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Students' Challenges and Support Needed in Reaching Academic Literacies in Higher Education: In-Depth Interviews with Swedish Students

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to capture and analyse perspectives on higher education from the views of five students through in-depth interviews. The students' statements are analyzed in order to gain an understanding of their experiences of developing academic literacies in their university studies. They are regularly visiting the university study workshop for help with their exam assignments. The following questions have been formulated to fulfil the aim of the study: (a) what aspects of studies in higher education do the students express as important, favorable, or unfavorable, for their development of academic literacies? and (b) in what way do the students value the study workshops as an educational tool? The analysis reveals three themes: the importance of explicit support structures, the importance of teachers' feedback, and the importance of using the students' pedagogical capital. The results also show that the students highly value the study workshop when they reflect upon the one-to-one feedback, but the support seems to be insufficient both in supporting them to be more independent in their studies and in developing academic literacies from a critical and epistemological point of view.

Keywords: *Academic literacies, explicit education, feedback, pedagogical capital.*

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Introduction

For many students, studying in higher education is something that differs markedly from their previous school experiences. In the meeting with the new educational context, where the student is expected to be able to read and understand academic language and be able to independently process, analyse and produce academic texts, gaps arise that challenge and need to be bridged. New for the novice in higher education are also the large amounts of text that the student is expected to read in the courses. They can be perceived as too extensive and demanding, which means a risk of the student failing and dropping out of education. Here, both students and higher education institutions are challenged in the vulnerability that arises when expectations are not met and feelings of failure, stagnation and exclusion take over. However, in higher education today there are clear intentions to broaden recruitment and offer higher education to student groups that do not come from traditionally study-familiar environments. This in turn means both new and other requirements for university teachers (Ask, 2005, 2007; Svensson, 2011, 2018). It is not about lowering the requirements of the education, but creating teaching situations that invite, confirm, support and at the same time challenge the student to new ways of learning. Bergman (2014, 2016) highlights similar issues based on the work of university teachers in supporting students' literacy development in writing. One way for colleges and universities to meet the broadened recruitment of students that started around the turn of the millennium was by setting up study workshops at nearly all colleges and universities (Swedish Council for Higher Education, 2016).

The study workshops that are offered focus on, improving the students' writing ability, and this is what is addressed during the students visits. Here, they can receive help with their examination assignments, but most often, the issues seen for the students are focused on academic writing, which is viewed as a separate skill. Mastering academic literacies is more than just mastering writing a formally correct text. Previous research (Eklund Heinonen et al., 2018) has pointed to the importance of subject integration, i.e., giving students the opportunity to work on their academic

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literacy development within the framework of the subject studies on existing courses, rather than through separate scaffoldings. The issue seen with students visiting the study workshop is how the support they receive could be transferred and generalized to their regular studies to create a subject depth and an independent and sustainable knowledge development. Therefore, it is of great importance to take part of the students' perceptions and experiences of the challenge they meet in higher education.

The aim of this study is to capture and analyse the students view on higher education to gain understanding of their experiences of developing academic literacies in university studies related to the aid the students apply for in the study workshop. The students have varying backgrounds and experiences of academic studies, and they attended different courses. The students' statements are analysed and interpreted to generate knowledge that will be used to improve and develop teaching in higher education. The theoretical approach applied in this study is discussed below and contributes with concepts, such as 'Community of Practice', 'academic literacies', 'explicit education', 'feedback' and 'pedagogical capital'. These concepts are useful for analysis and interpretation and will have an impact on how higher education could meet the variation of broadened recruitment.

The following questions have been formulated to fulfil the aim of the study:

- What aspects of studies in higher education do the students express as important, favourable, or unfavourable, for their development of academic literacies?
- In what way do the students value the study workshop as an educational tool?

Literature Review

Community of Practice

The theoretical starting point in this study is based on a sociocultural perspective with a focus on learning through social and creative processes of making meaning. Researchers with a sociocultural perspective such as Gee (2008) and Street (1995) apply the concept of literacy to language activities and embrace an ideological approach where literacy is regarded as a complex social phenomenon related to social and political processes. A sociocultural perspective assumes that learning is performed in conjunction with others in situated practices, comparable to what Lave and Wenger (1991) call 'legitimized peripheral participation'. Learning takes place in interaction, where the student progressively moves between different positions through participation in the learning practice. Initially, the student moves from a peripheral position, 'novice', to the centre of practice, 'expert', when knowledge has been internalized. Lave and Wenger (1991) studied 'Community of Practice' (CoP) preferably in practical learning communities. Wenger's definition of CoP as mutual engagement in 'a joint enterprise with a shared repertoire' (Wenger, 1998 p. 125) is problematized and discussed by Arthur (2016), who investigates the transferability of CoP from a practical to a theoretical learning environment. By studying a student's life history, Arthur shows how the student's experience can be compared to development within CoP. The study indicates that the interaction varies depending on the qualifications of beginners and experienced participants as well as on personalities and the kind of current activities.

Gauthier (2016) tried to implement CoP in one of his courses at the University of Mount Saint Vincent in Atlantic Canada. Gauthier applied, among other things, Wenger's et al. (2002) design to develop and translate CoP from theory to practice. They stressed the importance of mutual commitment, a joint project and a shared repertoire and pointed out vital leadership as the most important factor. Gauthier found that students developed a sense of value as members of the group, which contributed to an experience of owning their learning, which not only led to a course grade but also promoted students' lifelong learning.

Academic Literacies

New Literacy Studies (NLS) is a field that views literacy in its full range of cognitive, social, interactional, cultural, political, institutional, economic, moral, and historical contexts (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006). In NLS academic reading and writing is regarded as part of a more general academic meaning-making process, which also includes critically reviewing and evaluating information. Lea and Street problematize the view of academic reading and writing by pointing to three overlapping aspects: study skills, academic socialization, and academic literacies. Study skills can be regarded as the student's individual and cognitive study skills, while academic socialization can be interpreted as the student's integration into the academic discourse. Academic literacies are associated with a critically scrutinized approach, meaning creation, identity, and power. The contexts and the subject disciplines determine how students use language, depending on the situation and genre (Gee, 2008; Lea & Street, 1998, 2006; Street, 2010).

Lillis and Scott (2007) also use academic literacies (in plural) to signify a specific epistemological and ideological approach towards academic writing and communication. They emphasize the teacher researchers need to focus on the key topics, socialisation, scaffolding, and the learning process from novice to expert. These topics are based on sociocultural theory and not solely students' writing, which has been at the top of the agenda in expanding higher education contexts. The reason for this is obvious, because students' written texts continue to constitute the main form

in the assessment, and as such, writing is a 'high stakes' activity in university education. If there are issues with writing, then the student is likely to fail.

Explicit Education and Feedback

Wingate and Tribble (2012) compare Lea and Street's concept (1998) of 'academic literacies' with 'English for Academic Purposes' (EAP). EAP promotes explicit education in the academic literacies and can be seen as genre-based pedagogy on literacy. Wingate and Tribble (2012) point out that academic literacies and EAP have a lot in common, and both views can be applied together as complements in an inclusive literacy project for every student, irrespective of background. Wingate (2015) emphasizes that academic literacy is not solely about writing in higher education, the difficulties students face at university are also seen as an issue in understanding epistemology and how to communicate the discipline (Kapp & Bangeni, 2009; Lillis & Turner, 2001; Wingate, 2015). Language support is often entirely focused on students' writing, which neglects that writing is only the end product of a more complex process of the epistemology of the disciplines. Wingate (2015) points out that academic support needs to include reading, evaluation sources, as well as presenting and debating knowledge. The student needs to be explicitly taught in academic literacies and such an approach also needs to recognize students' diversity as well as the discipline of academic literacies.

To become actively involved in an academic learning practice, Court (2014) shows examples of how formative feedback provided to prospective English teachers during their first year as a student led to good opportunities for knowledge development. Court also points at the difference in how teachers formulated their response depending on whether the student was a strong or weak writer. A weak writer received clearer instructions on what needed to be addressed in the text, while a strong writer received vaguer and more summarized proposals for changes. When feedback was given in a timely manner and sufficiently detailed, the student's metacognitive ability increased, leading to a deeper understanding of the subject area.

Evans (2013) examines how students understand and create meaning in the feedback given. Here, different theoretical perspectives on feedback are also raised, for example, if feedback is given from a cognitive or a social constructionistic perspective. Evans describes that feedback from a cognitive perspective takes the form of directives and corrections, which can be compared to an expert who speaks to a passive recipient, while feedback from a social constructionistic perspective is provided as comments and suggestions in dialogue, which helps both teacher and student to new understandings through shared experience. Leach (2016) points out the need for support for both teachers and students to strengthen teaching and learning, where Massey University is held up as an example. The purpose was to strengthen and develop learning support (study workshops) and offer pastoral care (student health), which helps support students' learning. The study also shows how, as stated in the course objectives, qualitative teaching and student engagement in their studies can be strengthened by the requirement for collaboration, not only between students but also between teachers and between teacher and student. The aim was to develop relationships to create creative learning communities, both in academic and social groups.

Cultural Background and Pedagogical Capital

Zepke and Leach (2006, 2007) investigated what was necessary for students from different cultural backgrounds to stay and integrate or adapt to the new educational context. The concept 'integration' meaning how students assimilate to the prevailing culture and acquiring new ways of learning, which leads to opportunities of being incorporated into the new community. The concept 'adaptation' is inspired by Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970), and means that the student adds new knowledge capital to that already existing. Similarly, Henningsson-Yousif and Viggósson's (2006) discussed the concept of pedagogical capital and the relation to social reproduction. They use this concept to emphasise the important aspects of the student's life and how it shapes the view on education and future profession.

Students who are aware of their pedagogical capital and use of their life experiences are given effective tools, which are likely to affect the outcome of the education (Viggósson, 2011). Duckworth (2013) shows that a social approach to literacy enable students to bring their historical and social background into the classroom, and as such these are valued and used. The learner can thus be a co-producer of knowledge. Duckworth and Tett (2019) show how the students, when exploring their life and learning narratives remove earlier negative experiences, resulting in new possibilities in their learning situation, especially if teachers engage with the students in egalitarian ways. Leese (2010) also uses Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital to highlight beginner students' experiences of higher education and how they express the need for structured activities on campus to feel a sense of belonging. Students also wanted more support from teachers in the study situation and explicit instructions of what was expected of them.

Methodology

Research Design

The method chosen is based on a need of knowledge of the students' perceptions and experiences of those who frequently visiting the university's study workshops at a university in Sweden. In this study a qualitative in-depth interview method was preferred, since it was acknowledged the most suitable tool answering the questions how students perceive the requirements of academic literacies in higher education. The students participated in the study were mainly from teacher education but also from other university courses as well.

An in-depth interview method could contribute with knowledge about not only the participant's perceptions and experiences, but also the culture and society in which the interviewee lives (Mishler, 1995). According to Bamberg (2004), interviews are constructions between the interviewee and the interviewer. Presenting examples of people's ways of perceiving their background, their current situation and their view of the future is based on the notion that stories generate meaningful knowledge (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). When we share students' stories of their learning and meeting with academic literacy in a higher education context, it is also possible to contextualize the stories and gain a view of the educational work.

The interview questions were open in nature to call for storytelling based on the students' own experiences about their study background, current education, why they applied to the study workshop, and how they were supported. The reason for using this method was to guide the student's story telling without too many detailed interview questions. However, it was also important to ask follow-up questions and capture interesting aspects about things that could be related to the research questions. The interviews took place at the university premises and lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and a half. When meeting the student, it is important to consider ethical aspects and be aware of any existing issues when applying the method. It is also crucial for the analysis and interpretation process to be aware that the stories are co-constructions, which occur in interaction during the conversation (Bamberg, 2004; Johansson, 2005). The reflexive component of the method is important for both the informants and the researchers. Reflexivity means that the researcher is being aware of its co-creative role in the construction of the story. It also deepens the researcher's knowledge of how stories are not only based on social life but also play a role in creating and influencing social life (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001; Bruner, 1987).

Sample and Data Collection

Students who visited the study workshop were given the option to answer a questionnaire about previous school experiences and experiences of their current education as well as the study workshop. The questionnaire was available to all students who visited the study workshop, about 50, at the time. Only five students, who were all women between the ages of 20 and 40, answered the questionnaire. They were also interested in participating in an interview. The small number of responding students was to be probably due the absence of the researcher's personal presentation and delivery of the questionnaire, which in a sense may influence the representation of the participants. The interviewees have accepted that the study is only used for research purposes, and they were informed that in the interview situation they could cease participation at any time, and that their stories would be anonymized with pseudonyms. The anonymized participants are presented below:

• Alejandra is a woman in her 40s with Swedish as a second language. She studies as a subject teacher. Alejandra has sought help with her written examination assignments.

• Hannah is a woman in her 20s with Swedish as a second language. She studies as a preschool teacher. Hannah has sought help with her written examination assignments.

• Jenny is a woman in her 20s with Swedish as the first language. She has sought help with her thesis work at one of the university's educational programs.

• Linda is a woman aged 35 with Swedish as her first language. She has a varied arts education behind her and is now in the final phase of her education as an adult education teacher. She has sought help in completing her thesis.

• Marika is a woman in her 30s with Swedish as a second language. She works as a teacher and has sought help with her master's thesis.

Analyzing of Data

The five interviews were recorded and transcribed. Both the interviewer's questions and the interviewees' answers were printed to make the co-construction visible (Mishler, 1995). The interviewees' pseudonym initials were used, and the interviewer is marked with an I. Pauses are indicted by an ellipsis, and an ellipsis in parentheses indicates that something has been removed; in addition, words in capital letters are used to denote when something was emphasized. The conversations were transcribed in their entirety and a content analysis of the interviews was carried out using coding based on meaning content, where different themes had crystallized and then been colour-marked (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). To take into consideration credibility and transparency, it is important to intercorrelate analysis and

interpretation to the purpose and questions throughout the study. Subject variety is considered by selecting the participants based on different age, mother tongue and study program. Representative quotations from the transcribed text are one way to show transparency in the analysis work. Table 1 illustrates the process for identifying the themes, which were interpreted in comparison to the purpose and the research questions.

Table 1. Excerpt From the Analysis Processes, Inspired by Graneheim and Lundman's Qualitative Content Analysis Model.

Interviewee	Meaning unit	Condensed meaning unit- Description close to the text	Interpretation of the underlying meaning	Theme crystallised
Alejandra	Yes, I must, I must translate. I'm googling and I translate quite a bit to understand. This book has given me the reason. She (the author) writes exactly as you teach at school. But I wonder how to express myself in the Swedish language. I wonder how to write down my experiences in Swedish.	Translate to understand. A finds important content in the literature but wonders how she can express this in Swedish. A wonder how to express oneself in writing in Swedish	Need to understand and express new knowledge	The importance of explicit support structures

Findings / Results

Three themes were revealed from the students' stories answering the research question one, 'What aspects of studies in higher education do the students express as important, favourable, or unfavourable, for their development of academic literacies?'. Through content analysis (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004), the most important aspects prove to be *the importance of explicit support structures*, *the importance of teachers' feedback* and *the importance of using students' pedagogical capital*. To the research question two, 'In what way do the students value the workshops as an educational tool?', they view the availability of competent teachers and the possibility of one-to-one support as favourable. The students' statements indicate that the students meet teachers in the study workshop who are clear in their support and give direct feedback. They also evaluated the study workshop from an unfavourable perspective, where they highlighted the teachers' lack of time, the students' feeling of bothering the teachers with their issues and the disadvantage of meeting with different teachers each time.

The Importance of Explicit Support Structures

Throughout the interviews, the five students explained that they wanted more support and greater clarity in what is expected of them, which is not surprising because they attended the study workshop to find help with their academic work. Jenny stated that, if the teachers were clear in explaining the purpose and objectives of the courses, then she would understand 'the whole thing with the course'.

> J: Before each course, most teachers I have had told me, 'The course is about this. You will achieve this, and you do this through this'. Then I understand the whole thing with the course. It has never been like that before during my time in school, but at that time it was like 'now it is the next thing and now it is the next thing ...' you just have not quite understood.

Hannah talks about student–student interaction where the collaboration is inspiring but still not sufficient to achieve the intended results.

> H: I'm doing this together with someone who has the same background as me, and it's so hard for us to write the text, to start. I have a little more experience than her, but it is so hard because I CAN'T do so well, and it is so hard for us to just write a text. It has been so hard for us to just write an objective… It has been a HUGE job! We are at the same preschool and are in the same group, so it was an ACCIDENT! So, writing an ANALYSIS is really hard!
>
> I: How do you think? What do you need to feel that you are developing and can do it?
>
> H: It's that we have the thoughts, we are very good at talking you can say ...
>
> I: Yes.
>
> H: We are very good at talking but very bad at writing! (laugh)

The students express a strong desire to succeed with the studies, and when difficulties arise, they mainly talk about shortcomings regarding writing language skills and study skills (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006). Hannah also talks about shortcomings, particularly regarding academic writing. She thinks she is good at thinking and talking but perceives

writing as problematic. Lillis and Scott (2007) discuss the students' writing, which for a long time has been in focus on the language agenda in higher education contexts. They highlight how student writing is a dominant discourse in academic literacy and in students' exam assignments, and therefore, academic writing becomes particularly important for how students succeed in their studies. Students' anxiety about their writing skills is also highlighted in Wingate and Tribble's (2012) discussion of what students need to be socialized into academic writing practice.

Jenny mentioned that during the university studies it is the first time she experiences clear support structures. These structures can be related to explicit teaching and vital leadership, something that Wenger et al., (2002) highlight as the most important factor in CoP. Based on such reasoning, it could mean that qualitative and sufficiently quantitative teacher-led teaching becomes exemplary in the work of mutual engagement, joint projects, and shared repertoire. Leese (2010) found in her study that the students need structured activities and clear instructions and support from teachers.

The students also give their view on the study workshop, where Marika is fully satisfied, but some of the others feel that the support is not entirely satisfied nor structured in the desired way.

> M: There are actually trained teachers there who I think are absolutely fantastic, who really can do their job! Above all, this is number one, and I think the study workshop idea is a great support (...). I think the workshop is the answer. They support both verbally and in writing.

Linda has a different view:

> L: I thought I would meet the requirements in the pre-service teacher education, writing the master thesis. I didn't think it would be that hard for me to understand. I did not think that. The difficulty was that there were a lot of rules and concepts and processes and formalities that I needed, and that was stressful. It is too much stress, or it could also be me who was stressed at the time.

Marika's and Linda's stories can be seen as two opposite examples of attempts to reach membership in the learning community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Marika talks about feeling as though she is learning how to think and write by applying a more critical approach and thus feels more competent, which falls in line what Gauthier (2016) found in her study. Linda experiences a general stress and does not really understand the formal writing rules, and she partly blame herself. Her insecurity and stress may be interpreted as the requirements are unclear and too implicit (Wingate & Tribble, 2012). The study workshop was appreciated by Alejandra, and she says it is a "great system", but finds that there is very little time to get the support needed:

> A: They (the teachers) are always busy, and they usually only help me for half an hour. I am grateful, but I must come again and, then I don't meet the same person, and I don't think it is good because you lose time to explain for a new person again (...). I don't know who they are, they master the language well and have good thoughts and help me a lot (...) I just think they have not supported me enough for me to express myself the way I want.

As students develop a sense of value as members of the learning community, they feel that they own their learning (Duckworth & Tett, 2019). Alejandra is not satisfied with the limited time she was given in the study workshop and points out that she needs more support to understand the language and to express herself. Thus, the available time for support in the study workshop play an important role. In conclusion, time and explicit support seems to be crucial for students to develop from 'novice' to 'expert' (Arthur, 2016; Lave & Wenger;1991; Wenger; 1998).

The Importance of Teachers' Feedback

The students' stories reveal a great need for teacher feedback, which can be interpreted as a desire for teachers' direct response to the student's written work. The students are well aware that the texts to be read and written in their education require something new from them. Alejandra is aware of the importance of communicating, also verbally, both in an academic discourse and in her second language:

> A: My teacher told me, 'You must talk!' After I wrote my assignments, she said it was very interesting. Not very many teachers think in that way, some think 'She can't talk. She understands nothing!' I understand, but the problem is that I can't express myself! And it is a different situation for me when I don't have Swedish as a native language, but I am aware of the world we live in.

Hannah says she needed feedback on a task that required a lot from her. She went to the study workshop for help:

> H: (...) They said it should be scientific and it should be written accordingly, and it should be like this ... very brief, but you must emanate from this article ...
>
> I: Mmm, you should use an article you have read, and then try to write your own with inspiration from it. Yes, okay ...

> H: And that's what I did, and it was terribly hard because I got ... So, I went to the study workshop. I went there every day, and they got crazy ... (laughter). It was hard for me, and it was hard for them. I went there so often because I didn't understand. I have never written any scientific article and they (teachers) had such high demands on us, and it was stressful and tough, and you had to go back all the time, and check what was written? Everyone says different things. I have corrected the text at least 33 times (laughter), yes, but how many times should I?

The students spoke about the study workshop and the aid available to them, which must be pointed out is a workshop that is outside their regular courses, and it is usually one-to-one teaching. This seems to be a discontinuity to the principles of CoP, a process leading the student from a peripheral to a more central and integrated context (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002). One-to-one feedback is in line with Court's research (2014), where the weaker writers received clear revision advice. There is a risk that this kind of feedback, where the student is thoroughly guided through the assignment does not give the student a deeper understanding of meaning and the underlying epistemology of the discourse (Wingate, 2015).

In Hannah's story, she explains she did not get the feedback she wanted to improve her text, because she perceived she wear down the teachers in the workshop by visiting them too frequently. She felt that she over-used the workshop alternative in addition to regular teaching. The tools Hannah is asking for are academic socialization and scaffolding, and not only student/ student collaboration but also teacher/ student collaboration, so that she will be able to advance from being a 'novice' to an 'expert' (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lea & Street, 1998, 2006; Lillis & Scott, 2007). As they talk about their experiences, the students emphasize that passing the exam assignments is the most important outcome for them. However, the critical thinking approach in line with Lea and Street's concept of academic literacies (1998, 2006) is seldom applied or mentioned by the students.

Linda thought that working with the master thesis would not cause her any major issues, but it was not as easy as she had expected. Linda has been trying to complete her thesis for several years.

> L: This was my second supervisor, so from him I got some help, but he thought I was a little annoying because he wanted me to ... I had to give up in the end and said, 'I do as you want', but that wasn't really what I really wanted to do, but I've learned a lot anyway.

I: Do you mean you aligned yourself according to the formal requirements?

> L: No, but I had to remove a lot of what I wanted to write about, so I can't say today how to write a thesis ... I still don't know ... I'm not sure how to write.

Linda talks about how she gives up and adapts her writing to the requirements she thinks apply to be approved. She is not satisfied but prefers to end her studies with a focus on a passing grade. Completing her studies takes precedence over fighting for her own ideas and conviction. Marika also has thoughts about what is needed when she is supervised.

> M: The thing is that you get feedback very quickly. You read through comments. You edit and send again, and you get feedback once again. I think it is THERE, where it happens, precisely in those moments when you get feedback. When I get to reflect on my own writing, I discover that I have not been clear.

The students most often requested feedback that is clear and concrete, as also suggested from Evans' results (2013), which describes feedback from a cognitive perspective. However, in some of the students' stories, they call for feedback in a wider and deeper perspective, something that falls in line with what Evans calls 'a social constructionistic perspective' on feedback. Marika is clear about how teachers' competence plays a role in her learning. She says it's 'number one that teachers really know their job'. Leach (2016) emphasizes that the most important aspect in strengthening student engagement and learning is qualified teaching, which also involves giving qualified responses and feedback. For teachers to be able to work actively with feedback, the feedback needs to be implemented at the institutional level as a continuous element of teaching.

The students understand something is required beyond formal writing skills, but they nevertheless feel that the requirements for these skills are implicitly expected throughout the courses and are necessary for them to succeed. They are also aware that they need to communicate well, listen, read, and write in creative complex forms of knowledge to be able to perform an analysis, interpretation, and critical review (Kapp & Bangeni, 2009; Lillis & Turner, 2001; Wingate, 2015). Wingate and Tribble (2012) discuss the need for combining both perspectives of academic literacies and genre-based literacy pedagogy to enable students who seek higher education to learn, develop and finish their studies and come into working life. They point to the issue of too implicit academic socialization and propose a more explicit teaching based on both perspectives

The Importance of Using Their Pedagogical Capital

In general, the students highlight a desire to be recognized for their linguistic and cultural background and the knowledge they already possess and bring into the education. Alejandra talks about how she considers herself aware of her 'pedagogical capital'.

> A: I have a strong feeling that I have the pedagogical capital needed to become a teacher. We have to talk a lot more about multi-culture and democracy. Here at the university, I think teachers are wonderful, with the theoretical knowledge they share at seminars, but they must be convinced about the students own capital.

Pedagogical capital refers to important aspects of life that have shaped the student's personal purpose in teacher education (Henningsson-Yousif & Viggósson, 2006; Viggósson, 2011). Alejandra not only wants to be integrated, but she also wants to bring her historical and social background into the classroom to be valued and used (Duckworth, 2013; Duckworth & Tett, 2019). She also indicates a desire to add new knowledge to her pedagogical capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970; Zepke & Leach, 2006, 2007).

Hannah points out issues with reading academic texts and would prefer the texts to be "more narrative", a genre that she is familiar with from previous studies in high school.

> H: I wished that the texts we read would be narrative, narrative and a little easier to read, I don't mean fiction, but maybe just like this… a narrative text and not of the most, most kind of easy ones, but just as casual as in the books written in narrative form. It would have felt great and easier for me. Now when I think about it, I have so much more to write.

The students' stories are in line with what Zepke and Leach (2006, 2007) and Leach (2016) discuss regarding what is needed for students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to remain and succeed in higher education. Their reflections on their reading comprehension and production of texts indicate that there is a gap needed to be bridged to reach the level of study requirements in academic literacy (Ask, 2005, 2007; Bergman, 2014, 2016; Lea & Street, 2006; Svensson, 2011, 2018).

Jenny tells she has a dyslexia diagnosis:

> J: I don't really know how to start ... Okay, I've had a really tough time at school. I have dyslexia. That is why I thought it was difficult in school, and I didn't get real help (…). Mmm so I never learned how to read! Or how to see or how to write and stuff. It's like ...
>
> I: Is writing just as difficult for you?
>
> J: Yes, it is… Eh, yes, since through my school years I haven't received any help, but I have always been nagging for help, and they just said yes, and nothing happened.

Jenny considers that it is only during her university studies that she has been given the tools to really understand the purpose and goals of her studies. The experience of pedagogical capital can be seen both in a positive way and a negative way. When students exploring their life through narratives, earlier negative experiences are processed, resulting in new possibilities in their learning situation (Duckworth & Tett, 2019). Jenny brings a limited pedagogical capital from previous years in school, and at the university she gets new pedagogical capital to manage her studies, which shows to be a turning point for success (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Mishler, 1995). Linda experiences a big difference in the theoretical requirements between the education she received earlier and during the teacher education.

> L: I have studied at a design college ... I have studied picture and script and concept development for film, and there have been no theoretical assignments that should be written.
>
> I: Haven't you experienced the theoretical requirements before?
>
> L: No, not at all.

Linda exhibits a clear gap in her pedagogical capital. Marika on the other hand points out in her story that it was always easy to read and write but makes a distinction between reading with fluency and real understanding.

> M: It has always been easy for me to write and read. I have always had a flow, so it has never been a problem to read. It was very easy for me to read, but then we come to the next stage: understanding!
>
> I: You had succeeded in decoding the text?
>
> M: It's a process that I think everyone has to go through. Some go through it very smoothly and understand it very early, but someone like me, at the age of 30 (laughter)…, but I got it now and I am very happy. Otherwise, I wouldn't have these thoughts now. And now the first thing when I read an article, I look at it, and ask myself, who is the author? Is this any known author, or is it a researcher? I can now ... critically review.

Marika's experience is that she struggles to meet the challenges every time she enters new reading and writing contexts, but she considers that she has gradually developed her ability and is now able to read and write with an academic critical perspective (Arthur, 2016; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wingate, 2015).

Discussion

In the present work, the analysis and interpretation of students' statements reveal the students' need for explicit education, feedback, and possibility to use their pedagogical capital. The stories constructed in the meeting between the researcher and students make the students aware of their own study situation. This has an impact both on how the student can view themselves and their studies, but also on how higher education can take up the challenge of using students' pedagogical capital as a starting point in different contexts and in a lifelong learning. The students' stories on how they try to adapt and pass the education relates to, not only Zepke and Leach's concepts of integration and adaptation (2006, 2007) and Lea and Street's concept of academic socialization (1998), but also to the latter's concept of study skills. The stories reveal students conforming to the prevailing culture to achieve approved results and at the same time their critique of this culture. Importantly, the education should bridge gaps between different educational contexts (Svensson, 2011, 2018), show respect for different abilities, understand the importance of context, to be able to adapt teaching to different student groups. It is also important that the students' needs to ask themselves why they have chosen a particular education, in what context the knowledge should be used and why. This enables a development towards conquering academic literacies (Lea & Street, 1998, 2006), where learning and knowledge are part of social processes that include empower in relation to different levels in a lifelong learning.

The establishment of study workshops is one way of meeting student's needs, but this support needs to be organised with continuity and adequate teacher skills, as is clearly revealed from the students' stories. The study workshop becomes an exclusive solution for a few students and could play an important role for those students who perceive that regular teaching is not sufficient. To truly achieve an educational situation that benefits learning and development for all students, supporting students in study workshops seems not to be sufficient. However, in current education systems the study workshops are still needed, but must include and support critical academic reading, as well as understanding of the disciplines and discourse of academic literacies (Wingate, 2015).

Conclusion

The present work and previous research show the vital importance that teachers in higher education teach explicitly about the concepts and the language used in their subject areas (Wingate, 2015; Wingate & Tribble, 2012). Creating opportunities for such teaching in higher education requires skills, time, collaborations, resources, and support directed to both students and teachers. Collegial collaboration with meetings regularly over time, joint reading, and discussions on current research, and sharing of experiences and working methods enable development in higher education.

Qualitative teaching and dialogic engagement between teachers and students, and the ability for the students to explore their life and learning narratives result in new possibilities in academic literacies (Duckworth & Tett, 2019). According to Leach (2016), collaboration should be clearly stated in the syllabuses and practiced as working methods in the courses. As revealed from the student interviews in this study, such working methods could strengthen the development of relationships between teacher and student and between students in creative learning communities, both in academic and social groupings, which have a bearing on the sense of belonging and lifelong learning

Recommendations

The students' stories indicate that support structures and feedback are desirable throughout the education and at several levels. This means that all teachers, not only teachers active in study workshops, need to be aware of the literacy practices of their subject disciplines to support students' learning processes through more explicit teaching. For teachers in higher education, awareness of students' pedagogical capital can become a starting point and driving force for didactically developing and making higher education accessible to heterogeneous student groups.

Future research questions to be answered are if it would be possible in regular teaching in higher education to teach based on the principles of academic literacies applying explicit education. In what way could teachers in higher education let the students use their pedagogical capital as a background for new knowledge and how will such teaching affect students' success for carrying out the challenge of reaching academic literacies?

Limitations

The selection of participants in the study is based on the availability of students willing to answer the introducing questionnaire, and the five students selected were those who registered an interest in participating in the following interview. The study is thus limited to a variation of five students' perceptions and experiences. One issue with in-depth interviews is the balance of proximity and distance in the conversation between the researcher and the informant, which may affect the way the questions are asked and how the informant answers. It is also important to realize that the method used leads to a co-construction influenced by the two participants and the interview context. Further it could be questioned if the participants, regarding their cultural and linguistic background are representative for this student group.

Ethics Statements

The research involving human participants underwent thorough review and approval by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the Malmö University. Prior to participating in the study, all participants provided written informed consent, indicating their voluntary agreement to participate.

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