Insights for Lecturers Teaching First-Year Students Guided Writing Skills with Readings at a South African University

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Abstract

Mainstream education management systems and higher education institutions in South Africa appear to have sufficient provisions and advice for balancing in-person instruction and self-directed learning methods. However, examining first-year students' writing ability in relation to reading has been given less attention. Furthermore, research demonstrates that students are under pressure to memorize information when they first enroll in university, which prevents them from experiencing the pleasures of literacy, such as engaging in meaningful conversations with their lecturers and making critical or analytical observations about their environment and surroundings while also learning how texts are connected. Considering this phenomenon, in this study, I aim to offer first-year lecturers guided writing techniques and readings to aid first-year students in developing writing ability by utilizing the model texts in conjunction with one or two jigsaw reading days and a guided academic reading-writing interactive process. The central question has been: What are the best practices for first-year lecturers? With this work, I hoped to draw attention to the tremendous leverage potential of improving teaching methods and assisting higher education institutions. The research is qualitative. I used ethnographic observations and selected credible data strands from my students' technical research project report to pinpoint the disconnect underlying this phenomenon. Classroom-based pedagogical practice indicators that recognize instructors as curriculum architects support my findings. My paper also seeks to provide first-year lecturers and curriculum designers with suggestions for an evidence-based policy planning process for managing higher education systems.

Keywords: Collaborative guided reading and writing; classroom pedagogical practice indicators; first-year lecturers; first-year students; integrated project

Introduction

In this study, I encourage students to complete various writing projects, including academic and reflective writing when they first enroll in universities. These tasks can vary difficulty, but each gives students a special opportunity to hone their critical thinking and writing skills. Completing these assignments successfully can benefit one's academic and professional endeavors and is highly recommended for students seeking to excel in their chosen fields. However, first-year university students face challenges in academic writing programs because of communication and language barriers**.** They often struggle to understand academic language due to its unfamiliar complexity or specialized vocabulary and phrases (Nguyen et al., 2024). As a result, the majority of students experience social anxiety or shyness, among other things, which makes them feel overburdened, demotivated, and reluctant even to let others know about the issues (Nguyen, 2010).

Academic reading entails identifying prejudices and presumptions, drawing conclusions, and distinguishing facts from opinions (Waring & Nation, 2004). Also, readers connect the dots using inferences, but rarely, if at all, does this practice include the learner's identity (Sivasubramaniam, 2017). The word inference suggests making a judgment or assumption about the unknown. For example, "She has a heart of stone," which implies an inflexible, unfriendly, or cruel heart (Merriam-Webster.com et al, 2024). In university closed reading sessions, the emphasis is usually on the precision and correctness of responses, with instructors employing red pens or track changes almost as a form of punishment. Hoadley (2018) warn against this style of instruction because it has resulted in rote learning. Besides, many scholars have called for metalinguistic awareness in higher education as an important element of how students reflect on newly acquired knowledge (Swain, 1985).

To give students experience in organizing sources and information, my first-year communication students, for example, spend much time reading and writing argumentative literature and working on a year-long technical report assignment.

Crucially, having only recently enrolled, they are abruptly exposed to the most crucial components of academic writing, such as writing for a particular readership

(audience). Depending on the genre or type of work, they may be expected to provide context for their writing and clearly state their thesis statement, message, and claim. Irvin (2010) noted that even the term "academic" may cause problems for these beginners. The elements I mention above are encompassed and consistent with their graduate prescriptions, which require them to write a coherent and cohesive persuasive essay and generate a thorough report at the project's conclusion. In this case, the report covers the green material they selected. This is an integrated project that integrates communication skills and building materials. I will return to this shortly. As I highlighted in the previous paragraph, the capacity to read complicated texts at university — whether textbooks, short stories, or academic articles from research — cannot be overstated. This is because the quality of one's reading will determine how well one can write. Sivasubramaniam (2017) critiques *one right reading* that emphasizes closed reading techniques, particularly in higher education. He extrapolates, and I concur, that such approaches primarily concentrate on text grammar and schema-theoretical techniques, prioritizing accurate reading and comprehension over the diversity of readers (also see Anderson et al., 1977).

For this reason, low-stakes group activities or other student-centered approaches such as jigsaw reading days, model texts, and group academic writings, are essential for lecturers in teaching first-year students guided writing skills with readings (Irvin, 2010; Storch, 2021; Tieu & Baker, 2023).

Considering the type of argument, which dominates the tertiary level, this type of assignment should be a well-planned and substantiated position exposition. Gaining your audience's consideration — and possibly even approval — for one's point of view is more important than winning the debate. For this genre, one needs to acquire skills for organizing and identifying significant patterns in addition to simply presenting it to them. So, for Nunn et al. (2016), every writing project requires one to negotiate a novel knowledge landscape; therefore, one must learn strategies for understanding new material to utilize them in their writing.

I find Irvin's (2010) analogy of a judicial setting helpful, and I paraphrase, envision where one (the writer) can be compared to a lawyer arguing in court that one's accused is innocent, and readers be thought of as the jury deliberating on the case and rendering a verdict. The writer "lawyer" must persuade this "jury" (your readers) of the defendant's innocence or otherwise; a simple claim of being innocent

will not be believed, one's opinion is not sufficient in court, and evidence must be provided. This comparison by the author effectively conveys two key points regarding academic argumentation: (1) the need to present one's case in an orderly manner and (2) the critical element of solid evidence.

Irvin (2010) asserts that writing an assignment at the tertiary level also suggests that an analysis of the subject matter will be conducted before one's essay is produced, where writing ideas are developed by in-depth analysis of a subject. Writing assignments requires the identification and interpretation a subject's constituent pieces to provide a greater effect or meaning. The analytical process (of breaking down the information into small chunks) is essential for university writing assignments and calls for unambiguous perseverance, creativity, and the supremacy of reason, as well as an imagined reader who is logical and seeks to come up with a well–reasoned response.

The genre of argument is a persuasive essay; it makes a point and supports it in the broadest sense. Like a critical argument, an essay has an interpretive point of view, often known as a claim or thesis (Probyn, 2009). This indicates that rather than being a statement of the obvious, the idea is arguable and susceptible to interpretation. The thesis statement is a succinct, declarative sentence that usually comes when the introduction is finished. The structure of this genre, like any essay, should be organized with a distinct introduction, body, and conclusion. That is, organize the essay's body around distinct key supports — develop each one in a single paragraph for shorter versions or several paragraphs for longer ones to bolster one's thesis (Hendricks, 2012). Moreover, because the text serves as the authority, it requires citations. In a critical essay, logic constantly evolves, with assertions requiring specific support from the text.

To be convincing, at least three supports are required for each assertion. Documentation is crucial, distinguishing between outside information and indicating the author's movement from one point to the next. Transition sentences should signal movement from primary support to the next, linking to the thesis. Grammatical correctness is crucial, and the final draft should be edited carefully. Good writing involves punctuation and word choice to communicate tone and achieve desired effects on the intended audience (Tieu & Baker, 2023).

Sivasubramaniam (2017) views the classroom as a theatre. As such, educators should analyze scenarios as performers to convey their meaning rather than depending on drama critics to help students grasp characters, stories, and relevance in the classroom. From this point of view, and as I specialize in communication in a civil engineering class where group or team learning is valued, I argue that the lecturer's lack of creativity in teaching such genres as the genre of the argument and technical reports may accidentally result in a reduced level of participation from the majority of shy or language-impaired students (Hoadley, 2018). I address this problem in my classroom by utilizing one or two jigsaw reading days, model texts and group academic writing.

"To become writers, children must read like writers. To read like writers they must see themselves as writers" (Smith, 1983, p. 565). Kepe and Weagle (2020) suggest that fostering fluency and a positive attitude towards reading can improve writing skills. Their initiative, It Starts With a Story! Towards Extensive Reading, encourages students in grades 6-7 to read for pleasure and write about their readings in their journals. This approach shifts focus from statistical analysis and numerical metrics to person, process, context, and time, leading to collaborative writing. Rosenblatt (1978) emphasizes that a well-read person has a richer understanding of a text.

The study focuses on higher education, where the assessment of first-year students' writing skills about readings is not given enough attention, even though policies at South African higher education institutions balance in-person instruction with self-directed learning methodologies. Curriculum 2005, the Revised National Curriculum Statement, and the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS of NCS) are major curricula changes South Africa's Education System has implemented since the end of apartheid in the mainstream (CAPS, 2011). These changes signalled a paradigm shift in the curriculum's development, yet as multiple Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) reports (2021), confirm, these changes do not translate into good literary-minded students in South Africa's universities. Additionally, many questions have also been raised regarding the efficacy of students who must replicate what they have learned through formative or summative assessments, almost like they are ingesting and expunging it. This notion contradicts the rationale of knowledge as a liberating tool (see Freire, 1978)

Smith (1983) said it best when he said that reading a newspaper is the best way to learn how to write for a newspaper instead of reading textbooks. One reads publications instead of signing up for correspondence courses on magazine writing. One must read poetry first, just like if one aspires to compose poetry. Arguments of this kind can be found in almost anything. Numerous useful academic and literary works demonstrate that reading alone can enhance writing skills. Krashen (2004) has been quite verbose, suggesting that only reading is needed. Beach (1989) described this as elaborative processing where students need to see their writing as a place to develop their attitudes and produce conversation (also see Gutiérrez-Fresneda, 2020). Furthermore, this may lend credence to a metaphorical conception that views language learning as an open dialogue where talk is crucial for enhancing writing (Kohonen et al., 2001).

According to Storch (2021), group writing (collaborative writing)—which has garnered a lot of traction recently—is one method of teaching writing skills through social interaction. In his brief explanation, the author defines it as the creation of a text by two or more writers. Making the case that it differs from previous writing assignments, such as peer response exercises, in that students in partners are involved in all phases of the writing process, from making decisions to building and editing the text, rather than just the pre- or post-writing sessions. In group (collaborative) writing assignments, two or more co-authors produce a single text. Additionally, to do these tasks, co-authors must communicate with one another as they create the text. This communication can take the form of conversation in a computer-mediated collaborative writing environment or speaking when working together in person. This is an approach I espouse in my communication classes, and it works. The strength of this method is co-construction rather than contribution. In this study, I suggest that academic writing and reading progress requires a methodology that values jigsaw classroom reading days, model texts, group writing, and acknowledges student diversity.

First created in the early 1970s by Aronson and his students (1978), the jigsaw classroom is a cooperative learning technique that reduces racial conflict among school children, promotes better learning, improves student motivation, and increases the enjoyment of the learning experience. When applied in the first-year academic writing curriculum, this method can be used as an icebreaker (e.g., to decipher a

syllabus) or to build social cohesion and/or to ensure an accurate understanding of a crucial text. Over the years, many of my students have reported that the jigsaw reading method is highly effective and well-suited to helping with group cohesion or other pedagogical concerns, especially if the reading texts are scholarly or advanced. On the other hand, Tieu & Baker (2024), advocated a different method, using model essays and noticing as a feedback tool in IELTS writing preparation. They recently published an empirical article on model text, where their students write a preliminary text and then are introduced to exemplary model texts (exemplars), find what they like, do not like, and want to or do not want to include in their work. Then, they include this in their revisions of subsequent drafts. These two strategies are shown to be useful, but they do not make up an exhaustive list of all the valuable approaches.

The authors of the jigsaw classroom, Aronson et al. (1978), used them to develop a teaching concept built on cooperative learning exercises to engage all students actively. Tewksbury (2010) emphasizes the importance of team assignments, meaningful group tasks, student preparation for peer teaching, and instructor evaluation of individual student learning in designing effective jigsaws. Its function in class included assigning a number to each student in each group — 1, 2, 3, 4, etc. — and dividing the class into smaller "homage groups." For example, if you have five home groups with four students each, you will have five students with the number 1, five with the number 2, and so on. After assigning a number to each student, divide the home groups into new "expert groups," putting all of the 1s, 2s, and 3s together, etc., based solely on their numbers. Assign a specific study topic, chapter, or even a movie to each expert group that relates to the main point of your course. The expert groups must then confer about their particular task, exchange ideas, and work together on allocated tasks (Aronson et al., 1978). This method can be very helpful when studying hard topics or understanding fundamental concepts because it helps students teach each other. It helps students work in small teams and strengthen their reading and writing skills, and it is credited with students' remarkable achievement in my communication and language learning class.

Another very important point is that teachers also need to consider all the elements of readability to make sure the texts are appropriate for the students' levels, i.e., considering the text, the reader, and the interaction between the two to have the best fit (Baker et al., 2024).

In this study, I discourage using the 'correct' reading model often applied at the university level and is also criticized by applied linguists such as Sivasubramaniam (2017) and others, including Tylor (2002), who contends that although students do acquire knowledge and abilities, the method by which they do so is a very different story. In this study, I offer my reflections on the noticeable gaps that first-year students have in their academic writing. I find that the students not only carry over their language deficiencies into their university studies but also struggle with academic readings, have trouble conceptualizing ideas in texts, and are not proficient writers (Kepe, 2017). In academic writing, this situation is exacerbated by a lack of acknowledgment of the source of the information they have used or referred to in their work. In light of this, Nunn and Brandt (2016) posit that when students are developing their academic literacy, the complex relationship between developing their voice and referring to the work of others is central. The authors argue that in an academic context, the post-descriptive stages of analysis and evaluation of one's own experience can be informed by referencing relevant literature. For this reason, I argue that while academic writing enhances understanding by refining ideas, introducing new knowledge, and refuting statements, it also requires honesty, accuracy, and evidence-based opinions to support one's truth claims.

Hendricks (2012), Probyn (2009), and Swales & Feak (2012) have also reported academic flaws in first-year student writings. The three most apparent ones—quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing will be the only ones I touch on briefly here.

Quoting, paraphrasing, and summarizing: What are the differences?
Quotation

According to Hendrick (2012), direct quotation accurately transcends someone else's spoken or written words. Given this view, students must record quotations in notes and essays accurately. The author notes that students often overuse quotations, with only 10% of the final essay appearing as directly quoted matter. To avoid this, they need to limit exact quotations and use techniques like split-page summaries to use their own words.

Paraphrasing

A paraphrase, on the other hand, is a concise version of someone else's important information and ideas, often focusing on the research question and findings.

It involves rewriting long academic sentences into shorter ones identifying the subject or agent (Hendrick, 2012).

Paraphrasing steps

To effectively paraphrase a passage, a student can follow these steps: reread the original passage, develop notes, note key sentences, create a paraphrase, compare it with the original, use quotation marks to identify borrowed terms, and record the source at the top for easy reference. This process ensures the accurate expression of essential information in a new form (Hendrick, 2012).

Summary

Summarizing is a concise way to summarize a passage, focusing on the main ideas or findings. Start by making notes and paraphrasing the passage, then state the main idea in one sentence. Read the title, abstract, and headings to understand the article's structure. A split-page or Cornell summary can be utilized to avoid plagiarism and restate ideas in different languages. A combination of home language and English (translanguaging) can be employed for group work. The students can write their summary in their home language or English and provide a translation of a group work summary into English (Hendrick, 2012). Paraphrasing and summarizing are valuable skills for conveying information in one's own words, understanding the original meaning, and controlling the temptation to overquote. See the frame for the split-page summary below, adapted from Fisher et al. (2011).

Split-page summary:

Cue column	
	Note taking area *(Can be in your home language and English)*

Summary area

The frame of the Split Page Method shown above demonstrates how a learner could divide the note-taking area into two sections. The larger section is used for recording information during a lecture or while studying, and the smaller section is reserved for annotations, summaries, or reflections.

Teaching academic reading and writing in a communication skills class presents a daily challenge. My first-year students are interlocutors who need exposure to various types of communication (which are not part of this article) to communicate effectively and for specific purposes. As said above, they present with the previously mentioned gaps and need support to handle a variety of genres, like the genre of technical reports that go with research skills, for example, the genre of argument, recruiting letters, curriculum vita, etc. (Storch, 2021). However, one of the biggest issues is their incapacity to critically examine academic text (Hoadley, 2018).

Also, it is not easy for students to recognize and appropriately credit the ideas and thoughts they have learned from scholarly books, articles, journals, or the Internet. However, they are guided through the institution's preferred Harvard reference style, which is somewhat simpler than others. We also take them through relevant literature supporting academic writing with open readings. In Nguyen and Baker's (2023) case, students were directed to particular points in the texts either directly through questions pasted in virtual texts (Word or PDF) or directed by a rubric

Despite the challenges in my communication class, I make it my mission to empower students to read at their own pace through various reading strategies to find their unique writing voice amidst a sea of diverse perspectives. I believe using academic texts can hone their writing skills and equip them with the tools necessary to become successful communicators. According to Tieu and Baker (2023), this is so because they can see other writers' writing. Adamson et al. (2019) question why L1 in class cannot be embraced to help students find their genuine voice, where all readings are supplemented with classroom discussions, making a case that lecturers can work together with them (through the jigsaw model for example) in deciding what they learn, how they learn it, and how their progress is evaluated. For Nunn et al. (2016), this kind of classroom interaction between the instructor and students and also among the

students themselves, which supports collaborative writing, has the potential to benefit them holistically, transcend the area of knowledge, and extend learning well beyond the classroom. Gutiérrez (1995) calls it the third space, and I previously called it classroom experience (Kepe, 2017).

My motivation for writing this article stems from my ongoing awareness of my students' knowledge gaps and variety as well as a recognition of their perspectives, challenges, and classroom experiences. I think that if standardized teaching approaches ignore the distinctive qualities of each student and their L1 which helps foster a deeper understanding of text in the classroom, their ability to improve readers' reading and writing skills could be jeopardized (Adamson et al., 2019). Students need to read a wide range of texts with an eagerness to discern what they find appealing, objectionable, or would or would not like to incorporate into their writing during the draft and revision stages of their academic readings. In academic circles, this approach is called applying the noticing theory with model texts (Tieu & Baker, 2023). In my opinion, autonomy to choose and model texts and recognition of students' L1 can inspire children to embrace reading and writing on a personal level.

Baker (2023) draws on his experiences as a student (see interview), he explains that he found himself learning to produce various texts (novels, composition, business writing, thesis/dissertation) where he looked for details within model texts to help him develop as a writer and later as a writing teacher, an idea illustrated with various genre in Tieu and Baker (2023).

For Nunn et al. (2016), participating in such methods as jigsaw and (other writing activities) turns students into social actors as they work on their projects. This may help them to develop key competencies necessary to become responsible, well-educated, democratic citizens, including accepting collective responsibility, working in teams, instilling personal autonomy, managing information, and showing tolerance and respect for others. This supports my argument that such a classroom experience may lead to an inclusive and equitable learning environment that empowers all students to succeed (Storch, 2021). Especially so when the national curricula are evaluated based on the characteristics of students and how they (curricula) evolve in classrooms (see Sivasubramaniam, 2017).

My classroom experience supports my additional proposition premised on my previous work, Teaching English as Social Practice: A Practical Guide (Kepe & Linake,

2019), which attests to the point that students can unintentionally pick up some writing skills if they are given high-quality text to read at their own pace along with other models raised previously in the study. Even so, a skilled instructor may need to periodically phase in and out support, analyze the language (metalanguage) used, and guide the students. It is for this reason that this study focuses on first-year lecturers, offering them guided writing techniques through academic readings to help first-year students develop proficient reading and writing abilities (Sivasubramaniam, 2017)

I used ethnographic observations, as noted by Adamson et al. (2019), and selected two credible data strands from my students' research-integrated project on a technical genre to pinpoint the disconnect underlying this phenomenon. My study recommends using the jigsaw model (Aronson et al., 1978). model texts (Tieu and Baker, 2023) and collaborative writing (Storch, 2018), to support evidence-based programs and policy planning in higher education systems, highlighting the potential for improved teaching methods and support for first-year instructors in higher education institutions.

To this end, I provide new perspectives on teaching first-year students at a South African university using these methods, reflecting on my personal experience in a hermeneutic communication skill classroom and the communal third space (Gutiérrez-Fresneda, 2020; Spaull, 2013).

I conducted this study in the Civil Engineering and Geomatics Department at Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa, where I teach communication skills and research to first-year students. My teaching area in the department focuses mainly on graduate attribute 6/ GA6, which stipulates that on successful completion of the communication subject, the students need to have acquired t*echnical communication skills* such as using appropriate genre and academic conventions in written texts. One important genre featured in this study is the technical report. In this genre, writers must demonstrate their understanding of proper style, structure, citation, and plagiarism guidelines and their ability to create professional, coherent, logical, technical, and investigative reports. It culminates with integrated programs such as Professional and Technical Communication Skills (PTC150S) and Construction Material and Technology (CCA150S). Many scholars in the literature, including Drake

(2007), support our project of integrating themes within and across disciplines. In our instance, we integrate across disciplines, which she calls interdisciplinarity.

Drake (2007) notes that interdisciplinarity is based on a theme, with knowledge and skills from other disciplines or subjects contributing to learning in subject areas. In our teaching situation, we incorporate themes like environment, pollution, green material, and construction involving report writing. Included are crafting recruiting letters and even curriculum vitae for different companies, creating a job advertisement, designing and planning a route, maintaining graph-based comparison records, reading maps, drawing, writing creatively, and giving oral presentations.

In this study, we intend to use a technical report as an example of our main integrated project but concentrate on how we assign a specific study topic to each expert group in the jigsaw classroom model, especially as it relates to the main components of the technical report (Aronson et al., 1978). Because of the limited space for this study, I propose to use the writing of *synopses* for the report by various working groups/teams in class. My choice is influenced by the fact that synopses, by definition, need to capture or present a summary of the report (Kepe & Weagle, 2020). However, over and above that, this area tends to be problematic when students are writing their reports in most cases. The way we do it in line with the jigsaw model and model text is to break down its structure. Crucially, students ought to learn that an effective synopsis should follow a framework: (1) it needs to address a specific audience, (2) provide context about the study, (3) outline a specific purpose, (4) identify the topic, (5) describe the methodology, (6) make a claim, or formulate a thesis statement, and (7) offer a suggestion. These pieces auger well in the jigsaw classroom as they are shared and worked on by the expert groups (Aronson et al., 1978).

We assigned two data strands of synopses (exemplars) from their deliberations to consolidate knowledge. Having clearly understood the synopsis, students then compared the two synopses and conducted group discussions to discuss weaknesses and potential solutions involving opposing viewpoints and presentations. They derived their judgments and attempted to complete technical report synopses structures. See the exemplars below, adapted from their work, where students used exemplars A and B to analyze and evaluate two texts, focusing on synopses structure. They observed well-written texts, identified failures, and corrected mistakes to produce quality results, aiding in their creation.

MODEL TEXTS

Synopsis A

Topic: Examining Eco-bricks as a Potential Green Building Material to Reduce the Harm that Plastic Waste Causes to the Environment

The UN Environment Programme highlights the need for a systemic change to reduce plastic waste, with less than 10% of global plastic waste recycled. Millions of tonnes are lost or dumped, resulting in an estimated annual loss of 80-120 billion. The study aims to reduce the amount of plastic waste in landfills or polluting natural habitats. This study came about due to the soaring pollution caused by global plastic waste on the environment and proposes Eco-bricks (recycled plastic bricks) as a viable green building material. The method of investigation used was a literature review on the source of waste plastic bricks, their main properties, behaviors, and impact on the environment, their production process, their uses and applications, and the current buildings made of plastic bricks. We also used surveys, interviews, polls on social media, questionnaires, and statistics. Findings show that waste plastic bricks can help keep plastic out of the environment and prevent the negative consequences of plastic degradation. The use of plastic bricks can help reduce the accumulation of plastic waste, providing an alternative solution for managing plastic waste. It was recommended that one of the most important ways to reduce the growing amount of plastic trash in the environment is to recycle it into waste plastic bricks.

Synopsis B

Topic: The Lifecycle Assessment to Evaluate Mycelium's Environmental Impact

The research aimed to find green materials that can be substituted with materials used on construction sites. The ultimate objective of the research is to employ materials that reduce carbon footprints on working sites, thereby moving us one step closer to the realization of green Buildings. Mycelium is the green material that will be researched. We applied quantitative and qualitative methods mixed with methodologies to amplify our research. To gain a better understanding of the importance of utilizing mycelium on-site, we consulted two specialists in the construction field. We used face-to-face, semi-structured interviews to get their input; one was with Construction Material's lecturer, and another was with an engineer at Amandla Construction. We also referred to journals, textbooks, and previous reports on green materials and their environmental impact for qualitative research. To better understand the number of people aware of mycelium and its benefits, we used questionnaires, an example of quantitative methodology. The research findings demonstrate that mycelium is one of the most exemplary eco-friendly materials suitable for implementation in construction. The report's conclusion highlighted the benefits of using mycelium and its impact on the carbon footprint. We have proposed visiting a construction site where mycelium has been utilized.

With an emphasis on synopses structure, students examined and analyzed the two texts using exemplars. They identified well-written text, recognized flaws, and fixed errors to provide high-quality output and support their construction.

Methodology

To operationalize the research question, which was: *What are the practices for first-year lecturers?* And analyze the resulting data, I have utilized my observations during our integrated project as an insider and an ethnographer, as well as semi-structured interviews with respondents (Roberts, 2020).

Below, I briefly explain the integrated project we hosted in the Professional and Technical Communication/ PTC 150S and Construction Built Material (on technical report writing).

Link–Construction Built and PTC 150s's Technical Report Project

Ms. Rodreguez (my colleague) and I have linked an integrated subject project, which examined the negative effects of plastic pollution on various environments with

a quest to find eco-friendly, viable green building materials for construction. We are addressing sustainable development and current emerging environmental, architectural, and green engineering global issues aiming to promote responsible production and consumption, protect and utilize natural resources, control environmental pollution, and improve the environment while simultaneously developing the world. For academic writing, we utilize Storch's (2021) notion of collaborative writing, consistent with the jigsaw model (Aronson et al., 1978). a proposition that supports this study in line with Nunn et al.'s (2016) project-based learning and Drake's integrated curriculum (2007) for this ongoing ethnographic action-oriented project.

Question:

We asked our students to research a green material that can be used in construction, gather information, and build knowledge on production methods, properties, behaviors, uses and applications, environmental impact, and carbon footprint, and work in teams of four. While Ms. Rodreguez focuses on informational content, I focus on imparting research skills and organization to construct a complete technical report. She was supposed to build knowledge and model texts (see Tieu & Baker, 2023) around "greener engineering," in which our students participate vicariously in the search for alternative architectural green material methods of production, investigating key characteristics/ properties, particularly on green building design and the use of green and eco-friendly materials and behavior, uses and applications, and their favorable impact on the environment, which are inextricably linked.

Sample

We shared a class of 160 student construction and communication class. Using the jigsaw model, we divided students into four-person project teams (quartets) (*The Jigsaw Classroom*, n.d.). Per the groupwork guidelines, each participant was given a part or role to play in the topic of their choice concerning the materials used in green architecture. Each group was required to choose a green material and thoroughly examine its source, manufacturing mode, primary characteristics, behavior, uses and applications, and benefits to the environment and carbon footprint. For the sake of this report, we partially used the three steps from Gibbons Curriculum Cycle (2002), that is, building knowledge, modeling text, and joint construction; Faucett's writing process

(2011); and Nunn's et al. (2016) project-based learning supported by jigsaw model (Aronson et al., 1978).

Research Design

Bleich (1985) contends that a single instance or incident can create a conceptual category and that little data can yield the most insightful conclusions. As an insider (ethnographer), studying response mechanisms and formulating in-depth subjective reactions are consistent with this notion.

Four lecturers (academics) participated as respondents in this study. Of the four, two are my colleagues from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), and the other two are international scholars from different universities. None objected to their names being mentioned in this study, however, I will only state the international scholars' names whose strands of data appear below. Dr John Baker is from Ton Duc Thang University's (TDTU) Creative Language Center (CLC), located on the TDTU campus in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. This center offers language courses and exam preparation courses. At the same time, Christopher Weagle is a faculty member of Creative Arts and International Languages at the American University of Sharjah in the UAE.

Findings

Regarding how lecturers teaching first-year students guided writing skills with readings could use collaborative writing, model texts, and jigsaw for integrated projects, the academics who participated in the study, regardless of where they were from, had convergent opinions. However, the two international scholars offered their particular perspectives. This became evident as they reflected on their own practices of teaching academic reading and writing in high education for the first years, one using the jigsaw model and the other employing model texts (Tieu & Baker, 2023). Because of this, I have elected to present only two data strands from the international scholar inputs, which concisely answers the research question of the practices to teach academic writing with reading for first-year lecturers in institutions of higher learning. This is in concert with Bleich (1985), who suggests that one instance or incident can establish a conceptual category, and the most informative findings can come from a small amount of data. This aligns with studying response processes and developing detailed subjective reactions.

The choice of respondents in this study was informed by my quest to share my experiences hear and learn from my local and international colleagues (Blackstone, 2012). Because of our close regular interaction, we are lecturers at the same university and international research peers. Therefore, I am in an advantageous position to share my experience, understand their angle, and learn. For Roberts (2020), a successful interview with the traditional question-and-answer format requires the participants to share common norms and practices about the event. Even small-scale discourse analyses may provide teachers valuable pedagogical information if conducted carefully and thoroughly. See below Dr. John R. Baker's and Chris' Weagel's sharing of their experiences regarding model texts and the jigsaw classroom.

Extract 1 Dr. John R. Baker:

I initially became intrigued by model texts as a student, and my passion for them evolved into a career of helping others see the value I found in them. My interest began with novels and then expanded to other texts (compositions, business writing, theses/dissertations). Essentially, I read voluminously and played a detective-like game to discern what made them up, teaching me to read like a writer and write like a reader. As a writing teacher, I've endeavoured to empower students with a similar curiosity by offering exemplars and engaging students in various noticing activities. One approach involves having students compose a preliminary draft and then (considering model(s)' readability level(s) and students' proficiency levels) encourage them to analyze the model(s) to identify aspects they liked and disliked and wish to include or exclude in their revision drafts. Additional guiding strategies, like embedding questions at key points in virtual texts or incorporating rubrics, can also be employed. Overall, there are many things teachers (and students) can do with model texts, and it's certainly worthwhile.

Extract 2 Chris Weagle:

A jigsaw reading involves groups of students discussing a text, each consisting of 5-6 students. The text is divided into "pieces" based on page or paragraph length, and each student works on summarizing their section. The students' progress is based on the amount of information and time allocated for each stage. The selected text should be within the average student's ability to read and summarize, and not be too

lengthy. The activity concludes with an overall presentation, encouraging students to add, verify, contradict, and debate aspects of the reading.

Seedhouse (2013) claims that if interviews occur in an institutional setting, classroom discourse mirrors the sub-genre of institutional discourse. As such, the categorization of the topic may be decided by the institution's agenda (the curriculum or standardized interview questions). The co-construction of the topic would determine theirs. From his perspective as a teacher-researcher, the focus of interest for me was not simply how turns are constructed and patterned in an interview but also the reasons why. This is the point of using local and international experience to provide insights into the research question, which asked about the best practices for first-year lecturers to teach academic writing with reading.

In his research on semi-structured interviews in educational research, Seedhouse (2013) writes about constant negotiation, re-negotiation, and co-construction of the contextual features of the interview as valid, observable elements that reflect on and are mirrored by turn-taking behavior. Seedhouse advocates using "situation networks" involving various aspects: the semiotic, the activity, material, political, and sociocultural to analyze meaning.

Discussion

In this study, I have argued that the South African education system has a balance between in-person instruction and self-directed learning methods. However, first-year students' writing ability is often overlooked. Students often struggle with memorizing information, preventing them from engaging in meaningful conversations and critical thinking (Hoadley, 2018; Howie, 2017; Taylor, 2002; Waring & Nation, 2004).

In this study, I contended that despite significant curriculum changes following apartheid, South African students have not developed exceptionally sophisticated literary minds, particularly in the first years. Moreover, the inability of first-year students to reflect critically when analyzing texts and the challenge of academic writing in higher education serve as an example. Collaborative academic writing and readings, jigsaw classroom days, and model texts can all be beneficial in fostering writing and critical thinking abilities (Irvin, 2010). As one respondent alluded, *the reading-writing link was formed due to my passion, which raised consciousness and permeated my writing as*

someone who reads widely and comprehends a text more deeply. I found that reading and active noticing can improve writing.

Furthermore, the study recommended that South Africa's national curricula be evaluated in light of student characteristics and classroom development*).* It also emphasized leveraging student variation in academic writing and reading to increase abilities (Sivasubramaniam, 2017). I utilized ethnographic observations and classroom-based pedagogical practice indicators from the literature, my local colleagues, and international scholar peers to identify best practices and suggest evidence-based policy planning. The study revealed that teachers can use a more guiding strategy, where students are directed to specific points in the text's exemplars through questions or rubrics, and the importance of careful planning and consideration of readability elements to ensure the texts are appropriate for students' levels (Nguyen et al. 2024).

Conclusion

In this study, I have argued that since apartheid, the South African education system has seen substantial curriculum changes, yet those have not produced students with highly developed literacy. This is demonstrated by the deficiency in critical thinking of first-year students when interpreting texts and the difficulty with academic writing in higher education. Jigsaw classroom days, using models can help develop writing and critical thinking skills through collaborative academic writing and readings. In addition, the study stressed the need to use student diversity in academic writing and readings to improve abilities and suggested that the national curricula of South Africa be assessed according to student characteristics and classroom development.

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