

Lecturers' Text Competencies and Guidance towards Academic Literacy

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Abstract

Embedding academic literacy into the curriculum and regular subject teaching, has received little attention in Norwegian higher education (HE). The present article drawing on the findings of two studies, carried out in 2013/2014, seeks to amend this. The first study, an action research study, exposes how lecturers in one of the faculties at Oslo and Akershus University College (OAUC), perceive their role in teaching and guiding students' discipline-specific literacy, in particular academic writing. Collaborating with the faculty in a joint action research project, we seek to empower the lecturers, and develop pedagogical methods that are suitable for academic literacy teaching and guidance, and thereby make a change in the institution. The second study analyses the academic literacy skills and knowledge of new students. We follow students in their final semester in upper secondary school, and identify how they are prepared for academic literacy in HE. Together, the studies reveal that despite the students' preparation for higher studies, they are not fully qualified for meeting the demands of academic literacy. When entering HE, the students are still in need of guidance to establish textual meta-perspectives and to develop relevant disciplinary literacy practices. However, the lecturers are neither fully qualified for nor willing to include this topic in their content teaching.

Keywords: Action research, Higher Education, Embedded Academic Literacy, Writing in a Disciplinary Context, Writing Instructions, Writing skills

Introduction

In this article we present the results of two studies concerning writing in higher education (HE) and students' academic literacy and; the academic staff's competences and awareness concerning academic literacy, and the new students' textual competences when entering HE. By comparing the findings of the two studies, we aim to investigate the preparedness of the

lecturers in HE, to build on the students' competencies and guide them through their writing process in an academic context.

In terms of academic writing, higher education (HE) in Norway has evolved considerably in the last couple of decades. The number of written assignments the students must complete has expanded, and concurrently the need for academic proficiency. This change is particularly challenging in professional studies, such as the health-care studies, which have traditionally been more practically than academically oriented, and has led to an increasing need for support among students to acquire the necessary disciplinary writing skills (Dysthe, Lima, and Raaheim 2006; Greek and Jonsmoen 2012a).

Mastering disciplinary writing implies an understanding of how knowledge in the discipline is presented, debated and constructed. Consequently, disciplinary writing requires academic literacy, which is broadly defined as mastering the system of communicative practices in academic discourses (Lea & Street 1998). As literacy can mean different things depending on social practice and cultural context in which literacy is embedded (Black and Rechter 2013; Ciabattari 2013; Kennedy-Clark 2012), we have to take in account the cultural and contextual component of reading and writing practices. In addition, research has revealed that the challenges students experience concerning academic reading and writing, tend to be epistemological rather than linguistic, and often caused by deficient disciplinary understanding (Greek and Jonsmoen 2012b, 2013; Lea and Street 1998). A great number of studies have been conducted in US, UK and in Australia on the teaching of academic literacy in HE. The recommendation made by the majority of these studies, is to take an integrated approach, making the lecturers in each discipline responsible for writing instruction and inducting students into relevant literacy practices (Halliday 1993; Hyland 2004; Lea 2004; Lea and Street 1998; Shanahan and Shanahan 2008, Simon and Richardson 2009; Wingate and Andon 2011; Wingate, Andon and Cogo 2011; Wingate 2012a, 2012b; Wingate and Tribble 2012). According to Hyland (2002), academic literacy cannot be divorced from the teaching of subject itself. General features of academic writing, such as explicitness, objectivity, emotional neutrality and appropriate genre requirements are only core in a very general sense, and offer an inadequate foundation for understanding disciplinary conventions or developing discipline-specific literacy. Each of these points are further refined and developed differently within each discipline, and take meaning only when situated in real contexts of use (Andrews 2009; Coffin 2009; Hyland 2002, 2004; Johns 2013).

In Norway, few empirical studies have been carried out, and little attention has been paid to both academic literacy as a topic and the process of linking academic reading and writing to the subject. The dominant approach among lecturers to the students' need for teaching and guidance concerning developing academic writing, is offering academic writing courses arranged by Academic Writing Centers or other external experts. There are two obvious explanations to this situation. Firstly, the academic staff is primarily concerned with specific-subject matters and course content, and do not regard teaching academic literacy as their remit. Secondly, students are expected to enter HE having already acquired adequate literacy competences. There may however be other underlying reasons for why academic staff do not engage in teaching academic literacy. A notable reason seems to be a lack of knowledge and experience in the teaching of writing, leading to avoidance rather than the embedding of academic literacy in their subject teaching.

Academic Literacy and Disciplinary Knowledge

Academic literacy encompasses a wide range of reading and writing skills, from basic skills such as reading strategies and grammar knowledge to critical reading and reflective thinking, as well as knowledge concerning formal academic writing conventions. In Norway, literacy in the broadest sense of the word was made a key part of National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion in Primary and Secondary Education and Training (LK 2006), covering all disciplines from the 1st to the 13th grade, and making the teaching of writing a responsibility of all teachers (Øgreid and Hertzberg 2009). To our knowledge, however, the relationships and disparities between the learning outcomes outlined in LK 2006 and the demands of literacy in HE have only been evaluated to a small extent. The growth of today's student population, in both size and diversity, has led to an obvious need for knowledge concerning the students' reading and writing skills and genre knowledge (Greek and Jonsmoen, 2012a, 2012b, 2013). From a pedagogical point of view, it is also crucial to raise awareness in HE concerning academic literacies and developing ways of teaching discipline-specific literacy. According to Lea and Street, learning in HE involves engaging with unfamiliar literacy practices and adapting to new ways of understanding, interpreting and organising knowledge (Lea 1998, Lea and Street 1998). Disciplinary literacy skills are therefore essential for

building students' understanding of how texts represent both knowledge and ways of knowing, doing, and believing in a disciplinary community.

In Norway, as in other countries, students in HE primarily prove their disciplinary knowledge and understanding through written assignments, as do the academic staff, when publishing their research results. The Norwegian Quality Reform (Meld. St. 27 (2000–2001) 2000), introduced in 2000 – 2001 in order to comply with the Bologna process, has resulted in the extensive use of compulsory writing. The Quality Reform considers students' texts as final products that are to be evaluated, as well as a process where on-going discussions of the texts are essential to the development of disciplinary knowledge. The assumption is that working with compulsory assignments provides disciplinary learning, and that the learning outcome correlates with the number of written assignments (Meld. St. 27 (2000–2001) 2000, Aamodt et al 2006). Academic literacy and proficiency in writing are thus crucial components in HE. Evaluation of the Quality Reform indicates that students write more and get more feedback on their written work than before implementation of the Reform. According to the evaluation, there is a consensus among students that writing activities have a positive effect on both learning and writing skills, with frequent feedback as the main reason for their satisfaction (Dysthe et al 2006). However, first-year students at OAUC have reported a contrasting experience. For them, working with compulsory assignments provides little disciplinary knowledge, and is perceived as something separate from and disruptive to their learning (Greek and Jonsmoen 2012b). Moreover, a case study carried out among students working with their bachelor thesis in their final semester at OAUC (Greek and Jonsmoen 2013), revealed that feedback throughout their studies had not helped them to develop the required academic literacy. Students were constantly struggling to understand how they could improve their texts and meet disciplinary conventions. The challenges they experienced were more or less identical to the experiences of the first-year students, showing a clear need for improving the quality of teaching academic literacy. Although these findings are a result of research at one specific university college, we believe the findings to be institution-independent, with transference value to all HE institutions in Norway. Thus the findings justify the need to extend pedagogical changes in HE and for future action research projects in faculties.

Research Methods

Two studies are carried out; an action research study of lecturers in OAUC and a qualitative study of students in upper secondary school. Through the action research, we aimed to enhance the academic staff at OAUC's awareness of the significance of academic literacy, and motivate them to implement academic literacy in their subject teaching, building on the students' competences. To gain insight in students' academic literacy when graduating from upper secondary school, a qualitative, descriptive research study was carried out partially at the same time-period.

An Action Research Study

According to hearsay among academic staff at OAUC, the students' literacy is falling. The opinion often expressed, is that academic literacy is fundamental to HE, and that students' insufficient competence in writing is challenging. The lecturers do not regard themselves as literacy-teachers, nor do they feel that they have adequate competence to be one. Rather, they consider teaching academic literacy, primarily as a task of upper secondary school. Recent research conducted by The Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education, supports these statements (Lødding & Aamodt 2015). The research reveals that the students' academic literacy is of great concern to the academic staff, at a range of HE institutions in Norway, and academic reading and writing, as well as critical reflection, are specially emphasized. The general opinion is that academic literacy is more or less synonymous to preparedness for HE, and that student literacy is inadequate. Due to the academic staff at HE, upper secondary school must take the blame for this situation, and there are differing opinions among the lecturers at HE, concerning whether they should assume the responsibility and meet the needs of the new students, or leave the responsibility with the students (Lødding & Aamodt 2015).

Hoping to improve the students' academic literacy, one of the faculties at OAUC contacted us as writing researchers and writing instructors, asking for a short writing course for the following year's new intake of students. In order to change the existing generic and extra-curricular study skills approach to teaching writing (Lea & Street 1998), we instead suggested an action research project. The project intended to contribute to resolving an existing problem at the faculty, namely the fact that students are not satisfactory prepared for academic writing, due to inadequate academic literacy. Thus, the overall goal was to increase the students' academic literacy within a particular social and cultural context. We also aimed to enhance

the lecturers' textual competence and motivate them to embed literacy teaching in the educational context. A key element in action research is that the results generated through the project will benefit the practitioners, and lead to learning and thereby to a change.

Consequently, it was crucial to us that the study should take place in the faculty as an integral part of the first year curriculum, in collaboration with practitioners and based on their experienced challenges. By encouraging the lecturers to reflect critically on academic literacy in general, the various genres within the given discipline, and the values and conventions these conventions reflect, we aimed to contribute to building a supportive culture for student writing and thus increase the students' disciplinary literacy. In addition, by enhancing the lecturers' awareness concerning academic literacy as well as the textual competences of new students, we wished to incite the staff to consider how they can teach and guide the students in their writing process, and encourage the staff to implement disciplinary writing in their subject teaching. We decided on action research as a way to achieve a change in the faculty.

All the 10 lecturers responsible for the first-year-students, as well as the academic director, agreed to participate. Our use of collaboration refers to collaboration between the academic staff and us as researchers, in enhancing the lecturers' professional development in teaching academic literacy. Together we developed a project scheme consisting of four workshops for the lecturers, and a one-day discipline-specific writing seminar as an introduction to new students. Three workshops were carried out in spring 2013, in order to prepare the academic staff for teaching academic writing to new students, and thus take academic literacy into account when planning for the autumn 2013 semester. The fourth workshop was arranged in autumn 2013, shortly after the students' writing seminar. The one-day introductory writing seminar was to be followed up by the lecturers, focusing on disciplinary literacy in subject teaching and guiding the students in their writing process throughout their first year of studies. As writing experts, we offered to support the lecturers in their teaching and guiding. At the end of the first year, we planned for a final meeting to summarize the results and discuss how to continue the work.

The academic staff represented the practical and theoretical dimensions of the discipline. They were responsible for the students and their learning and, consequently, their role was teaching the students. As researchers, we contributed with competence in language development, adult education and literacy. Our role was to serve as facilitators of critical reflection, and renewal of the lecturers' practice in teaching discipline specific literacy.

Learning and change within an institution are key elements in all action research. Action research is interactive, and demands collaboration with the actors, experiencing the challenges first-hand (Brannick & Coghlan, 2001; Tiller, 1999). In our research, the practice field was a specific faculty at OUAC, and the actors were the academic staff in the faculty. The lecturers themselves sought our assistance in dealing with the challenges of improving students' writing skills. This seemed to be a favourable starting point, as action research aims to contribute to practical concerns of people in a challenging situation. The research took place in a real-world situation, and aimed to solve the perceived problem systematically, informed by theoretical considerations. Achieving the aim of the project demanded change and renewal of theoretical knowledge and practical pedagogical actions of the lecturers. Through methodical work, the lecturers and researchers in the project were to build a bridge between research-based knowledge and practical experience, and increase academic literacy amongst the students by improved pedagogical practice.

The desire for improved pedagogical practice necessitates disrupting the established order and changing personal attitudes and practices. Through this action research project, we sought to heighten the lecturers' understandings of what constitutes academic literacies, as well as their awareness of the norms, jargon, sets of conventions and modes of expression in the discipline specific culture. We also aimed to introduce some pedagogical principles of teaching academic literacy, aiming to enable the academic staff to adapt and implement the pedagogy to their own practice in the disciplinary context. Thus we aspired to make a positive pedagogical change in the institution and improve the students' learning outcome. The workshops therefore focused on the lecturers' interpretation of disciplinary texts, and on how these texts represented the disciplinary community. Each workshop consisted of input about academic reading and writing and critical reflection, and the introduction of pedagogical principles of teaching academic literacy, as well as examples of 'good practice'. The theoretical input was accompanied by practical work with the assignments the students were expected to submit in the following autumn. All input given by us as external writing experts, was context-specific as it was linked to the literacy practices of the faculty and the first years' educational goals. Raising discussions about what was required of students regarding their first-year obligatory written assignments and compositions were essential, as were dialogues concerning disciplinary texts and feedback given to students on their assignments.

Thus, in the workshops we focused on how to work with texts inside the classroom, for example genre conventions, text organization and argumentation, and how to support students in their writing process, helping them gain familiarity with the conventions of discipline writing, and integrating them in the writing community. We analyzed texts, emphasizing textual structure, disciplinary argumentation and rhetorical devices, and dealt with the topic ‘writing to learn’, and the connection between reading, writing and reasoning. The topics dealt with included:

- the relationship between reading, writing and developing disciplinary knowledge;
- research findings from upper secondary school and HE;
- what is required of the students’ writings according to educational objectives and conventions of disciplinary writing;
- what is required of the lecturer to enhance the students’ disciplinary academic literacy;
- how to design assignments so they achieve their intended the purpose;
- scaffolding strategies, how to give formative feedback to enhance disciplinary knowledge and academic writing skills and how to encourage students to see writing as a means of learning, rather than merely demonstrating knowledge.

In the third workshop, we specifically concentrated on designing the one-day introductory writing seminar for new students.

The One-Day Introductory Writing Seminar

The first-year cohort consisted of 80 students, and the writing seminar was carried out in their second week of studying. To make a dialogical approach possible, the students were grouped in three different classes and the seminar was arranged for each class. The seminar had a partially integrated approach. It was based on the specific curriculum and the obligatory assignment required at the time of the seminar. The students were given theoretical and practical input, including strategies for reading and writing, and worked both individually and in pairs on the assignment they had to hand in to their lecturers for evaluation shortly after the seminar. All the lecturers attended the seminars, which gave us an opportunity to demonstrate different pedagogical approaches to teaching academic literacy and the prerequisite vocabulary necessary for talking about texts. The lecturers supported us with discipline knowledge when this was required, and made it possible for us to adjust the content during the seminar and adequately provide answers to the students’ questions. The seminar focused on the following topics:

- the process of writing, and the relation between reading, writing and learning;
- academic writing and the disciplinary-specific discourse;
- how to interpret the wording of an assignment;
- how to work with structure and argumentation and maintain the recurrent theme.

After having implemented the writing seminar, the project group met for a final workshop to summarize the writing seminar and evaluate the research project regarding:

- the learning outcome of students;
- the learning outcome of the lecturers;
- whether the seminar content and the pedagogical approach mirrored the lecturers' intentions;
- teaching academic writing in a systematic and holistic way as a part of the subject matter, and take in account the research findings from upper secondary school and HE;
- further collaboration on embedding academic literacy in the educational context.

A Qualitative, Descriptive Research Study in Upper Secondary School

In order to understand the process of developing writing proficiency, Lea stresses the importance of investigating the students' prior experiences of writing and of reading (Lea 2004). Consequently, knowledge about the students' textual competence graduating from upper secondary school is essential. However, studies literacy in Norway, has mainly focused on teaching and learning in primary and secondary school, as well as in teacher-education (Askeladden & Aamotsbakken, 2012; Helstad & Herzberg, 2013; Helstad & Lund, 2012; Østren, 2008; Øgreid & Hertzberg, 2009; Penne, 2012, 2013; Rødnes, 2011; Gourvenne, Nielsen & Skaftun, 2014). Research studies on disciplinary literacy in Norwegian HE and transition from upper secondary school to HE is scarcely emphasized. Thus there is a need of knowledge concerning how students in upper secondary school are prepared for academic literacy in HE and the textual experiences they bring to their studies.

We therefore conducted a research project at two Norwegian upper secondary schools (16-19) in 2013/2014, partially during the same time-period as the action research project at OAUC described above. This research project investigated what the teachers and students in upper

secondary schools emphasize when working with written assignments, how this manifests itself in the students' written texts, and how the students describe their preparedness for HE. Throughout the year, we closely followed two classes in Norwegian and one in History, during the final year of their studies. LK 2006 defines writing as one of five basic and cross-curricular skills to be integrated in all subject curricula. An interesting question is what the teachers of Norwegian focus on when it comes to academic literacy, and how they respond to, negotiate and evaluate the students' texts.

The research employed ethnographic fieldwork over a one-year period, at two upper secondary schools. The schools were selected from different areas to reflect variations in the overall population, and the students' results reflected the national average. Throughout the year, we alternated between observing, participating and interviewing. Field-notes were made daily, both observation-notes and notes on theoretical questions and assumptions. We jointly discussed our field-notes, and made temporary analyses which resulted in new perspectives and questions.

By participating throughout the year, we gradually were integrated into the community of the class. This gave us the utmost opportunity to gather naturally occurring data under normal conditions, and to informal and spontaneous talk with the students. The data includes observations in the classroom, observations of dialogues between the students and their teachers and dialogues between students in different group collaborations arranged by the teacher. Being a part of the classroom community, also made it possible for the students to share their reflections with us whenever they wished to. In addition to the informal and spontaneous dialogues, semi-structured interviews with both students and their teachers, were carried out at the end of first and the second (last) semester.

The sample consisted of 58 students attending their final year of upper secondary school, and their teachers in Norwegian and History. In addition 46 of the students gave us permission to analyze their written texts. We have read 310 student-texts, and closely analyzed 35 random texts. The texts are evaluated against the objectives of written communication in upper secondary school, which emphasizes the ability to inform oneself on a great quantity of different texts, select, summarize and evaluate relevant information. The students' texts are to be clearly focused, well-structured and have an argumentation with a precise and nuanced vocabulary. It is also required that the students master requirements as to form and make use

of references from reliable sources (Utdanningsdirektoratet). All of these objectives are defined as quality indicators in written assignments in HE (Rienecker & Jørgensen 2007: 47-48).

Findings

The two research studies presented in this article, provide perspectives on new students' challenges entering HE in Norway. Not only do students have to adjust to an unfamiliar learning environment and new subjects, they also have to master new literacy practises with little or no help from their lecturers. The action research project however, reveals great ignorance among the lecturers and reluctance to pay attention to and teach academic literacy to the new students. For various reasons the lecturers disclaim responsibility for educating students in the literacy practises that are relevant to, and a part of the subject matter.

The Lecturers' Point of View

The programme of study place high demands on the students' written academic dissemination, and all the lecturers supervise the students in preparing their written papers. We therefore assumed that the lecturers would be familiar with academic literacy. However, it soon became clear that their preparedness was not as we had expected, both in terms of concrete knowledge, awareness of literacy as inherently defined by the discipline specific culture, and adequate vocabulary to talk about literacy. As a part of the action research project at OAUC, we analyzed texts together with the lecturers, in the way the students do in upper secondary school. This exercise revealed that the academic staff's meta-language and textual knowledge were insufficient when it came to discussing writing issues and explicating the expectations they had for the student assignments. Although the lecturers have spent many years developing appropriate ways of constructing their own knowledge through writing practices, their knowledge was tacit and difficult to verbalize. The lecturers participated enthusiastically, and found the analyzing of texts interesting and educational. However, it became evident that it did not lead them to reflect upon their own practices, thereby making change possible. 'It has been exciting and very instructive for me as a lecturer, to work with texts together with you', one of the lecturers exclaimed, 'but I cannot see how this will effect the students – it just means more work for us'. Even though they initially expressed a desire to

make a change: ‘we wish to focus more on the writing process, giving the students a chance to develop and learn to think as professionals’, it became clear that they considered focusing the writing process as of secondary importance. ‘First of all’, one of the lecturers explained, ‘the APA style needs to be a part of the students’ intellectual DNA’. Thus they focused on formalities, and considered academic literacy as synonymous with mastering these formalities. Formal criteria, such as format, paging and ranking of headings and the APA referencing style, were crucial to them, as were the organization of the text in pre-set elements.

Consequently, the workshops were characterized by frequently recurrent dialogues concerning the students’ failure to master the APA-style, rather than how to build on the students’ former knowledge, and how to embed disciplinary literacy in the subject teaching. The writing process itself and the disciplinary discourse was given little attention, and merely thought of as something the students ought to know or to learn by themselves, which corresponds to earlier research conducted at OUAC (Greek and Jonsmoen 2012a, 2012b, 2013). Literacy practices, such as how arguments were to be presented in the discursive practice in the educational setting, was never a subject they themselves brought about in the workshops. Nor did they initiate discussions concerning written communication appropriate to the particular discipline or pedagogical practices, suitable to enhance the required communicative behaviours. The findings from other small-scale case studies (e.g. Lea and Street 1999; Hyland 2004), have also indicated a general tendency towards the same outcome.

Writing in Upper Secondary School versus HE

We found that, at least for texts concerning factual prose, the learning objectives in upper secondary schools corresponded to the objectives for the first year of studies at the OAUC. Typical verbs used in relation to learning outcomes are the same: identify, describe, present, understand and use, compare, analyze, discuss and evaluate. Goals in the program description for the first year are ‘to understand’, ‘to describe’ and ‘to account for’ specific disciplinary subjects. For instance, the students are expected to interpret ethical theories and principles, describe human needs and account for precautions for infection control. According to the competence objectives in upper secondary school, in the two core subjects, Norwegian and History, the students should be well prepared for both interpreting, describing and accounting

for different subject matters. In fact, how to interpret, elaborate and reflect were also fully embedded in the disciplines. Both in Norwegian and History throughout the year, the students worked with questions comparable to what is required in HE, such as:

- ‘Discuss and elaborate on how the ideas of the Enlightenment influenced and were influenced by social revolutions in the 17th and 18th century.’
- ‘Elaborate on the discussion surrounding the Norwegian language and the linguistic policy in the 18th century.’
- ‘Reflect on different factors which have an impact on the development of oral language.’

On a weekly basis, the students at upper secondary school worked with disciplinary concepts and argumentation, and structuring arguments in logical paragraphs. In the Norwegian classes, the students analyzed texts and edited their own texts according to model texts and feedback provided by both the teacher and student peers. At the end of their final year at upper secondary school, the students told us that they consider themselves to be prepared for writing in HE. Analyses of their written assignments, revealed that the students know what is required according to disciplinary norms, and most of them met the demands to a certain degree. The average mark in the Norwegian classes was 3–4, which indicates fairly good or good competence in the subject. In general, the students master the Norwegian language, show disciplinary knowledge through arguing and elaborating, and use references correctly. This means that with the relevant knowledge they should be able to write texts concerning complex topics, and capable of reflecting and formulating their own thoughts.

Despite the similarities between upper secondary school and HE, there are some considerable differences, for example between the total pages of the required reading material and the demands concerning text production. The students in upper secondary school write shorter coherent texts than students in HE, from 250 words to more complex texts approximately 2-3 pages long. Furthermore, the students in upper secondary school reveal a lack of meta-perspective. For instance, they do not see the connection between texts they write in the Norwegian classes and texts they write in other disciplines. According to the students, literacy learning is generally considered as a part of learning Norwegian, and has little to do with, for instance, learning history. In one of the classes focusing on textural structure, one of the students, explained that ‘In the Norwegian classes, the formalities have to be in order. It has to be 50% content and 50% structure. In other disciplines the content is the most important’. Observations in the classroom revealed that the teachers rarely explicated the relevance of

knowledge gained in the Norwegian classes, for writing in other disciplines. Neither did they explicate the relationship between the form and content of teaching in upper secondary school and HE, even though the students attend a course certifying them for university admission. That neither the teacher in upper secondary school nor the lecturer in HE specify the common features between student texts written at upper secondary school level and HE, may explain why many students fail to see the link between the learning outcome from upper secondary school and the demands they meet as students in HE. It makes it difficult for them to readjust and make use of their knowledge and previous writing experiences in an academic context (Greek and Jonsmoen 2012b). To be able to keep a meta-perspective is crucial to critical reflection, an objective in all curriculums in upper secondary school and HE (LK 2006; St.meld. nr. 27 (2000-2001), 2001) and required in student assignments.

Discussions

The role writing plays in the construction of knowledge is well documented, and researchers from a variety of theoretical and empirical bases argue that embedding writing into subjects will help students to improve many aspects of learning (Dysthe 2001; Mitchell and Evison 2006; Wingate and Tribble 2012). Academic literacy is a product of critical reflection and a process of finding and structuring ideas and communicating disciplinary knowledge according to the practices within the academic discourse. It is also about identity formation and negotiating an identity in the midst of a disciplinary context where the students are regarded as apprentices (Hyland 2002).

One of the main commitments Norwegian Primary and Secondary Education and Training has to fulfil, is to develop students' learning strategies and the ability for critical reflection (LK 2006). Students in upper secondary school work continuously on cultivating critical reflection, understanding and analyzing points of view, rationalizing why certain decisions make sense, and they analyze and expound on different texts, both factual prose and fiction. Consequently, critical reflection is a part of the academic literacy they possess, even though the meta-perspective, as mentioned, is not present in every learning context. Thus the students to a certain degree, seem to be prepared for meeting the requirements of critical reflection in different tasks and assignments in HE. However, despite the lecturers' understanding of critical reflection as a part of the specific discipline, and the demand for students to

demonstrate critical reflection in different writing tasks, the lecturers themselves did not focus on what being critical actually meant in the disciplinary context, nor were arguments presented in the discursive practice of the educational setting.

A number of studies, both national and international, highlight the importance of critical reflection in the development of professionalism for teachers and lecturers, as well as for students (Johns 2013; Higgens 2011; Lycke and Handal 2012). The studies indicate that individual teachers and lecturers do not reflect critically on their own teaching practice to any great extent, and that there is little reason for them to question individual and cultural taken-for-granted truths. Our findings concur: it was evident that the lecturers did not consider teaching reflection in a disciplinary context as a crucial part of academic literacy. Neither did pedagogical, didactical discussions seem to be of great concern when planning the introductory writing course for new students.

Textbooks and academic research articles introducing students to concepts, assumptions and models are central instruments in the students' learning process in HE. However, these texts also represent authoritative, received knowledge, on which students rely, rather than challenge. Taking a critical approach to reading, developing professional proficiency and discipline specific literacy, however, involves seizing the text and wrestling with its ideas and themes. By understanding that 'reading like a historian' is not the same as 'reading like a social worker', students are able to become active, critical readers, and develop disciplinary literacy. Historians would perhaps in their reading of the play *A Doll's House* (1879) by Henrik Ibsen, look for if or how the historical frame has affected the writing. The social worker may be more interested in the relations between the family members, whilst a literary scholar would keep his eyes on how the play is narrated. In other words, different readings activate different aspects of a text. By integrating various aspects of literacy in their classes, lecturers can simultaneously provide students with multifaceted, meaningful literacy experiences and powerful learning tools for building knowledge and actively taking part in the disciplinary context. The lecturers involved in the action research project at OAUC, however, seemed convinced that the actual mechanics of writing is something learned 'elsewhere', viewing academic writing conventions as generic and transferable to the disciplinary discourse without reflection.

The workshops also revealed that the lecturers rarely debated how to respond to the students' written assignments, which components to comment and the effect of the comments on the students' disciplinary understanding and their writing proficiency. This coincides with earlier research at OAUC (Greek and Jonsmoen 2012b). The writing skills learned at upper secondary school do not automatically develop into more advanced skills which enable students to meet the requirements of HE. If writing is to lead to learning and academic development, guidance in writing processes as well as dialogues on texts between lecturers and students must be an integral part of education from the first year of study. However, throughout the workshops, the lecturers gradually revealed objections to embed academic writing in their subject teaching, and were reluctant to apply textual analysis as a pedagogical approach in teaching disciplinary literacy and thus academic writing skills.

A common assumption was that emphasizing the processes of thinking and writing would be at the expense of disciplinary knowledge. Also it was difficult for the lecturers to distance themselves from the role of expert in a certain discipline, and reflect on literacy teaching and pedagogical principles. The idea of taking the responsibility of writing instruction and embed academic writing in the subject teaching, challenged their conventional assumptions about university teaching. In addition, personal lack of experience and confidence, were of great concern to the lecturers. The lecturers therefore were reluctant to participate in teaching writing. Instead they persisted in their original idea of a writing course, held by external writing experts, that focusing on the APA referencing style. Consequently, the concrete planning and realizing of the writing seminar became our responsibility, which obviously was significant to the result of our intervention. In many ways the intention of the action research project was stranded by this lack of cooperation in implementing a new pedagogical approach to literacy teaching. This concurs with other studies, where approaches to embedded writing is left to input from writing specialists working in collaboration with the discipline specialists (Hunter 2006; Hunter and Tse 2013; Mitchell and Evison 2006). The responsibility for inducting the students into academic writing is moved from the faculty staff to specialists outside the faculty.

Research at upper secondary school, revealed that students enter HE with genre knowledge, rhetorical awareness and insight into own writing process and challenges. Their academic literacy is relevant for reading and writing in HE, and the students' prerequisite knowledge on

several points correspond to the expectations of the academic staff. Although students in HE are acquainted with making use of scholarly literature when they are writing factually oriented texts in upper secondary school, this knowledge cannot be translated without guidance. The students lack a solid, integrated meta-perspective on texts and text domains, and thus struggle with transferring knowledge from one domain to another. In HE, students have to readjust to the discipline they encounter and take advantage of their knowledge and skills writing texts in a new way and with new content. With this in mind, we suggest that there is a need for reasoning through and discussing the different aspects related to analyzing and developing disciplinary texts.

The responsibility of supporting students in developing and using meta-perspective in their learning and writing lies with both upper secondary school and HE teaching staff. Nevertheless, a critical question is whether academic staff in HE are competent and/or willing to take this responsibility. Despite OAUC emphasizing academic writing, the action research indicates that the academic staff are not fully prepared for teaching and guiding students in academic literacy and supporting their acquisition of the necessary skills. There seems to be little awareness and knowledge amongst the academic staff of which components give meaning to the students, and the effect of the comments on the students' disciplinary understanding and their writing proficiency (Greek and Jonsmoen 2012b). The lecturers tend to blame the students for not mastering academic writing, and call for writing specialists or send the students to remedial classes. This is a poor strategy in terms of future teaching and learning practices. All students are novices when dealing with academic literacy in a new discipline. The writing skills learned at upper secondary school do not automatically develop into more advanced skills that enable students to meet the requirements of HE. Asking students to absorb and understand writing conventions implicitly as a part of their studies, without any specific teaching or guiding, does not reflect good pedagogical practices. If writing is to lead to learning and academic development, guidance in writing processes as well as dialogues on texts between lecturers and students must be an integral part of education from the first year of study. Consequently, the academic staff need to be moving away from the idea of student deficits to reframing their role as lecturers in HE. Part of this role is to help students acquire the ways of thinking, talking and writing in the specific academic context, and to establish pedagogical responses to learner's needs. Such an approach means incorporating academic literacy into the disciplinary curriculum, and embedding writing skills in the disciplinary content and knowledge. We reach much the same conclusion as Hyland:

'[s]ince the conventions, intentions and assumptions of discourse communities are manifested in academic texts, it is through these texts that students will learn to understand the social practices of the discipline' (Hyland 2004, 137).

Conclusion

Comparison of the findings of the two studies demonstrates the importance of embedded literacy pedagogy, and underlines the need for increased consciousness and knowledge among the academic staff in order to build upon the students' competencies and guide them through the writing process in an academic context.

There is a need for further investigation and action research on writing pedagogy and embedding academic literacy in the disciplines in HE. There is no doubt that lecturers need support in achieving necessary knowledge and pedagogical tools for teaching and guiding literacy. The aspiration for improved pedagogical practice implies changing the established order and thereby also changing attitudes and personal practices. This constituted the action research project's greatest challenge, and was probably the main reason to withdraw and hand over the responsibility for the writing seminar to us as researchers. Time spent on paying attention to and reflecting on the lecturers' presumptions, possible clash of interests and misunderstandings between the researchers and lecturers, as well as previous knowledge among the lecturers, turned out to be too short. Transformation takes time, and usually only comes about when individuals experience a desire and need for change, and share a mutual acceptance for the consequences of this change. Research-based knowledge can lead to understanding and reflection, but change only comes about once that understanding is linked to one's own personal experiences (Meirink, Meijer, and Verloop, 2007). Since change entails personal costs, the change must be perceived as profitable, in other words it must satisfy the needs of the individuals within the institution.

Action research is defined as a process, where the participants engage in systematic cycles of action and reflection (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). The researchers and co-researchers test practices, gather evidence, reflect together on what they have learnt, seeking a mutual understanding about what to do and plan further actions. This process continues until the

problem is solved. Thus the action research project presented in this article, may be considered as the first cycle in a change process, making the lecturers in HE aware of the necessity of teaching academic literacy by building on the students' prior knowledge, regarding literacy as a part of the discipline itself and embedding literacy in their content teaching. Inspired by the work done by Wingate, Andon and Cogo (2011), we will continue the process and our next research project will focus on best practices concerning embedded academic literacy in the same faculty. The aim is to develop profitable, concrete pedagogical approaches together with the lecturers involved, embedding academic reading and writing in content teaching in a way that is time-saving for both students and lecturers, and manageable for lecturers in general. The research findings and experiences presented in this article has revealed essential knowledge. The succession of a new project depends on the involvement of the faculty management in a more active way. To insure that the project really is entrenched institutionally, time has to be allocated to the lectures involved, and the lecturers has to understand and agree on the projects aim, and realize and accept change. We will strive to reach a mutual understanding of the project aims, making sure that all participants consider themselves as real co-researchers and each persons' ideas are equally significant as potential resources. By creating learning situations based on theoretical considerations and research findings, *in the faculty together with* the lecturers, the action research will hopefully influence how the faculty lecturers' perceive their field of action.

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