

**ACADEMIC LANGUAGE AND LEARNING PRACTITIONER IDENTITY  
SHIFTS IN THE CONTEXT OF AN INSTITUTION-WIDE STRATEGY  
IMPLEMENTATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

Academic Language and Learning (ALL) practitioners support the post-entry academic language needs of students in higher education, often by advising and collaborating with discipline academics on language and literacy matters. Existing studies into the identities of ALL practitioners, and those within the parallel field of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teacher identities have found issues of marginalisation and troubled status. They call for a more centralised view of language within universities, along with a re-positioning of ALL or EAP practitioners. In this article, we explore the identity negotiation of ALL practitioners in Australia as they respond to a new university-wide strategy of language embedding. This strategy was implemented from 2019 by a team of ALL practitioners in order to support students entering university with low levels of academic language. The study collected data from two rounds of in-depth interviews with the practitioners at key stages of the implementation. Inductive thematic analysis of the data revealed shifts in terms of how the ALL team worked together and their collective profile or status, the knowledge base they worked from, and how they and others perceived their roles. We draw on various concepts from the identity literature, including Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital and Gee's notion of affinity identity. This study has implications for how language practitioners negotiate their team identities and build symbolic capital, particularly in the context of changes to institutional strategies regarding language support.

**KEYWORDS:** practitioner identities, academic language and learning, symbolic capital, affinity identities

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language teacher identity is increasingly recognised as an important area of research within TESOL and applied linguistics, with practical implications for language teaching classrooms (e.g., Barkhuizen & Strauss, 2020) and language teacher education programs (e.g., Yazan & Lindahl, 2020). Indeed, Yazan and Lindahl conceptualise teacher learning and practice as continuous identity negotiation, involving complex processes of decision-making and action, ongoing reflection on practice, interactions with students and colleagues, and participation in various communities. Teacher identities are challenged and shift continuously, but experiences such as participating in a new course, conducting teacher research, or implementing a new curriculum, policy or strategy can mediate shifts that are particularly profound (Jiang & Zhang, 2021; Tran, Burns, & Ollerhead, 2017). In this article, we explore the identity shifts of ourselves and our team members, who are all Academic Language and Learning (ALL) practitioners, in the context of a new post-entry academic language strategy implementation at an Australian university.

ALL practitioners are often referred to as “lecturers” and their work involves teaching, research, advising and collaborating with academics from different disciplines on language and literacy matters (Hoadley & Hunter, 2018). The few studies that exist on the identities of ALL practitioners depict a marginalised group of fringe-dwellers or boundary-crossers inhabiting a third space within universities (Briguglio, 2014; Grossi & Gurney, 2020; Percy, 2015), which draws parallels with a recent body of research into English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teacher identities (Bell, 2021; Bond, 2020; Ding, 2019). Most of these studies call for a more embedded, central view of language within disciplinary learning, more collaboration between ALL or EAP practitioners and disciplinary academics, and support from institutions to enable these practices. What happens to ALL or EAP practitioner identities, though, when they are enabled to shift their practices in these suggested ways? We draw on the theoretical framework recently proposed by Bell (2021), incorporating concepts from the educational sociologists Basil Bernstein and Pierre Bourdieu, to shed light on the identity negotiation of ALL practitioners as they respond to the implementation of a new university-wide policy and academic language framework.

It is important to mention that there are various terms used to refer to the field and context we work in: that of post-entry academic language development in universities. These terms, which we disambiguate further later in the article, include: academic literacies (e.g., Lea & Street, 2006), English for Academic Purposes (EAP) (Bond, 2020; Ding, 2019; Fenton-Smith, Humphreys, Walkinshaw, Michael, & Lobo, 2017), communication skills (Arkoudis & Harris, 2019), and the term we have used within our own team: Academic Language Development (ALD) (Edwards, Goldsmith, Havery, & James, 2021; Hoadley & Hunter, 2018). We have defined ALD as encompassing “academic language, discipline-specific discourse and professional communication” (Edwards et al., 2021, p. 55), “against a background of (English) language development” (Hoadley & Hunter, 2018, p. 50), and we view ALD as integral to students’ ongoing learning about and within their disciplines at university. In the next section,

we provide an overview of our ALL context and the background against which the new strategy was introduced.

## 2. CONTEXT

ALL practitioners in Australia have, since the 1970s, been employed by universities to improve students' academic literacies and learning (Aitchison, Harper, Mirriahi, & Guerin, 2020). These practitioners can join the Association for Academic Language and Learning (<https://www.aall.org.au/>), which holds a biennial conference and publishes its own journal (<https://journal.aall.org.au/index.php/jall>). ALL practitioners usually have a background in education as well as specific expertise in English as an Additional Language and/or applied linguistics. Over time, the role of some ALL practitioners has shifted to focus not only on students' language and literacy but to build the capacity of educators to embed language and literacy into the curricula (Aitchison et al. 2020), ensuring that all students have access to academic language development. As university cohorts have become more diverse (e.g., Murray, 2013), ALL practitioners are also increasingly called on to develop strategies to identify and support students who enter university with language levels that are considered too low for successful university study, and to provide more intensive language development for those who need it (Harris, 2016; Read & von Randow, 2013). These initiatives are often driven by university English language policies and, in Australia, the Australian Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) which requires universities to provide evidence of compliance with standards relating to English language proficiency for both admission to a degree and progression within a degree (<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2015L01639>).

We, the five authors of this article, work within a team of ALL practitioners at a large metropolitan university, the University of Technology Sydney (UTS). UTS has had a history of supporting students' language development so that some members of the current ALL team have strong historical faculty staff relationships and discipline and discourse knowledge. The current iteration of the ALL team had its origins in the English Language Study Skills Assistance Centre (ELSSA), which was established 30 years ago to offer generic academic and professional language support to students on campus. ELSSA Centre academics were assigned to faculties, often referred to their work as embedded, and strove to work collaboratively with discipline academics. These ways of working meant that ELSSA staff had direct interactions with students and staff through face-to-face teaching within disciplinary based subjects and intensive workshops, through individual staff consultations, and through participating in subject and course design to embed academic communication skills. Nevertheless, faculty academics often viewed the ELSSA Centre work as adjunct rather than embedded, and the ELSSA Centre was more strongly associated with a service model rather than a faculty level of practice change.

The changes to ELSSA Centre practices that arrived between 2011 and 2012 were extrinsic in the form of a restructure that sought to disambiguate ELSSA services and staff along the lines of continuing professional staff and academic staff. ELSSA staff were either redeployed as professional staff providing generic communication skills development, ~~the newly created~~

~~Higher Education Language & Presentation Service~~ or as academic staff to the new ALL team to be located within the university's teaching and learning unit. The role of the ALL team was to develop discipline-specific approaches to embedding academic and professional literacies into undergraduate and postgraduate courses, with the aim of enhancing student learning and helping students to graduate with excellent communication skills (for more details, see Hoadley & Hunter, 2018). Each ALL team member is responsible for working with staff and students in one or more faculties (Arts & Social Sciences, Business, Design, Architecture & Building, Health, Law, Science, Engineering and IT).

Within the current iteration of our ALL team, the practitioners' backgrounds vary but they all have considerable teaching experience (between 15-25 years) in discipline-specific academic language development and/or in teaching English language, EAP and study skills both in higher education and in the private language teaching sectors in Australia and overseas. Most of the practitioners hold a PhD degree, either directly related to the discipline they work with (in the case of Engineering and IT, Health, Arts and Social Sciences) or in the area of Language Education. Most of these practitioners are employed on a full-time permanent basis, although more recently our team has also included part-time permanent and sessional practitioners.

In 2018, the ALL team was directed by senior management to develop a cross-institutional strategy that would ensure that all undergraduate and all taught/coursework postgraduate students have a level of language that is adequate to meet the linguistic demands of their degrees. In response, the ALL team has designed and implemented an institution-wide four stage academic language development (ALD) framework (see Edwards et al. 2021 for a detailed discussion of the ALD framework). In stage 1 of the framework, all commencing students irrespective of their language background or any previous English language proficiency assessments are screened for academic language using an online task. The screening is embedded into a core discipline subject that students undertake as part of their degree. In stage 2, all students whose language level is assessed as 'Basic' according to the screening task are required to attend 'Language Development Tutorials'. These are additional tutorials aligned to the same core discipline subjects in which students completed the language screening task. The tutorials run for 1.5 hours per week for 10 weeks and students are required to have 80 per cent participation rates. The tutorials support students' disciplinary learning and academic language development. Tutorial activities and materials are designed by the ALL practitioner who supports that faculty and are taught by tutors with an English language teaching background. In stage 3, the explicit assessment of language is embedded into an existing assessment task in each subject that is part of the framework. This assessment is known as a milestone task and is used to identify students who need further support. In stage 4, further milestone tasks are embedded into degrees, to ensure that students' language is assessed across their degree.

The ALD framework has had significant impacts on the university and on the ALL practitioners: it now plays a critical role in developing student belonging and transition to the university; and it has enhanced the university's reputation as a leader in the field of embedding ALD. The compulsory nature of both the language screening task and the language development tutorials has required changes to university language policies and student rules, involving high

level discussions with senior management within the university. The ALL practitioners are now expected to report regularly to university executives on the effectiveness of the strategy. As well as implementing the ALD framework, ALL team members continue to work with their designated faculty or faculties. The increased workload and the expertise required to track and manage data for the ALD framework implementation and evaluation led to the appointment of a project manager position with expertise in IT systems. The project manager position has been essential to implementing the online language screening, tracking students' progress, measuring impact, and managing the data generated by these initiatives.

In this article we explore how our identities as ALL practitioners have shifted as a result of implementing the ALD framework. In the next section, we review the relevant literature on practitioner identity and also outline our theoretical framework, drawing on Bernstein and Bourdieu.

### 3. NOTIONS OF TEACHER IDENTITY

Language teacher identity has become a particular area of interest in TESOL and applied linguistics in the last two decades (Barkhuizen & Strauss, 2020; Block, 2007; De Costa & Norton, 2017; Richards, 2021; Yazan & Lindahl, 2020), with a longer history in general education (e.g., Gee, 2000). Richards (2021) defines teacher identity very clearly as: "how we understand and express who we are; how we position ourselves in relation to others in different situations; and those aspects of oneself that we choose to express in an interaction" (p. 1). It is also generally understood that teacher identity is dynamic, socially situated, and shaped by the events and environments we experience, as well as our underlying beliefs and values. Gee's seminal (2000) article proposes four ways of viewing identity (p. 100):

- Nature-identity (a state) developed from forces in nature
- Institution-identity (a position) authorized by authorities within institutions
- Discourse-identity (an individual trait) recognized in the discourse/dialogue with 'rational' individuals
- Affinity-identity (experiences) shared in the practice of 'affinity groups'

For the purposes of investigating our professional ALL identities in the context of the ALD program, Gee's concepts of the institution-identity and affinity-identity are particularly relevant.

Within the ALL field, the literature on the identities of ALL practitioners tends to fall into two categories: either that of the ALL practitioner as a fringe-dweller, struggling against being marginalised and telling 'small stories' (Grossi & Gurney, 2020), or as the boundary crosser working in a third space (Briguglio, 2014). An illustration of the marginalised perspective of ALL practitioners is as follows:

*"the overall picture is of a group of practitioners whose work is understood at best obscurely by those who employ them and those who use their services. They are often in the front line when cracks appear in their institution's most recent student recruitment strategy and are often downsized and downgraded when belts are tightened"* (Stevenson & Kokkin 2007, p. 50).

This view of the marginalised practitioner is picked up by Percy (2015) in her analysis of the role of ALL practitioners in Australian universities; she sees them as: “floating between the margins and the centre, between the student, the faculty and the institution” (2015, p. 882). The ALL practitioner as boundary crosser (e.g., Briguglio, 2014) usually refers to collaborations with disciplinary specialists to develop the academic literacies of all students. Neither the perspective of the marginalised practitioner nor that of the boundary crosser fully captures the role or the potential for agentic behaviour of the ALL practitioners in our university, although elements of both perspectives can be seen in the construction of our identities. One aspect that has not been explored in depth in the literature is that of the ALL practitioner as a member of a team, both constructing and being constructed as an agentic actor in the landscape of the university.

Some recent research has explored language teacher or lecturer identity change in response to macro-level changes such as a new curriculum (e.g., Jiang & Zhang, 2021) or policy (e.g., Tran et al., 2017). Findings from these studies show that implementation of a new strategy can trigger shifts in teacher identity such as changes in their “goals and self-definitions as teachers” (Jiang & Zhang, p. 280). Tran et al. explored the impact of a new research policy on the academic identities of ELT lecturers in Vietnam and identified four main responses to the policy amongst the 24 participants, varying from “enthusiastic accommodators” (p. 70) to “discontented performers” (p. 72). The policy required that the lecturers all became research-active, whereas previously some had been teaching-focused. The authors explain that the lecturers who experienced the policy change most enthusiastically were those whose professional goals, values and commitments aligned with the change, while others experienced disalignment.

The somewhat amorphous space that ALL practitioners occupy in universities is reflected in the literature on shifts in their identities in response to major changes in their work. In keeping with the more general literature on ALL practitioners’ identity, most studies suggest the importance of collaborations with faculty staff when shifting to a more integrated model of language development. For example, Briguglio notes the need to consider the messages that communicate the role of ALL adviser in the university and suggests that: “by joining forces in a model of co-production [we can develop a more powerful] new curriculum seen as a third knowledge” (Green et al., 2005, p. 88, *in* 2007, A12). This is explored in more depth in Briguglio (2014). Maldoni (2017) points out that an embedded approach to academic language within the disciplinary curriculum enhances the status of the ALL adviser in the eyes of faculty staff as it makes the role of language in the discipline more visible. Working with ALL practitioners also provides the opportunity for professional development for faculty staff, who often do not have formal teaching qualifications. It is notable that most studies of major changes to ALL practices focus more on the perspectives of faculty staff than on ALL practitioners or their identities.

A useful theoretical framework for conceptualising language practitioner identity, as proposed by Bell (2021), employs the dual lenses of Bernsteinian constructs and Bourdieu’s notion of capital. Bernstein developed a method of distinguishing between types of knowledge through classification, framing, and pedagogic codes. Using Bernsteinian constructs, Bell (2021) argues that the EAP discipline has a “weak classification (a lack of strict syllabi, progression and exit awards) and a tendency to rely on an integrated code (unclear boundaries with related disciplines)

(pp. 6-7). We suggest that the same applies to the ALL discipline, since it overlaps considerably with EAP. Hyland (2018) defines EAP as a “*text-oriented approach*” (p. 384) to language education that includes a focus on discourse as well as linguistics features, and the communication skills of a specific target (disciplinary) group, which is similar to how we define our ALL work (Hoadley & Hunter, 2018). Furthermore, Bell (2021) suggests that the “pedagogic eclecticism of EAP” (p. 5), in the way it draws from many disciplines and theories, weakens its status in academia. Examples of these disciplines are education, applied linguistics, TESOL and sociology (Hyland, 2018), with specific theories including Systemic Functional Linguistics, Corpus Linguistics, Genre Theory, Discourse Analysis, Academic Literacies, Legitimation Code Theory, Contrastive Rhetoric and Needs Analysis (Bell, 2021; Bond, 2020).

Considering Bourdieu’s notion of ‘capital’ can also help us understand some of the reasons for the comparatively low status of ALL and EAP practitioners within the academy (Bell, 2021; Bond, 2020; Ding, 2019). Bourdieu (1986) initially conceptualised three forms of capital - economic (money and financial assets), cultural (knowledge, qualifications) and social (connections, relationships, group membership) capital - which were later all encompassed under the “umbrella term” of “symbolic capital” (Bell, pp. 7-8). Bell recognises three key forms of symbolic capital that can serve to greatly influence EAP practitioners’ status within their higher education institutions: firstly, the doctorate qualification; secondly, the status achieved by engaging in scholarly research; and thirdly, the profession’s exit awards.

The consequences of EAP or ALL’s weak classification and lack of symbolic capital have resulted in the current “conditions that shape us as a community” (Ding, 2019, p. 72). These conditions include:

- Numerous ‘ad hoc’ entry requirements to work in the field;
- Lack of consistent/agreed qualifications across the field;
- Lack of PhD requirements to work in the higher education sector;
- Specialist knowledge and qualifications not being recognised or as equal/valued; compared to other established academic fields;
- Misunderstandings about the field /specialisation (i.e., just an ‘English teacher’);
- Lack of agreement about how the EAP/ALL ‘subject area’ should be categorised;
- Lack of academic status and benefits in employment conditions.

As a result, EAP and ALL practitioners often lack the symbolic capital to afford them a central place in the academy. Despite the calls for greater institutional support to enable a more embedded, central view of language and language practitioners within disciplinary learning across universities, there are few published examples of such support. Our study offers one example of what happens to ALL practitioners’ identities when they are enabled to implement such a strategy. In our ALL context at a university in Australia, most of us already benefit from secure employment conditions and contracts that include a research component, and most team members already hold doctorates (as described in section 2). However, like other ALL and EAP practitioners, we are subject to many of the conditions outlined above by Ding (2019) and Bell (2021), which influence our professional identities.

## **4. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The broader study that this article is based on explored the implementation of the ALD strategy and its impact on a range of stakeholders across the initial years of implementation. Our initial analysis of data collected in the first year of implementation (2019) showed that the ALL practitioners were engaged in a complex shift in their identities, so we decided to explore this shift in more depth. We used the following research questions, which emerged from our initial analysis of the data:

- 1) *How have the identities of a group of Academic Language and Learning (ALL) practitioners shifted in response to a new institution-wide Academic Language Development (ALD) strategy?*
- 2) *What are some of the reasons for their identity shifts?*

### **4.1 PARTICIPANTS**

The five authors of this article are members of the ALL practitioner team who were participants in this study. In line with our ethics approval, one ALL practitioner working with each faculty (some faculties have two ALL practitioners) was invited by a research assistant to participate in interviews in both 2019 and 2021 to explore the research questions outlined above. Four ALL practitioners volunteered to participate in the first round of interviews, and six in the second round. To ensure anonymity of the data, responses were de-identified by the research assistant prior to analysis, and responses from those participants who were interviewed in both rounds have not been matched. In this way, we were able to collect data on our team's experiences objectively and ethically. We have foregrounded our article (in section 2) with a detailed overview of the history and educational backgrounds of the ALL team collectively rather than individually.

### **4.2 DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS**

Data collection consisted of two rounds of semi-structured interviews, facilitated by a research assistant at two key stages of the ALD strategy implementation. The first interviews were held in December 2019, at which point the ALD framework had been implemented for a full academic year. These interviews were each 30-40 minutes long and guided by seven questions (see Appendix A) about the evaluation of the ALD strategy more broadly. Analysis of the interview scripts revealed the theme of shifting identities. We decided to follow up with a second round of interviews 18 months after the first round, with a twofold purpose of continuing our longitudinal evaluation and exploring identity shifts more deeply. The second round of interviews was held in June 2021. These interviews lasted 45-60 minutes each and were guided by 10 questions (see Appendix A). Some of these questions referred back to themes that emerged from the first interviews, and some asked explicitly about changes over time.



Each round of interviews was analysed separately, and then the analysis was combined. To start with, a research assistant and one of the ALL practitioners each conducted an inductive thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, creating categories and then grouping them together into sub-themes (Creswell, 2014). Next, we held a group analysis meeting with several ALL practitioners, who reviewed the two sets of categories and sub-themes and combined them. We found this process of dialogic thematic analysis helpful in ensuring credibility of the analysis (Richards, 2009). Since most (but not all) of the ALL practitioners doing the analysis were also interview participants, we embraced a subjective insider perspective, whereby we used our detailed knowledge, histories, experiences, identities and positionings to help us understand the data (Richards, 2009). Using this perspective, we were able to identify two participant groups from the data: one group who had considerable experience and history working in the ALL team, and another group who had joined the team more recently.

As part of the analysis process, concordance software (Watt, 2011) was also used to identify frequently occurring terms which could then be examined to reveal key themes. This allowed us to triangulate the identification of key themes, using both a semantic reading of the data and checking for frequency of terms in context.

In the data extracts presented in the findings section below, we use the numbers 1-4 to refer to ALL practitioners in the first (2019) round of interviews (e.g., Practitioner 1, 2019), and the letters A-F to refer to practitioners in the second (2021) round of interviews (e.g., Practitioner A, 2021). We present the data by referring to the ALL practitioner-participants as ‘they’ in the findings section, and then shift to ‘we’ in the discussion section as we reflexively analyse the identity shifts of ourselves and our team.

## **5. FINDINGS**

Analysis of the data revealed several key themes that reflected the identity shifts of the ALL practitioners: (1) cohesive ALL team identity, (2) shifting knowledge base, (3) narrowing and deepening roles, and (4) raised profile of ALL. While we present and illustrate these themes separately below, they inevitably overlap, connect with and inform each other.

### **5.1 COHESIVE ALL TEAM IDENTITY**

Firstly, the implementation of the ALD strategy appeared to have fostered a more cohesive ALL team with strong working relationships. Compared to the first dataset, there was a noticeable increase in the use of the word “*team*” in the second round of interviews. From our concordance analysis, we found three instances of the word in the 2019 interview transcripts, whereas it was used 76 times in the 2021 interviews and mostly in the context of the ALL team. Prior to the ALD strategy, the ALL practitioners mainly worked on ALL matters within their respective faculties and responded to the needs of those faculty academics and students, although they also shared ideas and resources as an ALL team. From 2019 onwards, the demands of designing and implementing the university-wide ALD strategy meant it was necessary to work together much

more closely. One of the practitioners in the 2021 interviews even saw “*collaborator*” as a key aspect of their identity: “*In terms of my identity as an ALL team member, I feel more of a collaborator now*” [Practitioner E, 2021]. This new level of collaboration led to a sense of greater cohesiveness, which four of the six practitioners spoke about explicitly in the 2021 interviews, using words such as “*cohesive*”, “*collegial*”, “*faith*” and “*trust*”. One practitioner explained that “*our relationships have changed. I think that we’ve become more cohesive because we have to collaborate more as a result of ALD*” [Practitioner E, 2021], while another expressed feeling “*like the team has a lot of faith in me and a lot of trust*” [Practitioner F, 2021].

Two of the key reasons for this shift, as mentioned in the interviews, were a need to collaborate on both the standardisation of the ALD strategy across the university, and on the research evaluation project which the team had established. One of the practitioners described how the ALL team members had shifted from working more independently to a closer team in order to standardise ALD messages and procedures:

*We tended to be quite autonomous and not have to supervise anyone else and generally manage ourselves. Now, because of the ALD framework, I think we function much more as a team. Because we have to, because it needs to be standardised, so we need to be making sure that the same message is going out for each faculty. Even though each faculty has its own needs and requirements.* [Practitioner A, 2021]

Another practitioner explained that researching the ALD implementation (the ‘broader study’ we referred to in section 4) had added a new and very positive direction to the way the team worked together:

*I really enjoy working on that [the research] with my whole team ... And I think that that gives us a different avenue for working together, which we didn’t have before ... I find that that’s really enjoyable, and that gives us a sense of cohesion and a sense of purpose, and it adds an extra dimension to the ALD framework.* [Practitioner E, 2021]

The ALL team are employed on academic contracts which encompass both teaching and research, but prior to the ALD strategy, each ALL team member focused on their own research agenda, which in most cases related to their faculty/ies. At the start of 2019 when the ALD strategy was first developed, the team established a research project to explore and evaluate its implementation, and this has now become a large-scale endeavour involving all ALL team practitioners, three research assistants, and more than 2,000 research participants (the vast majority being student participants) over several years. Collaborating on the ALD research therefore facilitated a team identity shift, creating a greater sense of cohesion, or collective team identity. It also had implications for the team’s shifting knowledge base, which we discuss next.

## **5.2 SHIFTING KNOWLEDGE BASE**

Some of the ALL practitioners seemed to be experiencing a shift in their knowledge base in relation to both teaching and research as a result of the ALD strategy. We should note that this

shifting knowledge base was mainly experienced by the group of interview participants who had been in the ALL team for longer, while the group of newer members, who coincidentally alluded to more recent experience of EAP teaching and language-focused research in their comments, did not mention a significant change in their knowledge base.

As explained in section 2, prior to the ALD framework, the ALL team's focus had been on discipline-specific academic literacies (such as advising and collaborating on communication practices for all students as embedded within assessment design and subject resources), which afforded the group the status of collaborators or partners with many faculty staff. After implementing the ALD strategy for two and a half years, several ALL practitioners mentioned a shift, which for some was "*uncomfortable*" [Practitioner A, 2021], from their more genre-focused academic literacies knowledge base to a more linguistic-focused knowledge base with more emphasis on the elements of grammar and vocabulary: "*it's taken the focus back into language as opposed to communication practices*" [Practitioner A, 2021]. This shift had started by the end of 2019, after the first year of designing materials for the Language Development Tutorials (LDTs) that the ALL team designed and taught alongside faculty subjects, with several of the practitioners realising that the students needed more help with grammar than they had previously anticipated:

*We haven't been able to include grammatical ... activities in the LDTs [in 2019]. I'd like to ... include that next year in 2020 but without turning the LDTs into grammar lessons, because it doesn't work. Rather, to build or to include a grammar component of an extension of an existing activity so that it is set in context.* [Practitioner 1, 2019]

This shift towards a linguistic-focused knowledge base (viewed by some as more EAP-focused) was seen even more strongly by 2021, resulting in one of the practitioners re-assessing and refreshing their knowledge as they adapted to the needs of the students they were working with:

*Working in that space of English for academic purposes is something I did a really long time ago ... and it does feel, in a sense, like I'm going back in time to what I used to do ... That makes me feel uncomfortable. I need to deal with that and work out how I can just get more comfortable in that space ... And it's made me re-evaluate my knowledge and make me think that I need to refresh my understanding about aspects of ... teaching language. ... I actually had to shift ... back into focusing on specific language and much more into the nuts and bolts of grammar and sentence structure, and staging, and a more linguistic focus, than I had. I'd [previously] taken more of a genre focus.* [Practitioner A, 2021]

The shift in knowledge base was also experienced in terms of research. Some of the ALL practitioners had previously focused on (mostly ALL-related) research within their discipline rather than language teaching research. Being involved in the ALL team's research evaluation of the ALD framework felt like a shift in research field for one practitioner in particular: "*I don't feel particularly expert at it [research on ALD] because I've got more of a background in*

[discipline area]. Even though I did a Master's in TESOL and all that sort of stuff, but it was a really long time ago" [Practitioner B, 2021].

While there was acceptance that the shift towards a greater linguistic focus was necessary, the practitioners continued to emphasise the need to work with faculty staff on academic language skills more broadly. For instance, in 2019 one practitioner summed up the "bigger picture" as getting the message across to subject coordinators that "language support in general just needs to be broadened out so that it's seen much more as the responsibility of everyone at university" [Practitioner 2, 2019]. While the ALD strategy requires academics within certain subjects to take more responsibility for language, there was a sense that this has narrowed the focus of the ALL team's work, whereas prior to the ALD framework they encouraged broader embedding of communication practices in as many subjects as possible. The ALL practitioners continued to promote this broadening agenda in 2021, and some even found that the ALD strategy provided an opportunity for them to make more suggestions about language resources for the whole student cohort in those subjects included in the framework.

### 5.3 NARROWING AND DEEPENING ROLES

The third aspect of the ALL identity shifts was a sense of our roles narrowing but also deepening. This change was closely connected to the shift in knowledge base as described above, and also due to the ALD strategy becoming almost the sole focus of their work, especially in the early stages (2019). One practitioner estimated that "about 80% of my work is [now] on the ALD framework. So it's sort of deepened [my work] and narrowed it" [Practitioner 2, 2019].

The practitioner who described their focus as going "back into language" in the section above [Practitioner A, 2021], explained that they now felt perceived by others as "the language person" rather than as someone who could provide broader support around subject and assessment design. For all the practitioners, it had become necessary to work with a small group of faculty staff in order to implement the ALD strategy successfully: namely, the Associate Dean of Teaching & Learning or Education, any English language officer or Teaching & Learning manager (in some faculties), Course Directors, and Subject Coordinators of the subjects involved in the framework. Previously, the ALL practitioners could work with any academics who expressed a need or interest to collaborate on academic language. The phrase "language person" occurred eight times in three interviews, and each time the participant was commenting on how they were now perceived within their respective faculty. For example:

*I've got much narrower contacts and narrower range of contacts. But probably closer because we're working more closely with the LDTs ... So, I'm seen back as the language person. I think some people in the faculty see me as more supportive or more useful than they would have before. [Practitioner A, 2021]*

*I think that being attached to the project has both raised and narrowed our profiles in the faculty as well. So, it's been raised because of the compulsion to have the ALD project embedded into all the OCAP [Online Courses Approval Process] stuff and because it's got*

*some policy teeth behind it now. But it's been narrowed to the project. ... At the same time, it means that they don't see me as someone who could advise them on subject design. ... A couple of other people I've worked with on postgrad subjects and I've done workshops with them, because they've known that I'm the language person to go to. [Practitioner B, 2021]*

*Probably the majority of people see me as an English language person, I'd say. [Practitioner D, 2021]*

The above comments illustrate the faculty staff perception of the ALL team member as “*the language person*”, thus narrowing the scope of work, but simultaneously opening up opportunities to work with faculty staff to develop disciplinary language practices within some faculty subjects.

While it was clear that the ALL role had narrowed and deepened for all team members as a result of the ALD strategy, they perceived it in different ways. For some practitioners there was a sense of loss or moving backwards, “*back in time*” [Practitioner A, 2021]. As we have described above, the practitioners continued to pursue their agenda for embedding communication skills more broadly, but found it challenging, with a need to squeeze themselves out of the narrow or tight space that the ALD framework had located them in: “*how can I burrow out of that [ALD framework] space a little bit to get into more of the work that I would like to be doing*” [Practitioner A, 2021]. However, for other practitioners, it opened up opportunities for them to get to know more academics in their faculties, develop their faculty-specific ALL identities, and offered avenues for taking on other non-ALD work. For instance, one of these practitioners described how working with academics on the ALD framework had led to invitations “*to do some course teaching or to deliver workshops to the students, and this is outside the LDTs. [...] [so] my role has expanded in the faculty, and my exposure to the academics*” [Practitioner C, 2021]. Another practitioner explained that in their faculty, the ALD framework was actually a way in to develop awareness of language and literacy, which had been challenging beforehand:

*In Faculty A, it was very difficult before ALD to actually implement anything to do with academic language and learning. ... There was not a lot of uptake of our support before ALD. Having ALD has been amazing in this faculty, because it's actually forced coordinators and tutors to become aware of the need [for language support]. [Practitioner E, 2021]*

For two of the other practitioners, the narrowing focus on language support may have clarified the role of the ALL team member in the eyes of faculty staff:

*I think some people in the faculty see me as more supportive or more useful than they would have before or they know of my existence, and that they can ask for support or assistance around assessing language or developing language in their subject, if they'd like to do that. [Practitioner A, 2021]*

*But the ALD project has ... taken me into subjects that I wouldn't have had much contact with beforehand, in the postgrad. in Faculty G. So, before, I was more or less confined to*

*the undergrad. but did a little bit of stuff in the postgrad. But now I'm in the postgrad. as well.* [Practitioner B, 2021]

The importance of the faculties in the ALL team members' work can be seen in the frequency with which the members use the term 'faculty': 142 times in the six interviews from 2021. One prominent shift, as we have described above, was the change in the ALL practitioners' roles within their faculties and how this had changed faculty colleagues' perceptions of them. Several practitioners also commented on how the ALD strategy has expanded not only their role within faculties but their knowledge of how their faculty works. This knowledge included a deeper understanding of policies and procedures:

*All of us have had to make ourselves aware of course structures, and pathways, and coordinators, and hierarchies. Core faculties are complex little mini institutions. Heterotopias, if you like.* [Practitioner B, 2021]

*And then the other thing I've probably had to do more this year, that I haven't done before, is actually make sure I go back in and find the policies and student rules that the ALD is aligned with, and pass them on to the faculty, because I had questions about what policies and rules it related to. I've never had to do that before.* [Practitioner D, 2021]

#### **5.4 RAISED PROFILE OF ALL**

The changes occasioned by the ALD implementation have impacted the level of visibility of the ALL team across the university, making both the team and the team members more visible. This has led to several team members being invited onto university-wide committees and working groups that they might not otherwise have been asked to join:

*Now, I think I have to work much more with the top as well ... much more liaison across the different units across the university. That's different.* [Practitioner D, 2021]

*I have been fortunate enough to be involved or be included in all these different projects as a [central teaching & learning unit] person, not just necessarily as an ALL person, but as a [central teaching & learning unit] person. So, projects either within the unit or within the university. In that sense, yes, my role has changed, in that I'm not just doing ALD and dealing with the Faculty B School, it has also expanded to include projects and activities within [central teaching & learning unit] and also university-wide.* [Practitioner C, 2021]

The raised profile of ALL is due to the institution-wide nature of the ALD strategy and its integration into policy, thus the need to liaise with various units across the university, and regularly report to university executives on the on-going implementation. This final theme is closely connected to previous themes: the need for greater collaboration both within the team and across the university due to the nature of the ALD strategy has facilitated stronger relationships and perhaps a clearer sense of faculty academics acknowledging and benefiting from the ALL

practitioner role, while some of the ALL team members have felt challenged by a shifting knowledge base and narrowing of their roles.

## 6. DISCUSSION

In examining the identity shifts experienced by the ALL practitioners in this study as a result of the ALD strategy implementation, it is clear that these shifts have been mainly positive. We have become more cohesive as a team, gained more visibility and status within the university, deepened our knowledge of the faculties we each work with, and developed new connections and relationships with disciplinary academics. As such, our study departs from accounts of ALL and EAP practitioners as positioned on the margins (Bell, 2021) or stuck in-between institutional spaces (Percy, 2015) and is instead an example of how these practitioners can develop robust professional identities. In this section we explore these positive identity shifts in more detail and compare our themes to those found in the literature, which allows us to draw out new insights. We also use Gee's concept of affinity identity and Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital to more deeply understand the identity shifts we experienced.

Firstly, the strong sense of collective team identity we developed over the years of initial ALD strategy implementation could be defined as an affinity identity (Gee, 2000), where the ALL team can be considered a close-knit affinity group. As Gee notes, the power of affinity groups comes from "*participation or sharing*" of practices (p. 105), and the implementation of the ALD strategy enhanced our participation and sharing. There is very little in the ALL or EAP practitioner identity literature on collective identity apart from passing suggestions that ALL group identity can be strengthened through harnessing individual agency (Grossi & Gurney, 2020). Our study contributes to the field by suggesting that when ALL practitioner teams within an institution collaborate and share practices with each other more closely than before, it can be powerful both for their own group identity and their status within the university. While the increased collaboration, trust and cohesiveness we experienced were to some extent a necessity for successful strategy implementation, we also used the opportunity to establish a whole-team research project for the first time. In this way, we were not so much "enthusiastic accommodators" of a new policy (Tran et al., 2017, p. 70), but critical agentic actors who identified opportunities connected to the new strategy and also resisted some elements of the identity shifts we experienced.

The ALD strategy has affected our identities in relation to how we felt about the way we worked with faculties. The sense of loss and gain we felt related to the desire to be seen as more than a 'language person' and to (re-)position our work more broadly within the disciplines. Whether we felt a sense of loss or gain seems to be dependent on how we had previously seen ourselves. Those of us who had built symbolic capital (see Bell, 2021; Bourdieu, 1986) through previously working with all students across disciplines (a recommended way of building capital by Bell, 2021) felt a sense of loss as we prioritised the ALD framework work over our previous collaborations and partnerships with faculties. Those of us who are newer members of the ALL team, on the other hand, felt a sense of gain as we were able to use the ALD framework to find

ways into the disciplines to expand our work to include all students, for example, by working with disciplinary academics on assessment tasks and marking rubrics. The status and power afforded by the ALD framework gave some of us the symbolic capital we needed to expand our role.

The ALD strategy has also had differing effects on identity in relation to our ALL team's knowledge base. Those of us who are more experienced members of the team felt more strongly the shift to being viewed as a language teacher. It could be coincidental that those of us who are newer members of the team had stronger or more recent language education backgrounds than the more established members, who felt they needed to refresh their knowledge of language teaching. Another possibility is that the ways of working of the ALL team prior to the advent of the ALD strategy provided strong opportunities for the ALL member to identify with their respective faculties. Those of us who are more closely affiliated with our faculties may perceive ourselves as having greater symbolic capital in our affiliated faculty due to deep understanding of the disciplinary discourse and of the types of knowledge within that faculty. This affords some of us an 'informed outsider' status and can facilitate opportunities for collaborative research with our faculty colleagues. Being seen predominantly as a language teacher challenged this identity.

ALL practitioner identity has frequently been perceived to be positioned "between the margins and the centre" (Percy, 2015, p. 882). However, this is an identity that our ALL team challenges and provides a counter narrative to through our work in faculties. The differing identity shifts felt by both experienced and newer member of our ALL team demonstrate our commitment to positioning our work broadly within the disciplines and resisting the narrow 'language person' identity. The more experienced team members who felt the sense of loss advocated strongly for retaining their faculty work. Similarly, the newer team members used the ALD framework to build their knowledge base of the discipline with which they were working and to create opportunities to work in the disciplines outside of the ALD framework.

Developing a more collective practice and research-based identity has contributed to our improved visibility and status and enabled us to build symbolic capital. In our ALL team we were already following the suggestions for building symbolic capital made by Bell (2021, p. 11) about "learning to play by the academic rules" and "charting new territories" through academic literacies collaborations and partnerships, and the suggestions made by Bond (2020) about positioning academic language as central to the disciplines. However, the research dimension of ALD has allowed us to build on symbolic capital in terms of our scholarly profile, and to do this more cohesively as a team. As noted by Bell (2021), peer recognition of research and scholarly work is a significant marker of capital in the academy. Although some of us had already produced research in collaboration with our colleagues in the faculties, the research we are conducting for the ALD framework means we are creating local knowledge to build our own field, rather than being users of existing knowledge.

Having sufficient economic capital has also facilitated our positive identity development. Being employed in secure academic positions and having PhDs affords (most of us) status already. However, the strategic funding of the ALD framework has meant that we now have a role to play in the university's strategic direction. The ALD strategy brings a stamp of authority



with it, allowing us to build symbolic capital due to the institutional and financial support provided for the framework. The support of the leaders of our teaching and learning division, and implementation of the new English Language policy through the ALD framework has afforded us power and agency that was previously lacking, providing us with a more robust identity as agentic actors than as the more peripheral ALL practitioner. By reporting back to managerial levels of the university who are large stakeholders in the ALD framework, we have become known as a team that brings about positive change. Our gains in institutional knowledge, our central role in ensuring the ALD strategy is enacted, and our management of large strategic funding has placed us centrally rather than on the margins.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The professional identities of this group of ALL practitioners have shifted significantly, although not uniformly, in response to an institution-wide strategy. Through the implementation of the ALD framework, with its institutional support, the identity of the team has been fortified. The ALD framework has provided opportunities for us to conduct research on our own practices, thus building our own knowledge base and allowing us to gain recognition as a profession, as recommended by Stevenson and Kokkinn (2007). In addition, more cohesive identities have been formed and legitimated by the discipline-specific work carried out in the faculties.

While this is a small-scale study focused on ALL practitioners working within just one institution, it offers some valuable insights for practice and further research. The ALL and EAP fields both currently focus on how language-focused practitioners can and should collaborate with disciplinary academics and negotiate these often complex working relationships, but we suggest there needs to be greater emphasis on ALL practitioners practicing and researching together *with each other*. Working as a team, ALL has developed a strong collective identity and greater agency, thus creating a cohesive team with an institutional identity and shared knowledge. Future directions for research could include the extent to which working as a team develops stronger affinity-identities of ALL practitioners, and whether this team identity provides stronger recognition within universities. Future studies could also explore the perceptions of faculty academics about academic language development frameworks and courses, and their perceptions about ALL roles and identities.

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## **APPENDIX A: Interview questions**

### **First round of interviews (December 2019)**

- 1) What was your overall experience of being involved in the ALD framework?
- 2) Has your role changed at all as a result of your involvement in the ALD framework? (How?)
- 3) How do you think the students in your faculty (the faculty you support) perceived the Language Development Tutorials (LDTs)?
- 4) What benefits (if any) did you perceive for the students who were required to attend the LDTs?
- 5) How do you think the academic staff in your faculty (the faculty you support) perceived the LDTs?
- 6) Within the faculty, how widespread is the awareness or knowledge of the ALD framework?
- 7) What do you think could be improved about the LDTs or language support at the university generally?

### **Second round of interviews (June 2021)**

#### Experience

- 1) Has your overall experience of being involved in the ALD framework changed over the years 2019-2021? If so, in what ways?
- 2) In the previous round of ALL team interviews at the end of 2019, participants mentioned that the ALD framework was ‘taking over work life’.
  - Does that accurately reflect your experience at that time?
  - Has that experience changed at all since then? If so, how?

#### Benefits and disadvantages

- 3) What benefits (if any) have you perceived for the students who were required to attend the LDTs?
- 4) Can you see any disadvantages for students being required to attend LDTs? If so, what are they?

#### Faculty perceptions, awareness and relationships

- 5) How do you think the academic staff in the faculty you support perceive the LDTs?
- 6) Within the faculty you support, how widespread is the awareness or knowledge of the ALD framework?
- 7) Have your relationships with the academics in the faculty you support changed as a result of the ALD framework? If so, in what ways?

#### ALL role and identities

- 8) Has your role changed since the start of 2020? You could think about your role within the ALL team, and/or your role in the faculty you support. If so, in what ways?

9) Has your perception of yourself as an ALL practitioner changed as a result of being involved in the ALD framework? If so, how?

10) Do you think the way others (e.g., in your team, faculty, or more broadly) perceive you as an ALL practitioner has changed as a result of being involved in the ALD framework? If so, how?