggestions have been drawn from the experiences of the three

courses discussed in this article, from the WWP as a whole, and from reflections on the relevant international scholarly literature.

### **(i) Analogic thinking: Developing the role of the WF and student acculturation into scholarly writing and thinking**

Analogic thinking is a mode of learning through comparison between what is currently understood and models of something or someone different. Comparison allows students to map and align new observations to previous understandings. Analogic thinking plays a critical role in this process. Two forms of analogic understanding are considered here. Firstly, the WF tutors themselves provide important role models of successful students. Secondly, implicit in the work of the WFs, and hence accessible to all WI courses, is the process of the scaffolded learning of scholarly conversation through guided responses to writing drafts.

#### ***WFs as role models***

The WF role is a dynamic one. WFs are students who are themselves developing as scholars. There is no one path to becoming a WF. As observed above, some have been students on the same WI course, while others were also Wits Writing Centre (WWC) consultants. Perhaps most interesting, for the development of trans-disciplinary understanding, were WFs who worked in WI courses in different disciplines, so expanding their experience of teaching styles and of the self-understanding of disciplines and their ability to bring their knowledge of their home discipline into conversation with other disciplines. WF work is thus intellectually stimulating and enables rich conversations about how students learn to think and write within and across disciplines and it also contributes significantly to the career development of the WFs themselves.

In 2020 the WF role was seriously threatened by demands from students that the WFs bridge the gap between students and the classroom caused by the sudden shift to online learning. The threat to their role as writing coaches and as role models of successful students, and the danger of an unchecked drift to them becoming underpaid adjunct faculty, became ever clearer. In response, the role of the WF as writing coach was made more explicit, and a continuing professional development plan for WFs developed. At the same time, WFs were encouraged to develop voluntary, self-directed writing groups focused on modelling teaching ideas and on responses to member's own writing. Going forward, writing groups will play an important role in the professional development of WFs. By promoting sustainable writing networks not dependent either on lecturers or supervisors, writing groups also contribute to growing a writing eco system across the university<sup>24</sup>.

#### ***Letters and slow thought***

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<sup>24</sup> The professional development of writing consultants and WFs through developing their own writing has long been seen as an efficient and rich form of training. See for example, Bifuh-Ambe (2013).

In learning how to be a critically informed student, by observing the WF, students learn by analogy. They also need to practice how to read, how to think and how to write like a scholar, which is a form of analogic practice made much harder by reliance on digital learning. Hasty online courses with press-the-tab answers, isolation leading to social media trawling, click-bait tactics and the success of industrious online manipulators, the advances of readily available AI applications, may all contribute to a daily shallowness of engagement<sup>25</sup>. Scholarly engagement, by definition, requires the opposite of what Linda Stone termed 'continual partial attention (cited in Garfinkle, 2021). In the WI digital ecosystem, the aim is to create and to encourage thoughtful and engaged reading and writing, and responses to both, and to provide opportunities to slow down, to think further, and to practice what Maryanne Wolf (2018) has termed 'cognitive patience'.

An initial idea to draw students into more scholarly consideration of their work was through the Wits Writing Centre (WWC) strategy, designed at the beginning of lockdown, to work through the low tech, low data option of email correspondence in response to student drafts<sup>26</sup>. This was a formalised process guided by templates designed to provide the metacognitive opportunity to employ informal writing to hone formal writing. It has been adopted in several courses within the WWP and is central to the related research project<sup>27</sup>. Four of the WFs in the three courses discussed here have used these templates in their WWC work. Letter response to student drafts thus offers an easily available method to introduce slower, and increasingly scholarly, conversations about writing into the courses.

Letters also addressed Bontle Tladi's concern about dissonance in feedback, by their ability to foreground options. As the students become less concerned with a single evaluation of their work, and become more aware of multiple views, including their own, they begin to understand writing and research as a craft, which they shape through their choice of which responses to incorporate. Letters can be constructed and protected as free spaces to think through ideas, and significantly to think through dissonance without the compulsion to find either an immediate solution or a consensus<sup>28</sup>.

Increasing the opportunity for students to see their work through multiple views informs the creation of a writing culture which emphasises craft, meta-awareness of cognitive

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<sup>25</sup> Daniel Kahneman, in *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011), makes the point that fast, associative and intuitive thought is as crucial as slow effortful thought, and that wisdom lies in the interaction between fast and slow thought. Both speeds of thought are clearly necessary. However, as the courses discussed in this paper reveal, the current crisis in learning online undermines effortful thinking. The strategies discussed seek to reintroduce it, but not, of course, to the exclusion of intuitive, associative thinking.

<sup>26</sup> WI Online Handbook: Message in a Bottle, 2020, and Nichols, P. 2020, Letter from the Wits Writing Programme. Available on request.

<sup>27</sup> Erasmus, Z., Mngomezulu, N., and Nichols P. 2020. 'Epistolary Pedagogy for the Covid-19 Pandemic, South Africa' research project, funded by the Oppenhemier Memorial Trust. Available on request.

<sup>28</sup> See the classic description of free spaces and the generation of democratic change in Evans and Boyte (1992).

processes, and the writer's choice of how to revise and frame. Encouraging peer learning also removes pressure from the WFs who no longer need to be the sole interlocutor but can rather oversee and intervene when they see a need for guidance.

### **(ii) Empathetic reasoning within the discipline**

Responding to the exigencies of the pandemic required lecturers, WFs, and students to review and develop their roles with a consideration of each other's well-being and the varied conditions under which students and staff were operating. Foregrounding wellbeing, both in course content and method, recognising and working with it as a core theme, appears to have been directly connected to a greater ability to engage and develop the critical thinking, reading, and writing required by the Social Work course. While the teaching experiences of the Social Work course and the cultural management course differed considerably, as explored above, in both the importance of empathy became increasingly clear. Hence there is a strong case for empathetic reasoning to be made much more explicit in these courses and related to cognitive and compassionate reasoning required by the disciplines.

### **(iii) Inferential reasoning and building on tacit knowledge**

Inferential reasoning resembles the teaching of inquiry. It is the posing of challenges so that students uncover their misconceptions, reconfigure their cognitive models of understanding, and make new connections in their knowledge. As Michael Polanyi wrote in 1966 in *The Tacit Dimension*, 'Discoveries are made possible by pursuing possibilities suggested by existing knowledge' (cited in Wiener, 1992). This type of reasoning is promoted through modelling, coaching, scaffolding, reflecting, and explaining (Kurfiss, 1988). Wiener (1992) suggests building inferential reading skills through encouraging students to read beyond the words, to ask questions as they read, to draw predictions and predict outcomes, and if the answer is not immediately apparent, to draw on their skills of inference<sup>29</sup>. Inferential reading in the digital age also includes the ability to construct and validate while reading, to navigate between texts, to detect bias, to validate and to test authority as far as possible, by, for example, checking the reliability of a site through an internet search<sup>30</sup>. In developing this self-conscious skill of constructing knowledge through inference, the question arises of whether WFs should come from the same discipline as the particular WI course.

In the first and second courses considered here, WFs came mainly from within the discipline. In the third course, which explicitly taught inferential thinking, the WFs were not

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<sup>29</sup> The reading of these courses suggests salient critical thinking skills for further development, but, as mentioned above, these thinking skills are relevant to all courses. Avril Joffe, for example, notes that a "key writing strategy in the Cultural Policy and Management course are the required 'Reading Responses' which are designed to promote inferential reading."

<sup>30</sup> See PISA report for extensive discussion of navigation, construction and validation skills and Wineberg (2021)

students in the discipline. The current position of the WWP is that the WI lecturer chooses their WFs and decides if they should come from within the discipline. This remains the status quo, as there can be value in an outsider's view of the specific questions and answers which a course seeks to raise.

The habits suggested by Wiener (1992) to develop inferential reasoning can be enhanced by WFs trained to follow students' thinking. This is the skill required of the writing centre consultant, who frequently does not have the same subject background as the client, but who is practiced in helping the student to identify rhetorical positioning, respond to disciplinary markers, employ a vocabulary to describe elements of argument, and now as suggested here, to develop a vocabulary to describe metacognitive moves. Through attentive and active listening, the WF prompts the student to explain, reflect and infer, and so to see their own thinking and build upon it. Such a listening role could enhance a course designed around the development of inferential thought.

### **Conclusion: Surfacing modes of reasoning within and across disciplines**

Andreas Schleicher has commented that in promoting digital literacy in the 21st century, physical or technical infrastructure is less important than the development of effective, self-regulated learning skills<sup>31</sup>. It is the development of these skills that is central to the practice of the three courses considered in this paper, and to the theory and practice of both the WWP and the WWC.

There is a large body of scholarship on the teaching of critical thinking in WI courses on which this paper draws to suggest pragmatic strategies<sup>32</sup>. The paper does not suggest a mechanistic micro-skills approach to teaching measurable critical thinking skills<sup>33</sup>. It is situated rather within the traditional Writing Across the Curriculum approach of promoting learning through working with discipline-specific problems and arguments, and of encouraging each student to wrestle with meaning-making. It argues that particularly when students are removed from acculturation processes available in the face-to-face classroom, WI courses can be enhanced by developing greater metacognitive identification of the thinking skills entailed in solving problems, and that lecturers should design their courses with this increased instrumental awareness. In this sense, the article seeks a middle ground between a 'psychometric' approach towards critical thinking aims and the traditional Writing Across

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<sup>31</sup> Schleicher's final remarks in the Webinar to launch 21<sup>st</sup> century readers PISA report, April 2021.

<sup>32</sup> An introduction to considering how to teach critical thinking in the writing class can be found in Kurfiss (1988)

<sup>33</sup> See Ennis (2013) and skills-based micro credentials as described in EDUCAUSE Horizon Report Teaching and Learning Edition (2021: 22-23).

the Curriculum approach which understands all academic writing as thesis-based writing.<sup>34</sup> It suggests that thinking skills need to be identified, taught, and reflected upon to enable discipline-specific problem solving<sup>35</sup>.

We need to teach these skills of deep literacy explicitly because as Patricia M Greenfield (2009) has observed,

Every medium has its losses and weaknesses; every medium develops some cognitive skills at the expense of others. Although the visual capabilities of learning video games and the Internet may develop impressive visual intelligence, the cost seems to be deep processing: mindful knowledge, inductive analysis, critical thinking, imagination and reflection.

While the disciplines considered here are different, the concerns to improve deep processing are common and surface in teaching conversations across courses. As Bontle Tladi has suggested, for the sake of the whole programme, it is useful to provide: *'a virtual sharing table with other practitioners to touch-base, to let off steam, to share and celebrate successes, to serve as a solution generation corner, and to facilitate continued development'*.

The case studies discussed have revealed not only the significant constraints created by the pandemic on the development of deeper engagement and self-reflexive learning and writing across disciplines but also, and more importantly, the creative and deeply committed responses to those constraints developed by those teaching the courses. Each lecturer has indicated a recognition not only of the need to spend longer personally on reflection on teaching issues and strategies, but also the critical and generative influence of group reflections within and across courses and disciplines.

More broadly, the case studies have demonstrated the importance of developing deep literacy within and across disciplines, and ways of achieving that goal. In their reflective practice the lecturers and WFs confirmed Karl Deutsch's observation that the process of developing disciplinary and cross-disciplinary work is much like 'the process of breathing in and out', as both shape 'the long-time production cycle of knowledge' (cited in Greenberger, 1971).

Perhaps, most significantly, the case studies and the reflections on them, suggest the importance of developing new strategies for addressing the now widely recognised global crisis

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<sup>34</sup> See Bean (2011: 20-21) who presents these approaches as oppositional. In an extreme form this might be the case, but given the crisis in learning exacerbated by the pandemic, might not a compromise approach which emphasises argument in the discipline *and* seeks to embed argument in disciplinary and professional ways of thinking, enable deeper engagement? Bean himself (2005) supported such a compromise, a measurement of skills designed to surface patterns and strategies for improvement, in his endorsement of Barbara Walvoord's assessment methods for university programmes.

<sup>35</sup> Stice (2021) suggests a similar strategy, and points out, for example, the power of naming and measuring students' ability to recognise and position 'hindsight bias' in a history course.



of quality learning which has been deepened at every level of the education system by the multi-faceted impact of the pandemic<sup>36</sup>.

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This article is dedicated to Rutendo Chigudu (1983-2021).

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**Roshini Pillay** is a Senior Lecturer in Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand. Her research interests are group work, technology-enhanced learning in social work education, social justice, and Occupational Social Work. She is currently working on a podcast called Social Work Khuluma to support social work education. 

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<sup>36</sup>For an introduction to the extensive global debate around "schooling without learning", see World Bank (2018).

**Bontle Tladi** is an Industrial Engineer by training and a developing Social Design theorist and facilitator. Her research interests are broadly in the extension of design to the areas of social impact and social innovation. She is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Pretoria. 

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