**Academic Literacies: The Word is Not Enough.**

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**Abstract**

For Academic Literacies, the world is textually mediated; written texts and what informs them reveal elements such as subject-discipline practices. Furthermore, multi-modalities, for example, visual representation, inform written text, and multiple methods of inquiry, including interviews, shed light on written text production. In this article we argue that the word is not enough, and non-textual elements must also be considered. From multiple-discipline focused research, we present data from interviews and focus groups with Design and Nursing lecturers that explored student success holistically, not solely through, or for, written text production. We highlight non-textual elements key to both student success, and written text production, such as ‘empathy’, the ‘visual’, the ‘non-verbal’, and also the inability of text to reveal certain key features. We argue that rather than solely prioritise text, Academic Literacies approaches can more effectively help students succeed by holistically considering non-textual elements.

**Key words: Academic Literacies; Written Text; Holistic Exploration; Enhancement**

**Academic Literacies: the primacy of the word**

An Academic Literacies approach is written text focused: “Literacy Studies provides a paradigm which is essential in the study of contemporary language use and how it is changing in the textually mediated social world we inhabit” (Barton 2001, p.101). Academic Literacies analyses texts to explore and reveal socio-economic, socio-cultural, and critical-discourse based perspectives. When it draws on methods such as visual methods (Adams, 2016), interviews (Tuck, 2016; Lillis and Tuck, 2016) or ‘scamping’ (Coleman, 2016), it also aims to reveal how written text is produced. Indeed, even when elements such as visual ‘scamping’ (i.e. making ideas visible through creating a drawing or sketch) are recognised as key to student success, such elements are seen to help produce written text (Coleman, 2016). Literacy Studies “provides a way of understanding that writing is more than spoken language written down and that the term literacy embraces more than the acts of reading and writing” (Barton, 2001, p.98). Fundamentally, this approach “enables the discussion to move beyond both the traditional formulations of both sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics” (Barton, 2001, p.98) and is thus not a study of the language itself, but “the study of texts and practices” (Barton 2001, p101). The theory and applications of the Academic Literacies model can be done at Higher Education (HE) level and with communities outside HE, from kindergarten (e.g. Hawkins, 2005; Justice, Pence, Bowles & Wiggins, 2006) to year 12 (Lea & Street, 2006), and with a wide range of academic texts, for example responses to peer review (Lillis and Curry, 2015). As Lea and Street note (2006, p.370) about examples from an Academic Literacies study they undertook in a UK university: “Although these examples are from the university level in the United Kingdom, the principles and issues apply across academic contexts at secondary and elementary school levels and in other countries.”

In Academic Literacies research, “the principal empirical methodology inherent in an ideological model of literacy is that of ethnography, involving both observation of the practices *surrounding the production of texts* – *rather than focusing solely on written texts* [our italics]– as well as participants’ perspectives on the texts and practices” (Lillis and Scott, 2007, p.11). Consequently, although the Academic Literacies’ definition of text encompasses both written and oral texts, its priority is helping students understand and produce written text. As a result, although visual representation (e.g. Coleman 2016) and oral text (e.g. Boz, 2016) is studied, it is nevertheless focused on how this helps inform or produce written text. The construct (cf Kelly, 1963) of Academic Literacies thus operates in an understanding that the word is enough, that the word can be studied, and its production can be aided through multiple modes of approach.

As Moje (2008, cited in Kiili et al 2013, p.225) has argued, “the core function of disciplinary literacies is to build students’ understanding of how *texts* [our italics] represent both the knowledge and the ways of knowing, doing, and believing in different disciplinary communities.” Disciplinary literacies are viewed as “the joint understanding of discipline-specific *literacy features* [our italics] through which knowledge is created and practices are shared” (Kiili et al, 2013, p.225). Academic Literacy practices are embedded in subject areas to allow for “explicit development of Academic Literacies… within timetabled classes” (Hillege et al 2014, p.687, cf. Gimenez, 2008). This embedding aims to reveal subject-specific usage of key terms. For example, the key Academic Literacy terms of ‘Essay’ and ‘Report’ can differ greatly according to subject context: “on courses that required students to produce essays as part of their assessed coursework, it was found in some instances that whereas the curriculum stated that the task to be assessed was an essay, in reality it was a report” (Murray and Nallaya, 2014, p.6). Furthermore, such embedding has been noted to help “contribute to improved student participation” (Thies 2012, pA16) and can help with elements that discipline lecturers cannot. For example, “it is common to attribute students’ difficulties with reading to poor study habits, lack of effort, general ignorance, and/or inadequate vocabulary, none of which a discipline lecturer can hope to do anything about” (Chanock et al. 2012).

Academic Literacies are argued to be key in helping students understand written text production by making the tacit explicit (Jacobs, 2007). Furthermore, the importance of creating spaces for “the collaboration of AL [Academic Literacies] practitioners and disciplinary specialists, to facilitate the embedding of AL teaching into disciplines of study” (Jacobs, 2005, p.475) is underlined. Dialogue (cf. Bakhtin, 1981) has been argued to help lecturers understand students’ backgrounds from an Academic Literacies perspective in order to help students with text production (Lillis, 2003). Indeed, English for Academic Purposes lecturers are argued to be able to help students with Academic Literacy because “the linguistic nature of academic knowledge”, means that they, “as language experts are able to analyse the disciplinary genres and develop relevant teaching resources” (Wingate, 2016, npg). Table 1 shows a number of articles and book chapters to illustrate the primacy of the word for Academic Literacies.

Insert Table 1 here:

Thus, studying texts and embedding Academic Literacies in subject disciplines helps students succeed. To complement this work, and to enhance the ability of Academic Literacies to help students, in this article we argue that the word is not enough. We argue Academic Literacies should study student success in the subject holistically by exploring the role of elements such as speaking, listening, reading and writing. Importantly, we argue certain key elements cannot be revealed through a purely written text-based or text-focused approach. Moreover, we argue that by prioritising text, Academic Literacies is in danger of losing what Kelly (1963, p.80) calls permeability. If, however, Academic Literacies can allow for this permeability, it will have a “particular kind of plasticity… the capacity to embrace new elements.” We do *not* argue that text is not important, nor do we argue that the work that Academic Literacies does is wrong. Instead, we argue that the word is not enough, and that Academic Literacies should recalibrate its focus slightly to widen its lens of inquiry and support. We further stress that we are not arguing Academic Literacies specialists become subject experts; rather, that student success can be better supported by an Academic Literacies approach that is aware of and understands the role such elements play.

The remainder of our article is structured as follows. We first describe the background and context to studies we have undertaken in a range of subjects investigating what students need to succeed. We then provide a theoretical setting for the limits of text and for why we argue the word is not enough. Following this, we describe our methodology and approach to the data we gathered before presenting and discussing our findings under the headings of Design and Nursing. We show how non-text based literacies play a key role in student success. Firstly, why they are important by themselves; secondly, why they are critically important in how they influence what underpins the text, and thirdly; how their importance raises questions regarding the importance of text for these subjects. We then discuss the implications of our findings before drawing conclusions about how we believe Academic Literacies can be strengthened and enhanced to more effectively help students succeed by considering and incorporating such non-text based literacies.

**Background and Context**

The physical context that the data for this paper comes from is a UK post-1992 university. Similarly to many other post-1992 institutions in the UK, this university has historically focused on technical and vocational courses. Students often follow subjects that are practical, and to succeed they need to demonstrate ability in literacies that are non-text based, such as being emotionally literate (e.g. in mentor assessments on a ward), or visually literate (e.g. in sketchbook assessments). We, the authors, work in the areas of academic support for students across a wide range of subjects including Engineering, Business, and also Nursing and Design. We also research this area, specifically, what support lecturers feel students need in order to succeed. We have interviewed and conducted focus groups with lecturers in a range of subject areas including Engineering, Computing, Psychology, Business, and also Nursing and Design. Based on the findings of this research we argue that traditional Academic Literacies approaches would benefit greatly from a more holistic approach that was aware of and understood non-text based literacies.

Two such subjects we believe clearly illustrate the importance of these non-text based literacies are Nursing and Design. In Nursing, the non-text based elements of compassion underpin and in some cases take precedence over more traditional text-based literacies. To succeed, students need to complete text-based and also non-text based assessments (e.g. performance on a ward). In Design, the non-text based elements of the visual underpin and again often take precedence over more traditional text-based literacies. To succeed in Design, students also need to complete text-based and non-text based assessments (e.g. constructing visual models).

Although we choose the subjects of Nursing and Design, we stress these are only examples that illustrate our argument. In a range of projects, we have researched other subject areas and also found non-text based elements to be critically important. In Psychology (as with Nursing), empathy is key, but the empathy of Psychology is distinct from that of Nursing (which is more focused on care) in that it is more connected to identifying rationales and motivations for actions (see Pilcher & Richards, In Press). In Engineering, elements of mathematics and material properties are key (Pilcher & Richards, In Press). In Business, numeracy and profit generation are key, and in Computing, many elements are key depending on the branch of Computing, possibly visual or code-based (see Pilcher & Richards, 2016, Richards & Pilcher, 2016). Thus, Design and Nursing are not unique in the importance that non-text elements play in student success, but do provide very suitable and clear examples of these. Although such non-text elements could be considered as being professional rather than Academic literacies, students need to be proficient in them in order to successfully complete both non-text based assessments, and produce written text. Furthermore, when Academic Literacies does consider such vocational subjects and talks about professional elements, it does so through the focus of writing (e.g. Lillis & Scott, 2007). We now outline some of the theory underpinning our argument.

**Theoretical setting: why the word is not enough.**

The work of Bakhtin (1981, 1986), Voloshinov (1929), Wittgenstein (1953), Vygotsky (1934), and others (e.g. Richards & Pilcher, 2013, 2014, 2015 and Pilcher & Richards, 2016) highlights a number of elements, crucial to communication, that texts cannot convey. For Bakhtin, a key element to creating meaning is dialogue, and each conversation alters the meaning of a word (1981). Words have three owners (Bakhtin, 1986): the addresser, or person using the word; the addressee, or person hearing the word, and; nobody, or the dictionary definition. Thus, words are inextricably connected with the thoughts and ideas of the speakers (cf. Vygotsky, 1928) and are in turn linked to the language game (cf. Wittgenstein, 1953) being played; in this case, ‘game’ is understood to be something such as ‘ordering in a restaurant’, or ‘writing an essay’ (cf.Wittgenstein, 1953). Thus, in a Higher Education (HE) context, the meanings of words are linked to the language used in the subject; what that language means for the speaker, and; the world setting, or discipline, that the word is a part of (Wittgenstein, 1953; Pilcher & Richards, 2016). Furthermore, there are key ideological and psychological elements (Voloshinov, 1929) that underpin the usage of the words (Pilcher & Richards, 2016; Richards & Pilcher, 2016) which mean, crucially, that not all the elements involved in understanding a text can be gleaned from the text alone. For example, Voloshinov’s (1927) discussion of the word ‘Well’ in a theatrical script. This shows how key meaning related elements cannot be gleaned from the text, such as intonation, the weather outside, the entrance of the actors, the order of their entrance, and so on.

Theoretically therefore, it is possible that there may be elements Academic Literacies is failing to gain access to by not asking the question of what students need to do in order to succeed, rather than the question what do students need to do to produce successful text. In this way, Academic Literacies may understand dialogue (cf. Bakhtin, 1981) to be that which underpins the text, rather than being dialogue focused on revealing particular elements needed in a certain subject. However, such elements, once discovered, could be crucial to student success, and may need to be displayed in the production of all assessments, written texts included. Thus, because Academic Literacies prioritizes text, it may lack a permeability (Kelly, 1963) that would allow it to incorporate these new elements, but also a permeability that would allow it to consider the importance of other literacies apart from text-based literacies that stand alone in their own right.

Yet, there are numerous non-written-text based literacies. This is shown in a health context through the importance of graph literacy to prostate cancer patients (Nayak et al, 2016), and the importance of clinical practice environments to learning and reflection (Cushing, 2015). In an architectural context, visual literacy is key, as “visual expressions can make sense in students’ mind and be read by means of design elements including dot, line, direction, size, form, space, ratio, texture, color, value, and design principles including repetition, symmetry, harmony, contrast, dominance, balance, and unity” (Kılıçaslan & Kuloglu, 2015, p.2825). Such visual elements are also key in computing to help with the visualisation of electro-magnetic fields (Sturgeon & Ray, 2015). Thus, in addition to written-text-based or written-text-informed literacies, other types of literacies are key to certain academic subjects. We now describe how we gathered data in Nursing and Design.

**Methodology**

Our data comes from a study that aimed to answer the question ‘What ‘English’ do students need to succeed?’ We had a very simplistic interview tool that consisted of the word ‘English’ in the centre and was surrounded by the words ‘Reading’, ‘Writing’, ‘Speaking’ and ‘Listening’. We then asked lecturers to talk about these areas in terms of what students would need to succeed. Our approach was intentionally simplistic, and intentionally focused to explore the specific subject contexts through dialogue, not text. This choice was the result of a previous focus group study into the use of assessment task words that had revealed significant subject specificity in lecturer and student understandings of words (Richards & Pilcher 2014). We were subsequently curious to explore student success in specific subject contexts through speaking to lecturers of students we supported, and exploring how they perceived success through the lens of the ‘English’ students required. We had concluded from this previous project that such data was revealed best by an interview and focus group approach as it provided a suitable environment for dialogue (cf. Bakhtin 1981) in a context closer to the world setting (cf. Wittgenstein, 1953) of the subject. Importantly, we did not feel that a traditional Academic Literacies text analysis approach (see Table 1) would reveal these elements as it would be purely based on our own analysis, and not that of the subject lecturers. Furthermore, we did not want to focus, as a traditional Academic Literacies approach would (see Table 1), purely on text production, but wanted to explore student success in a wider context of the other elements students may need. We note that rather than being targeted toward a specifically linguistic goal, the target of ‘English’ here was more on the overall productive and receptive abilities required by students to succeed in the specific subject.

In this project (Pilcher & Richards, 2016) we spoke to lecturers in Nursing (6), Design (6), and also Computing (6), and Business (6). We then transcribed these interviews ourselves to start the analysis (cf. Bird, 2005), and then analysed the data by reading and re-reading it very carefully and diffractively (Mazzei, 2014) through reading it anew using the theory of Voloshinov (1929) that sought to consider the key ideological and psychological elements underpinning the text.. This diffractive analysis led us to realise that crucial and contextually unique non-textual elements were fundamental to student success. We found that these elements underpinned the textual elements and also often meant that the textual elements became less important. We next wanted to see if these different subjects did indeed feel these non-textual elements were of importance, and that they were unique to their subjects. To do this, we presented our thoughts to the lecturers in focus groups (5 in total) that consisted as far as possible of one lecturer from each of the different subjects. We found that the focus groups confirmed the existence and importance of these elements and the need to consider these elements in helping students to become literate in their subjects to help them succeed. We now present and analyse some of this data, using the two subject areas of Design and Nursing as examples.

**Findings**

In this section we present findings first for the subject of Nursing, and secondly for the subject of Design. We firstly provide some context about each subject as a discipline, the particular tasks students are expected to complete, and what each subject values in terms of learning ‘outcomes’ or achievements. We then present findings to illustrate textual and also non-textual literacy based elements that are key to student success, and which inform written text production. Our argument is that by considering these non-text-based literacy elements with the textual elements already incorporated, Academic Literacies approaches will be enhanced and more flexible in terms of disciplinary adaptability.

**Nursing**

The subject of Nursing includes a range of programmes such as Child Nursing, Midwifery, Mental Health, Learning Disability and General Nursing. Key learning outcomes for Nursing in the UK institution studied here frequently refer to the importance of elements such as compassion, safety, respect, honesty, and integrity. Also, they frequently refer to the fundamental importance of evidence-based learning and to being without discrimination. Such outcomes and elements are informed by, and must adhere to, national professional guidelines such as ‘The Code: Professional Standards of Practice and Behaviour’ (Council, N.M. 2015). To meet these outcomes and elements and succeed on their programs, students need to demonstrate clear awareness and understanding of these elements in text (e.g essays and reports), and also in non-text based assessments such as performance on the ward which is assessed by a professional mentor (both with patients and as part of a team) and through reflective writing.

In support of traditional Academic Literacies approaches, our data does indeed show the importance of a range of texts to Nursing. Much of these showed the highly academic and technical basis in its terminology, that: *“a lot of that has roots in Greek and Latin… for instance… hydro-cephalous.”* In addition, many British tabloid press articles were also used, especially in Mental Health Nursing as, *“some of the stuff they write about people with mental illnesses are shocking you know ‘The raving lunatic’ ‘the schizoid’… pretty nasty stuff”*. In terms of text production, this also was often very specific to the profession, as one lecturer noted, students needed a “*kind of Nursing shorthand… they do struggle with that.”*

However, we found many non-text based ideological and psychological elements (cf. Voloshinov, 1929) underpinned student success, and, importantly, also underpinned the written text they were expected to produce. With the term ‘vulnerability’, one lecturer noted how, students *“may have had an understanding of what the term means but not necessarily the concept of the theory within the profession… there’s a clearly defined definition around child development… we would say to them well actually there’s difficulties with the dictionary definition.”* Further, with the term empathy, *“I think within Nursing we would see ‘empathy’ as a professional quality and a skill… something that could be learnt… that you have to employ that as part of your work and is very core and maybe again that’s very different in other disciplines”*. Indeed, it was noted that *“we very much aim to… teach compassion as part of our curriculum, that’s actually a code of core element of the curriculum and increasingly so across all of nursing.”* In mental health, the ‘English’ was expressive, abstract, emotional, and self-reflective: *“mental health is abstract a lot of the time even with the very real human experience…. it’s not an easy thing to find words to… describe human emotion… so language that’s got to do with reflection… self-awareness.”* Consequently, neutralised dictionary definitions (Bakhtin, 1986) would be inappropriate in this context, and language was appropriated to the specific compassionate and emotional world setting (cf. Wittgenstein, 1953) of nursing.

In Mental Health Nursing, text was underpinned by compassion and empathy, and this was what assessments focused on. In the words of one lecturer: *“attitudes and values are… a huge part of Mental Health…if they use language that was derogatory… disrespectful… insensitive in some way then we would pick up on that side in their written work but along with that then they have a number of other aspects of the programme… they’re assessed by their mentor… so when they’re in practice… they’ve got a registered nurse who acts as their mentor so they would be hopefully tuned in to the same things as we would be…. so attitudes and values and use of language…. within the clinical setting would also be hopefully addressed.”* Similarly, in Learning Disability (LD) Nursing, students needed to,“*have the right values and attitudes… because… people with learning disabilities seem to be very vulnerable… very fragile.”*

Furthermore, compassion and empathy were integral to non-written-text in Nursing. Nursing activities were underpinned by these elements, for example, regarding listening: *“it’s not just being able to be knowledgeable and… to communicate, it’s about… being confidential, being empathetic… being non-judgmental… and I think communicating as well with a broad age spectrum…. to be able to know whether a baby is hungry or has a pain or a dirty nappy…. or just wants attention.”* Such listening had to be active, and, *“if you’re actively listening to a person it’s not just hearing what they say… it’s… thinking about what that really means, I guess using the information about who that person is, where they’re at what they’re needing to, you know to inform your intervention.”*  In Mental Health Nursing, such listening was clearly linked to emotion and empathy, *“to listen to how the person is feeling… so it’s kind of… counselling and therapy really… skilled listening is a real art… it’s trying to get them* [students] *to… do that really and to listen not just to the words but to the feelings that are being communicated.”*

Regarding speaking, in Nursing, emotion and empathy underpinned *“the ability to be able to go into words how you feel… emotional intelligence is really important.”* Such speaking was something students were ‘very much assessed on’ and thus integral to their success, they needed to *“communicate… with patients, with colleagues in the team environment* [and this]… *is something that they’re very much assessed on.”* Often, emotion and compassion existed in a symbiotic relationship with verbal and non-verbal physical communication. For example, in Learning Disability Nursing: *“with our guys, the people we care for, we have to give as many clues as possible as to our meaning so it’s not just the speech, it’s the face, it’s the proximity, it’s the gestures you know… it’s total communication and speech is really only one part of it.”* Learning Disability nurses needed to be proficient in, *“sign language, using pictures, technology as well we use an awful lot of stuff on iPads and so on. All of these things can help aid communication.”* Critically, in Learning Disability Nursing, text may play a secondary or non-essential role: *“for some of our people… even the English itself probably isn’t that important. The tone and the empathy and the warmth you could probably almost speak gobbledygook and it wouldn’t matter as long as a tone is engaging you are still communicating something.*”

Indeed, compassion and empathy were critical in non-textual elements in Nursing; for example, silence. In Mental Health Nursing, silence could involve something called ‘presencing’: *“there was a term… and I think it’s still used in fact, called ‘presencing’ so the role of silence [if]… somebody was very distressed… inaccessible in some way or couldn’t verbalise how they were feeling so just being present was enough.”* In General Nursing, silence was also key: *“in Nursing there are lots of instances when… you should know when to hold your tongue. When working with sick kids, for example, you have got children coming in with non-accidental injuries, the parents are coming in, you suspect the parents have done it, everybody suspects the parents… but it’s not up to us to be judgemental… and it is very difficult to show in your face that you are not disgusted by it or, you know, upset by it. You have just got to act as if everything is normal, and that is quite difficult.”*

Other non-textual elements crucial for success included the ability to listen not just to words, but also to gestures, facial expressions and other signs (i.e. physical communication). In Learning Disability Nursing, for example, the work of nurses was all *“about active listening… about the whole… body language and attending to people… to… interpret what the person’s saying… L[earning] D[isability] nurses… communication is 90% of our job… a lot of our guys have communication problems… we have to listen but we also have to observe… and the facial stuff and proximity and what have you so again… it’s integrated… in a kind of total communication… listening’s crucial.”*

Based on these findings, we argue that Academic Literacies for Nursing will be enhanced by complementing text through holistically considering non-text based elements grounded in empathy and compassion. By doing this, we argue Academic Literacies will better help students succeed in the subject in both text-based and non-text based assessments. Ultimately, context (cf. Bakhtin, 1981) was considered key: *“that issue of context is really important… I’d agree absolutely that context changes all the time you’ve got to get the concept in context if you’re going to really understand what’s going on and what the person is saying.”*

1. **Design**

The subject of Design, similarly to Nursing, also includes a range of programmes such as Graphic Design, Product Design, Interior and Spatial Design, and Interactive Media Design. To succeed on these programmes students are required to complete a variety of tasks. Key learning outcomes for Design frequently refer to the importance of having rationales for design processes, producing designs that consider aspects such as ergonomics and use human space, and preparing industry standard visual instructions. Although these learning outcomes are from the UK institution studied here, they are nevertheless intended to prime and prepare students for national and global employment, and consequently align with wider industry expectations. To meet these outcomes and elements and succeed on their programmes, students need to demonstrate clear awareness and understanding of these elements in text (such as essays and reports), but also in non-text based assessments such as sketch books, physical and virtual models and drawings, and realisation of client requirements through visualising and designing prototypes, and pitching design ideas to industry.

As with our data for Nursing, in Design, our data also shows the importance of a range of texts, and thus shows support for traditional Academic Literacies approaches. For example: *“there is a mixture of journals, books…. They will be reading about sociology… learning approaches… ethnographic approaches and then those who are also writing about design.”* Similarly to Nursing, Design also appropriated particular terms uniquely. For example, understanding of empathy in Design was considered both unique and very different to that of Nursing: *“‘empathy’ within Design is usually… with the idea of having some sort of resolution at the end of it… and yet, there may be no resolution in especially Nursing… it might be more to do with merely being willing to understand and listen.”* Also, whereas critique in Nursing was underpinned by emotion, in Design ‘critical’ was precisely *“that ability to contextualise and see shifts in time, and offer interpretation.”*  In Design, ‘sophisticated’ was also viewed highly individually: *“‘sophisticated’ is the ability to apply critical thought to context, to real life scenarios, much like a case study you are using the language taught through the module to understand, to interpret, about a hermeneutics of design, what it means, how does it mean and explain that interpretative process…the term is woolly.”* Not only were such terms unique to Design, but the huge variety of their meanings was also a key element: *“quite often a term will be used and then it is coloured in, rough sketches made by someone and then coloured in. You’ve got 20 different authors writing about it, and it’s coloured in after that point. So that becomes part of the more in-depth reading.”*

In terms of ideological and psychological elements, Design required a very specific social, networking element that also demanded great variety of language usage. This applied to both listening and speaking. In terms of listening, one lecturer said: “*we talk about listening skills and the importance of actively listening, we talk about networking being very important as well.”*  For Design, the interpretation of ‘active’ listening was very different to the ‘active’, empathetic listening of Nursing. Here it was more about sales and performance, as Design students in the workplace *“wear many hats in design industry. You can be a salesman, you have got to talk creatively and passionately, you’ve got to put on your business head, marketing head, technical head and you are always pitching… also, this is a big thing… you… have to be like a clown you’ve got to ask the silly questions over and over again.”*

A key ideological element for Design that was intertwined with the ‘English’ needed to succeed was the ‘philosophical’. Students who could demonstrate *“sophisticated argument”* in Critical Contextual Studies *“do tend to be critical and philosophical, very good with conceptual ideas and discussions around those things.”* Success in such elements required Design knowledge and not simply ‘English’ alone: “*I think when you’re talking about things like aesthetics… it’s not just the ability to spell or write a sentence properly* [for students]*… it’s engaging with the things that they’re reading, it comes back to everything that we’ve been talking about in terms of you know critically engaging with something that they’ve read.”*

As with Nursing, in Design, non-written-text based ideological elements were essential. One key element to Design was the visual: *“it is a visual language in a lot of ways”;* and “*a visual English, yes. You’ve got the semiotics of that.”* Visual elements were often intrinsic to assessment: *“because we are teaching a visual subject, referencing lots of visual language… you are referencing great cinema or literature…”* Such elements were used to explain content in a visual, non-text based way. For example, one lecturer said *“the concept of a utopia and dystopia… it’s very cinematic, very visual, and that’s where… you can explain visually what utopia is and what dystopia is, and then it allows you to start to talk about the culture, the politics of utopias and dystopias.”* Also as with Nursing, the prominence of these non-written-text based elements meant that written text played a secondary or non-essential role. For example: *“the students can prepare boards with their Design work which may be fantastic… full of spelling mistakes… grammar mistakes… doesn’t make sense at all you know… but designers are not terribly concerned with that.”*

Based on the above, we argue that Academic Literacies for Design will be enhanced by complementing text through holistically considering non-text based elements grounded in the visual and the philosophical. Notably, although it is contrasted here with Nursing, the uniqueness of the language used in Design could also be markedly different from other areas. Indeed, when talking about the experience of an Engineering student, one Design lecturer noted that *“strangely enough,* [the] *person that commented most on that this year has been a Masters student who did Engineering here. Our use of language and art design has been completely different to the experience they have in engineering... sometimes words change, not completely changed meaning, but change as a result of the perspective of their learning, they start to understand what we mean by that.”*

**Discussion**

The above findings for the subjects of Nursing and Design show that once student success is studied holistically, a number of elements are revealed that can strengthen and enhance Academic Literacies approaches. They clearly confirm that written texts are important, and that Academic Literacies have done indispensable work to help students with written text production. Yet, we argue they also show that by exploring student success holistically rather than focusing on written texts or the production of written texts alone, key elements are revealed that underpin and inform written text production. Not only this, but awareness of these elements also contextualises the role of written texts within that of other elements in overall student success. In Nursing, the importance of the emotional and the empathic was only revealed when student success was studied holistically, and yet all texts needed to be informed and underpinned by these elements. Furthermore, these elements also meant that written text often took a backstage in favour of more non-verbal communication or silence.

By the same token, in Design, the importance of the visual and the philosophical was only revealed through holistic exploration of student success as whole. Again, these elements informed both informed written text production and also meant that the written text often took a backstage to more visual literacies, meaning that accuracy in grammar was often not so important compared to the successful visual communication of the design idea. What is more, as noted above, we have found that Design and Nursing are not unique, and that in other subjects we have researched, non-text-based elements play a key role in student success. Psychology, Engineering (Pilcher & Richards, In Press), Business, and Computing (Pilcher & Richards, 2016) all have key non-text based elements. Success requires proficiency and understanding of these non-text based elements. In addition, we surmise other subjects may also require proficiency in non-text-based elements for success (e.g. Music or Chemistry).

Traditionally, Academic Literacies has operated upon the idea of the world being textually mediated (Barton, 2001); it has focused exclusively on written text (e.g. Lillis, 2016), or on different modalities for the purpose of text (e.g. Coleman, 2016). We argue that such an approach places Academic Literacies in a position of becoming a concrete construct (Kelly, 1963) that fails to allow for the entrance of new ideas and which continues to operate along similar lines. On the one hand this has meant that Academic Literacies has made huge advances in helping students to understand and produce written text. On the other hand, we argue here that by exploring student success more holistically and not simply in terms of written text production alone, Academic Literacies can discover a vast range of new elements that both inform written texts and also help contextualise these written texts within the wider picture of student success. In this way Academic Literacies will become far more permeable (cf. Kelly, 1963) to new ideas that can only strengthen and enhance its ability to help students. We envision such discoveries and understandings will be able to enhance Academic Literacies, both theoretically and pedagogically, in order to help students succeed in their subjects, and also to help lecturers convey their subject material. Such an enhancement can only help improve the effectiveness and the value of Academic Literacies to student success.

**Conclusions and implications**

Traditional Academic Literacies approaches are based on the foundation that we live in a textually mediated world. This is a foundation that underpins how Academic Literacies approaches help students become familiar with how to produce written text in, for example, subject-specific contexts. Academic Literacies is based on this foundation because it operates under the assumption that analysis of the written text alone (for example through linguistic genre analysis, or analysis of the multiple modes underpinning text production), can reveal how such text is produced, and how this in turn helps students. In this article we have argued that the word is not enough, and that studying written texts alone cannot do this. Instead, student success needs to be studied holistically in the subject, not just through and for the production of written texts. Not only can words be appropriated uniquely within different subjects (contra their neutralised dictionary definitions) but they are underpinned by key ideological and psychological elements that are not accessible through study or analysis of the written text alone. We have argued that Academic Literacies can be enhanced and strengthened in order to better help students succeed by holistically studying this range of literacies involved in student success.

We have shown how the study of student success in the subject holistically rather than through a focus on written text alone reveals two key elements. One, it reveals how a student grasp of key elements underpins student success in the subject, both in the production of written text and in other activities. Critically, such elements were only revealed through this holistic approach to studying student success, even though they indirectly inform text production. In Design these elements were of the ‘visual’ and the ‘philosophical’ and in Nursing they were of the ‘emotional’ and empathic’. Two, this holistic approach revealed the importance of key non-textual elements such as the use of visual sources and production of videos for assessment, and in Nursing the elements of non-verbal communication. Critically, such elements meant that the written text often took a backstage role, and elements such as accuracy were overlooked. We argue that Academic Literacies will be able to enhance and strengthen the work it does by placing the written text in the context of these other elements and by exploring student success more holistically in the subject.

We believe the implications of what we have shown above is that in future Academic Literacies needs to become more permeable and open to new elements through holistically exploring other subject areas such as Physics, Mathematics, Music, Zoology, Chemistry and others. This will then reveal elements underpinning student success that lie beyond the written text, and allow Academic Literacies to better understand and contextualise text production. Thus, in research terms, the implications of our work are that Academic Literacies should widen the scope of its study and explore how other non-text based elements are critical in student success. In this way Academic Literacies can discover elements not accessible to the text, and it can also learn about how text production is contextualised within student success. Pedagogically, we are not arguing that Academic Literacies Practitioners become subject experts. However, we argue that a greater awareness and consideration of these elements will help make Academic Literacies more effective. Ultimately, in this way, Academic Literacies can reveal the role of key non-written-text elements that indirectly inform written text production, the limits of written text, the role of non-written text elements. In turn, this will help contextualise the role of written text within overall student success. For our own work as writing support tutors and advisers, we have found awareness and consideration of these elements has greatly helped us to provide guidance to students about the written text they are required to produce. For example, when a Nursing student seeks advice on an essay asking them to evaluate a particular process or policy, we understand that such evaluation is informed by elements of empathy and emotion, whereas for a Design student the evaluation would be far more visual or philosophical in nature, and the accompanying use of visuals may play a far more prominent role. Awareness and consideration of these elements helps us advise and consider the nature of the text produced far more holistically and, we argue, effectively.

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