**Caught Between Traditions? Three Framings for ALL Practice and the Neoliberal University**

Key Words

Academic Language and Learning, neoliberal University, identity, engagement

Abstract

This paper seeks to outline three broad traditions that have framed Academic Language and learning within the higher education context in Australia, and examine some implications of the current neoliberal agenda on each. The first tradition can be linked to the United States, and reflects a context for engagement with higher education which affords the possibility of success through the overcoming of one’s personal circumstances. The second is linked to the elite model of higher education traditionally associated with Britain, and its emphasis on selectivity and merit. The third is the social democratic framing of higher education, as premised on collective access and support, and is most strongly associated with continental Europe. In the first tradition, it is argued, the study of academic literacy is often poisoned explicitly within higher education learning and carries minimal stigma or deficit connotations. The second reflects a tendency for academic language and learning to be positioned implicitly within university study, and to be accompanied by a certain level of stigmatisation. The third tradition has tended to frame academic literacy somewhere in between the other two traditions, but with subtle differences and variations. Australian universities have traditionally been aligned with the British tradition, but particularly following World War II have increasingly been influenced by the other two. This has provided a challenge for ALL practitioners in working out where they fit as an increasingly important ‘non-discipline’ in the broader institution (McCormack 2014). In more recent years, neoliberalism has framed Higher Education largely in market terms, positioning education as a commodity and students as consumers (Connell 2013). This global trend potentially muddies an already complex picture in terms of the conceptualisation of ALL, and carries differing implications for each of the traditions that have been outlined. In tracing what some of these might be, focus will be on implications for student engagement (Kahu 2013), with a particular focus at the level of student ‘will’ and its application in seeing a course of study through to completion. The more clearly universities acknowledge the landscape and traditions within which they operate, it is suggested, the less danger of mixed messages to students, particularly in terms of who the onus is on to do the hard work that higher education requires. ALL practitioners may also benefit, it is suggested, from a clearer charting of the traditions that circumscribe and shape their work, professional identities, and the possibilities we envision for ourselves within the rapidly evolving higher education landscape.

References

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