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**Supporting students' academic literacies in post-COVID-19 times:  
Developing digital videos to develop students' critical academic reading  
practices**

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## Supporting students' academic literacies in post-COVID-19 times: Developing digital videos to develop students' critical academic reading practices

### Abstract

While embedding Academic Language and Literacies (ALL) instruction in discipline-specific courses is known to be effective, it is difficult to enact across the siloed university. Moreover, the move to online/remote delivery during COVID-19 has necessitated greater focus on the development of online supports. This article reports on an effort to embed digital ALL support in a mandatory social research methods course, which we argue is particularly suited to academic literacies instruction. A series of digital videos were created to complement a literature review assignment, and were evaluated using video analytics, end-of-course student surveys, and individual interviews with tutors. Quantitative analysis of viewing patterns demonstrated that the majority of students accessed the videos multiple times, while qualitative data suggest that students generally had positive responses to the videos. However, thematic analysis of interviews with tutors showed that while they considered the content helpful, they also had reservations about the length and use of the videos. These findings clearly demonstrate the extent of the unmet need to integrate these types of approaches into undergraduate courses. We also argue that if universities wish to maintain currency in a shifting, globalised world, they must do more to foster the types of collaborative partnerships that facilitate effective ALL instruction in undergraduate coursework. These findings carry particular relevance for teaching and learning literacies in the wake of COVID-19, because digital video has become even more integral to higher education.

### Keywords

Academic literacies, COVID-19, digital supports, research methods courses, higher education

## Introduction

Given the centrality of Academic Language and Literacy (ALL) practices in every aspect of higher education (HE) study—and recognizing that students are largely assessed on their ability to communicate their learning through the medium of writing—the need for institutions to develop pedagogical strategies to support students to develop ALL is imperative. In this article, we use the term ALL to refer to the disciplinary-specific literacy, numeracy, and language (conventions, practices, and understandings) that students are expected to master and perform in order to demonstrate their learning and meet the requirements of their courses. Also, we distinguish between academic literacies and language practices by using the abbreviated form (ALL), and we refer to the conceptual scholarly field of work in this space as Academic Literacies

Although all universities offer varying forms of support for writing development, much of the scholarly literature argues that ALL supports and teaching that take a decontextualised, generic 'study skills' approach are ineffective (Lea and Street, 1998; Wingate, 2006). Instead, Academic Literacies scholars and academic developers stress the importance of reciprocal collaboration between ALL and disciplinary specialists (Adams et al., 2016; Jacobs, 2007; McKay, 2013; Wingate, 2018). However, much of the literature also attests to the challenges with enacting the practices of embedding ALL instruction in disciplinary courses (Maldoni, 2017; Maldoni and Lear, 2016). Acquiring powerful ALL practices is not something that can be achieved in the space of a year or a single intervention (McKay, 2013), so effective collaborative efforts between discipline and ALL specialists requires sustained, equitable commitment from all specialists involved (Jacobs, 2007). However, finding appropriate time, resources, and mutual disciplinary respect can be problematic.

A notable trend in the ALL literature is the dominance of the focus on student writing, with much less attention paid to academic reading (see Baker et al., 2018; Bharuthram and Clarence, 2015; Wingate, 2018). This is particularly problematic because a lack of attention—both in terms of research and practice - to reading means that its importance can be underestimated by students, with research suggesting that students indeed, in their 2020 study of undergraduate students' perceptions of academic reading, Gorzycki et al. found that while students recognise the important role reading plays in their studies, they do not prioritise it as an activity. These authors argue this is partially attributable to the way that reading becomes a 'hidden curriculum' without explicit teaching and encouragement.

This article reports on a project that sought to develop an understanding of the process of designing and the perceived usefulness of resources for ALL development embedded within the learning and assessment activities in a compulsory 1<sup>st</sup> year social research methods course. We follow the definition of embedding offered by Maldoni (2017), as the "explicit development" of ALL, as a "crucial part" of the course learning, rather than a peripheral issue (A-105). As part of a scheduled 'Digital Resource Creation' (DRC) process, a series of resources were developed to support students to develop their critical reading practices, which were specifically aligned with the assessment tasks for the course. By 'critical reading', we mean the practices of reading that help to develop students' criticality in terms of identifying consensus and disagreement in the literature, evaluating the warrants for research and authors' claims, and establishing how a source fits into body of work that constitutes a field of study. These resources took the form of a series of four videos, which were designed to explicitly support students' engagement with both the literacy practices underpinning social research and the actual assignments for the course. While this research was undertaken before the move to remote learning necessitated by COVID, we contend that our findings are particularly relevant for the post-COVID higher education academic support space, with the argument already made that the higher education sector should leverage from the opportunities for more creative

teaching and learning that the pandemic created (for example, Bhagat and Kim, 2020). We argue that (mandatory) research-focused courses are highly effective spaces in which to explicitly support students' ALL development because undertaking research explicitly requires students to engage in critical thinking, reading, analysis, synthesis, and writing. This article therefore explores the potential such courses to provide a pedagogic space for embedding targeted ALL instruction. Moreover, since digital video has become even more integral to teaching and learning during COVID-19, this research has implications for embedding ALL practices in social research courses.

## **Literature Review**

### **Students' academic language and literacies**

Two dominant issues persist in discussions around student ALL instruction in tertiary settings. The first issue is that ALL is frequently treated as a set of transferrable skills, with a focus on writing (thus marginalising related practices such as reading, thinking and synthesis), as per the 'study skills' model identified by Lea and Street (1998). Underpinning assumptions about language in this model are pervasively problematic: language is seen as a neutral (decontextualized) conduit for communication, which promotes techno-rationalist responses to 'fixing' student writing (Turner, 2011). Because language is taken for granted as a 'neutral' site of transferable 'skills', the commensurate expectation is for students to arrive at university either already 'academically literate', or willing to diagnose and 'fix' their own 'deficiencies'. This is particularly the case for academic reading, which is rarely taught (Baker et al., 2018).

Lecturers expect students to acquire the cultural attitudes and values of their discipline and academic literacy, through what Gee (1989) calls 'tacit' learning, simply by exposure to texts and knowledge within their selected field, and enculturation into the thinking practices and values systems of the disciplines (Lea and Street, 1998; Wingate, 2018). This over-simplification of ALL fails to take into account the nuanced, critical, and complex realities of text-in-use at the tertiary level, ignoring the cultural and discursive practices that challenge the nature of 'correctness'. Lea and Street (1998) describe increasingly complex models of literacy, moving from 'study skills' (focusing on the surface features of text production) to their 'academic socialisation' model, which views language instruction as a process of enculturation (assimilation) into disciplinary practices and conventions. Various studies attest to the benefits of embedding academic literacies into discipline-specific courses (e.g. Gunn et al., 2011; McWilliams and Adam, 2014; Maldoni and Lear, 2016). Finally, Lea and Street's (1998) 'Academic Literacies' model acknowledges both the skills and socialisation models, but foregrounds issues of institutional power, authorial identity, disciplinary epistemology, and critical discourses, and how these relate to students' meaning making.

This brings us to our second issue. Undergraduate students are held to university-level standards of academic discourse, sometimes in a variety of fields, and are generally expected to reach those standards without explicit ALL instruction. Students who do not meet these literacy 'standards' (demonstrated through assessment processes) are frequently positioned in deficit terms (Lea and Street, 1998; Turner, 2011), as 'lacking university readiness' and labelled 'at risk'. At the same time, disciplinary specialists (teaching academics) rarely view ALL development as part of their core role (for example, Wingate, 2018), with responsibility for ALL outsourced to learning advisors. Moreover, ALL issues are predominantly located in the context of students with language backgrounds other than English (for example, Wingate, 2018). Such impoverished understandings of ALL development results in individual students being given the burden of obtaining support, rather than ALL development being seen as the 'core business' of university learning and teaching (Clarence and McKenna, 2017). This oversimplifies the nature of language and is particularly detrimental to students from socially and politically disenfranchised linguistic backgrounds, who

are frequently positioned in deficit terms (Turner, 2011; Wingate, 2018). The higher attrition rates of these students, compared to 'mainstream' students, are often attributed to lacking mastery of ALL practices in HE (van Wyk, 2016).

Moreover, although the Academic Literacies model (Lea and Street, 1998) offers useful conceptual tools scholars have critiqued the framework because of the inherent difficulty in operationalising pedagogy and support that correspond with the transformative and empowering elements of the model and move away from the dominance of study skills and socialisation (see Lillis et al., 2015 for an edited collection of examples). Acknowledging these critiques, in this article, we unpack one effort to actualise a holistic Academic Literacies approach to 'teaching academic reading', and we discuss the challenges of doing so.

### **Embedding academic literacies in discipline-specific courses: opportunities and challenges**

When ALL practices are embedded within the disciplines, the impact on student outcomes is consistently reported to be positive (Gunn et al., 2011; Adams et al., 2016; Maldoni and Lear, 2016; Wiles et al., 2016). Successful approaches to embedding ALL in disciplinary coursework require supported collaboration between ALL experts, academic developers, and discipline specialists (Adams et al., 2016; Jacobs, 2007; McKay, 2013; Thies, 2016; van Wyk, 2016; Wingate, 2018). Such collaboration allows ALL specialists to articulate subject specialists' tacit values and practices, and it allows discipline specialists to better understand aspects of ALL they take for granted in their work (Jacobs, 2007).

However, the same literature attests to the significant challenges that both ALL experts and disciplinary specialists face in seeking to embed academic literacies, particularly in terms of the time it takes to undertake such collaborations (McWilliams and Allan, 2014; Thies, 2016). Furthermore, as academic literacies tend to be marginalised within a skills-based teaching framework, ALL often takes a secondary or adjunct position in such collaborations (Jacobs, 2007; Maldoni and Lear, 2016). Accordingly, McWilliams and Allan (2014) discuss the importance of creating a strong 'community of practice' including members of each field—ALL experts, discipline specialists, and information specialists/librarians—in order to maximise the effectiveness ALL teaching within a particular disciplinary setting.

### **Research Methods Courses: A Possible Site for Sustainable Development of Academic Literacies Instruction?**

While the complexities are well documented, and there is ample evidence indicating the critical need to embed ALL throughout the curriculum in specialised degree programs, very little literature exists that specifically discusses embedding academic literacies approaches in mandatory research methods courses. Furthermore, literature on embedding academic literacies rarely deals with the critical issue of reading (Baker et al., 2018). We consider this a missed opportunity, as these courses offer fertile sites for explicitly exploring ALL in context, particularly different purposes, and approaches to reading. We therefore sought to explore this important, 'nascent' site of research (Wiles et al., 2016).

In order to address this gap in the literature, we discuss a mixed-methods study that was designed to explore the process of designing and embedding a set of ALL teaching materials (a series of videos on reviewing literature and writing a literature review linked to a course-specific empirical research project) within the digital environment of a mandatory undergraduate research methods course at a large metropolitan university in Australia. In this article, we outline the students' and tutors' patterns of access and responses to the videos provided. We argue that there is a potentially rich relationship to be developed between compulsory research methods courses and explicit ALL instruction. We

also make important claims here about the role of video as a tool for providing ALL support, with implications for teaching in a post-COVID world.

## **Methodology**

### **Project Background**

As part of the cross-institutional DRC program (digitally upgrading curricula and course content) at an Australian metropolitan university—referred to throughout as ‘Golden Tower University’ (GTU)—the research team developed and evaluated digital resources for a mandatory first-year social research course. The 12-week course is a general introduction to conducting social research, where students learn the basic principles of quantitative and qualitative approaches to social research and collectively conduct small-scale data collection (a survey and an interview) before writing a research report. As a ‘gateway’ course (a compulsory first year unit that feeds into several degree programs), the content and assignments are scaffolded to provide students with a supportive learning environment. The course has two assessments: a 1000-word literature review on a shared research question (around which later data collection and analysis activities are based), and a 2000-word research report due at the end of the course. In Semester 2, 2018, 311 students, who were majoring in Social Research and Policy, Criminology, or Social Work, were enrolled in the course.

We decided to use the DRC process as an opportunity to explicitly unpack and teach aspects of literature reviewing, which was the first assignment for the course and is, according to our observations, a common task where students typically struggle in Social Science courses at GTU. We had varying roles in the development of the videos. Sally and Jung-Sook were the course convenors, Nicole is the educational developer who supported the digital upgrading process, and Caitlin helped to design the content and was a tutor on the course, and as a collaborator did not participate in the tutor interviews. Sally and Caitlin are Academic Literacies researchers, and both have experience of working in universities in ALL roles. Jung-Sook is a Social Work lecturer. As ALL researchers and practitioners, Sally and Caitlin identified the need to focus on the practices that constitute literature reviewing, including reading, note-taking, and synthesising. This focus was supported by Jung-Sook, who had previously convened the course and had observed the challenges students experienced with regard to locating pertinent sources and synthesising literature as part of the Literature Review assignment. The videos predominantly focused on academic reading, which we have already noted is an important and critically under-examined issue in Academic Literacies research (Baker et al., 2018; Bharuthram and Clarence, 2015; Wingate, 2018). In so doing, we addressed the problematic assumption that students should have already learned to ‘read’ well before arriving at university (Gorzycki et al., 2020).

We created a suite of four videos, which targeted various aspects of reading and writing for literature reviewing, informed by Bharuthram and Clarence’s (2015) work on teaching academic reading in the South African higher education context. Digital video has become increasingly prevalent in higher education teaching and learning across the last decade (Dinmore, 2019). For this study, the videos were made in the university’s media studios using screen capture software. They featured a lecturer speaking to some PowerPoint slides and navigating different research, reading, and writing processes and practice. The raw footage was edited to provide clarity and fluency and a transcript of the film was produced. These videos were integrated into coursework at strategic points across the semester, corresponding directly with upcoming assessment tasks and deadlines. The choice of videos was deliberate—following Henderson et al.’s (2015) argument that university educators should increasingly implement video-based technologies as one of the most prominent uses of digital technology for undergraduates. The videos covered the following topics, which were selected to loosely represent a chronological ordering of academic reading, from finding sources to synthesising own reading within own argumentation and writing:

- **Video 1:** finding and appraising sources (Week 2 resource)
- **Video 2:** using textual information to make decisions about what, where and how much to read (Week 4 resource)
- **Video 3:** summarising and synthesising (Week 6 resource – literature review assessment was due)
- **Video 4:** returning to the literature in the discussion (dialogue between findings and existing work) – set as online tutorial task in preparation for a research report due in Week 12

The videos included prompts for students to stop and consider their own reading practices, and made direct links with the upcoming assignments, and tasks were designed to support students' engagement with the videos. The first video provided students with a model for information literacy practices, demonstrating a process of conducting online searches, including commentary on using appropriate search terms, limiters, and Booleans. It also discussed how to make rapid selections of preliminary literature by scanning for temporality, disciplinary field, author expertise, content within the front matter (title, journal information, keywords, abstract) etc. The second video offered a more nuanced picture of critical reading with a particular purpose in mind. It reviewed some of the bibliographic information discussed in Video 1 in more depth, and it modelled how a researcher might scan and skim articles to find areas to target for more in-depth reading. The third video offered an in-depth picture of three separate processes involved in writing a literature review: note-taking during reading, constructing an in-depth summary of a single source, and constructing a synthesis of multiple sources. Finally, the fourth video demonstrated to students how they might use their source material to discuss their findings after presenting their results. It walked students through how they might read their own work purposefully, in conversation with other literature. These four videos were outlined as key tasks in the weekly course schedule, and students were encouraged to watch Videos 1 and 3 as tasks that did not contribute to their tutorial attendance. In contrast, Video 2 was included in the tutorial activities for Week 4, and students were required to contribute to a blog in Week 10, based on watching Video 4 and making connections with their own reading/writing for the final assessment.

We were careful not to be prescriptive in our instruction. In line with the critical perspective offered by Academic Literacies—which recognises the nuanced ways that literacies work in practice and in context, and how 'what counts' as 'good (reading and) writing' can shift subtly even when writing within the same discipline—we are keenly aware that offering 'how-to' forms of instruction can mimic decontextualized skills-based approaches. Instead, we repeatedly reminded the audience that there are many ways to get into, engage with, and interpret literature, and the methods and modes that we modelled in the videos were a set of options, rather than *the* approach to follow.

### **Research design**

This project adopted a mixed-methods research design exploring students' and tutors' perceptions of the videos and examining students' engagement with the videos. We sought to respond to these framing research questions for this article:

1. What are students' and tutors' perceptions of the videos designed to support critical academic literacy development in a mandatory research methods course?
2. How did students engage with the videos?

To this end, we gathered data from three sources to meet our objectives: data collected on the uptake and use of the videos via the course Moodle page, student feedback collected via the course evaluation, and individual interviews with course tutors (n=3). Metrics for student and staff access

patterns with the video resources were obtained from the course Moodle page, including how many students accessed each video and when. Qualitative data was also obtained from two specific questions that had been included in the end of course evaluation, which addressed students' perceptions of the video resources. These data were thematically analysed following the process outlined in Braun and Clarke (2006). Moreover, although both students and staff were invited to participate in individual or focus group interviews, it is significant that none of the students elected to participate in interviews. We contend that this lack of interest offers a lesson to other action researchers in terms of the timing of the proposed data collection (due to the ethical considerations, we planned to interview students after the final assessment had been submitted, which seriously limited the availability and interest of students), and the evaluation/ survey fatigue that many university students face (for example, see Adams and Umbach, 2012).

Ethical clearance was obtained from the university's human ethics committee for all methods of data collection. Nicole, as a member of the research team who was not involved in the teaching of the course, was tasked with de-identifying metrics data from Moodle. The student course evaluation data was anonymous, and the tutors have been given pseudonyms. Data were stored and shared among the research team in accordance with university policy.

## Findings

### Students' use and perceptions of the videos

The data collected from the course Moodle site was analysed descriptively to inform how many students watched the videos, the number of views, the average view per student, and the timing of when the videos were watched. As can be seen in Table 1, analysis of the data gathered from Moodle showed that of the 311 students enrolled in the course, 308 students accessed at least one of the videos. Of those students, 37% watched all four videos and 31% watched three videos.

**Table 1**

*An overview of the student viewers of the four 'critical reading for writing' videos*

	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Watched 4 videos	115	37.0%
Watched 3 videos	95	30.5%
Watched 2 videos	53	17.0%
Watched 1 video	45	14.5%
Did not watch	3	1.0%
Total students	311	100.0%

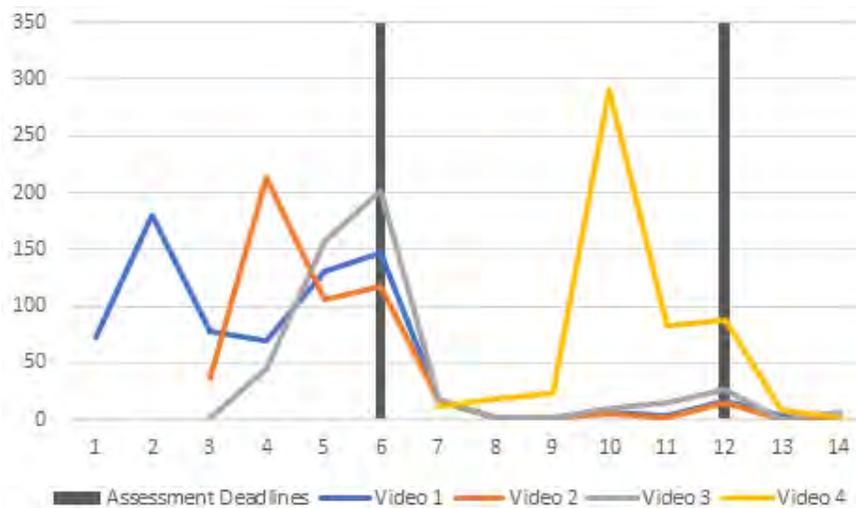
In total, Moodle analytics recorded 2,249 clicks on the four videos, with the highest number of students accessing the first video (n=264). As can be seen from Table 2, the first video also had the highest number of clicks (n=727), with each student accessing this video an average of 2.75 times. In contrast, the least popular video (according to the number of students who accessed the video) was the final video, with only 202 students watching this video, but on average 2.58 times, leading to 522 total clicks. In terms of total number of clicks, the least popular video was the third video with only 484 clicks.

In terms of the timing of when students accessed the videos, unsurprisingly there was strong alignment with the course schedule and the assessment deadlines. The first video was scheduled for Week 2, the second video in class in Week 4, the third video in Week 6, and the final video was part of an online activity in Week 10. The first assignment (the Literature Review) was due in Week 6, and the final assignment was due at the end of Week 12.

**Table 2**

*Analysis of each video by student views and average number of views*

	Total clicks	Number of students	Average clicks per student
Video 1	727	264	2.75 (1-11)
Video 2	516	225	2.29 (1-17)
Video 3	484	205	2.36 (1-15)
Video 4	522	202	2.58 (1-13)

**Figure 1**

*Analysis of when the each of the videos was watched over the 12-week semester (note: dates beyond 29 October 2018 are grouped in Week 14)*

However, what is significant is the fact that students continued to watch the videos after the scheduled activities according to the course schedule. For instance, we can see that the peak watching period for the first video (on finding sources) was in Week 2, with 180 clicks, aligning with the schedule; however, a steady number of students continued to watch the videos beyond Week 2, with 147 clicks of Video 1 in Week 6. Similar patterns can be seen with the second and fourth videos, whereas the third video had more clicks before the scheduled activity. This suggests that students used the videos beyond the mandated tutorial activities, and that they were used to support students with completing their assignments. This is confirmed in the qualitative data gathered from the student course evaluation, a finding which aligns with that of other research into students' use of digital video (Dinmore, 2019).

#### **End of course student evaluation results: Student feedback on course and videos**

Student feedback from the end of course evaluation indicated an overall positive attitude towards course content and resources. A total of 48.4% (n=151) of enrolled students completed the end of course evaluation, which is considerably higher than the average response rate for course evaluations and may indicate some selection bias. Of these, 87.4% (n=132) agreed that they were satisfied with

the overall quality of the course, with 85.4% (n=129) agreeing that the digital resources ‘helped them learn’. In a question pertaining specifically to the videos, 86.2% (n=125) agreed that the videos had helped them learn how to complete their assessment tasks.

The written responses to the questions in the course experience survey also indicate that the videos were well received by students. Students talked about learning how to write a literature review and report step by step: “Videos especially aided writing a report and were in–depth and step by step.”, “Really useful to learn how to do a literature review and report”. When prompted to answer the question, “What was the best thing about the course”, one student wrote simply “Critical learning videos”. Students agreed that the course structure and emphasis on ALL was important for their overall development as learners. As one student wrote, “The best thing about this course was the first assignment, which was a literature review. This is because it was a new task for me and helped me a lot to improve my skills, particularly in understanding research and reading with a purpose”. Another identified that these practices would “help with all other courses”. These students clearly felt that ALL aspects of the course would have long-term benefit for them as university students. One student offered a particularly enthusiastic response pertaining to the suite of videos in particular: “The online content and videos created explaining how to write a literature review and report were AMAZING! I wish I could download them and keep them with me”. Generally, the respondents were clear in their statements of the value of these resources in supporting university-level learning and coursework.

Students reported less favourably on the design features of the videos, with one noting that the content/focus points were “pretty common knowledge”, and another emphasising that the videos were “quite dry; instead, tutorials should teach how to do this”. Although this second student offered a critique of the video, s/he was concerned about the method of delivery rather than the content of the video. Interestingly, a third (and final) student complaint about the videos was that they didn’t cover *enough* content: “The videos were great for learning how to research but not on the actual writing of the literature review”. Essentially, the student calls for more of this type of ALL development to be explicitly integrated into the course.

### **Tutors’ use and perceptions of the videos**

Individual interviews with tutors revealed a number of important areas for consideration. Overall, responses to the videos were mixed. The particular strengths identified by tutors related to the overall design and content of the videos, which they felt modelled authentic research practices in real time, and were therefore accessible and relevant. The videos featured a narrator speaking over a computer screen and navigating different research, reading, and writing processes:

*[It] was clear they were been made live at someone's computer. So someone had a PowerPoint and they were like speaking to the PowerPoint and they were sometimes bringing up articles and clicking through so it was very much like watching someone doing a demo in front of the class or a demo you might see on YouTube. So, I think technically that was quite good because it creates an illusion of you sitting in the room with someone and that sort of sense of intimacy, that's really important in a lot of new communication like podcasting and blog casting today. So that definitely should be kept.*

According to Amber, this created a sense of ‘intimacy’ between viewers and the speaker, which is representative of new-media genres with which students are familiar. She indicated that the videos were ‘pitched’ at an appropriate level for first years, giving them a genuine sense of research processes—messiness and all—in a way that was appropriate for learning in their generation.

However, while tutors outlined their perceived benefits, they also offered valuable critiques of the videos. Many of their reservations were related to length; as Amber notes, *I think the main challenge*

*is keeping young people's attention span*, which was echoed by both Mabel and Sara. This perceived problem of the length of video was paired with another important issue for tutors: the tutors found it difficult to integrate them well into their one-hour tutorials. Although Video 2 was required viewing in the tutorials, Amber admits that she *didn't play [it] in the classroom so that [the students] would have more one on one contact time with each other*. She was particularly resistant to the idea of taking up precious time in a one-hour tutorial with a long video:

*Well I definitely don't think that we should be playing the videos in the tutorial. I'm pretty adamant about that. That goes for any videos.... They're not there to watch videos. It kind of reminds me of, you know, stereotypical schoolteacher who rolls out the video, movie for kids to watch and then sits in the back and reads a book or something.*

According to Amber, video viewing does not count as 'real teaching' and she had no interest in a video replacing her role in the room. Given the post-COVID higher education climate, her concerns are important: it is not enough simply to give students a video; they must also be given tools to actively engage with video content. There is therefore a cautionary tale here about ensuring that tutors understand the reasoning behind the introduction of new strategies and resources. Some of these interviews indicate that tutors themselves may benefit from explicit training with respect to academic literacies in contradistinction to the 'study skills' approach. Likewise, as the course convenors and educational developer, we benefitted from listening to the tutors' experience of using the videos in their teaching and contend that this should regularly happen.

Despite the many limitations of the videos outlined by tutors, we feel it is critical to note that they never commented negatively about the content of the videos. In fact, they made clear connections between the needs of students with respect to some of the video content, and identified other areas they felt were worth addressing. Mabel offered a particularly clear picture of her perception of ALL issues she felt were pressing for her students:

*They don't read enough. And if they could also spend more time expanding their reading, especially the academic reading, it will be very helpful for them to develop their academic writing skills... You should have evidence and justification. Expanding reading would be important. And also trying to think critically and also structure their ideas with evidence.*

The tutors note that these issues are indicative of the future ALL-related struggles that students might face. Consequently, the tutors were clear that, while the videos are far from perfect, the content was valuable, and they called strongly for a much more profound emphasis on ALL instruction, covering a wide array of processes and practices, in other courses.

## **Discussion**

This article has offered a critical interpretation of a newly designed set of resources to support students with development of their ALL practices. The 'Digital Resource Creation' process at GTU made designing a suite of videos on reading possible, which offered us the opportunity to embed a critical approach to developing students' ALL practices. In response to our first Research Question—What are students' and tutors' perceptions of the videos designed to support critical academic literacy development in a mandatory research methods course?—we can summarise that students and staff perceived the video resources as useful but requiring further development, to make them better teaching tools. Importantly, their responses suggest the need to incorporate the videos more successfully within the overall teaching on the course, as opposed to drastically changing the videos themselves. The content was deemed useful overall, which was evidenced both in tutors' and students' responses to the videos. These findings speak to the need to carefully consider how digital

resources are integrated into classroom work, perhaps validating ‘flipped classroom’ style approaches (Tse et al., 2014) more than ever.

This research also validates important findings in other empirical literature indicating that time for collaborative discussions between ALL and discipline specialists is critical to establish a coherent understanding of the role of ALL instruction in cross-disciplinary coursework (Adams et al., 2016; Wingate, 2018). Two of the videos were provided simply as addendum resources (rather than being fully scaffolded into course content) in part because of different conceptions of teaching staff regarding the centrality of ALL instruction – we reached a sort of compromise about how much mandated study time could be occupied by explicit ALL teaching by requiring the viewing of two videos and leaving two optional. Our findings suggest, however, that tutors and students felt the content of all the videos was relevant and worthy of more time in class.

In response to our second Research Question—How did students engage with the videos?—our analysis suggests that although we could have more effectively scaffolded our approach to integrating the resources, students still engaged well with the videos. This is evidenced by both the overall number of students who accessed the optional resources, as well as the fact that students returned to the videos. That students viewed the videos multiple times likely suggests that they found the content suitably aligned to their ALL support needs in a research methods course. Furthermore, students accessed the videos during critical points in the course when they were developing their assessments, which presumably indicates they used the videos as intended: to engage in both guided and self-directed, course-specific ALL development.

From our analysis of the student usage data, course evaluation data, and interviews with the tutors, we advance three main arguments. Firstly, we argue that mandatory research methods courses offer fruitful spaces for developing students’ ALL practices. Secondly, and relatedly, we explicate the difficulties of drawing on the Academic Literacies conceptual frame to develop resources based on a critical understanding of literacy. Finally, we contend that there is a clear appetite among both students and tutors for teaching tools that help to develop students’ ALL, but digital tools do not offer a panacea to ALL teaching issues. The fact that both students and tutors found the course-specific content of the videos profoundly relevant while flagging issues with design and implementation carries important implications for video-based and online ALL instruction. Essentially, it indicates that structured engagement with such content is key to supporting students’ literacies acquisition in a digital environment.

### **Mandatory research methods courses: Fertile ground for sowing the seeds of critical academic literacy practices?**

There appears to be consensus that both students and tutors valued the videos, as evidenced through student access, the number of views, and the qualitative feedback gathered through the course evaluation tool (students) and through individual interviews (tutors). However, we acknowledge that these resources were not without limitations, with common critiques related to their length and use of the videos as in-class teaching resources. Guo et al. (2014) argue, for example, that educational video designers should aim for a maximum length of six minutes; unfortunately, we found that our goal of presenting academic reading in a non-prescriptive, authentic way that recognised the plurality and complexity of academic practices did not translate easily into six-minute chunks.

Despite these issues, we argue that it was the *embeddedness* of the videos, rather than their content or design, that is the most significant factor behind their effectiveness, providing further evidence of the value of making ALL instruction course specific (Maldoni, 2017; Wingate, 2018). ALL components are not just stand-alone addendum that can be attached to any courses in small, generic doses; a six-minute video, no matter how well designed, would not be enough to effectively display the iterative messiness of pre-empirical research practices. We argue that because critical reading

and writing are a core part of social research, mandatory research methods courses are key sites for explicitly developing students' ALL practices. Moreover, by designing activities that sought to unpack and scaffold students' critical reading practices—in this case related to literature reviewing—we were able to make strong links with shared ALL practices that underpin their other courses.

### **Challenges of moving from Academic Literacies conceptual critique to teaching practice**

Our intention in designing these videos was to try to capture the dynamic, situated and complex understandings of ALL practices as per the Academic Literacies model (Lea and Street, 1998). In doing so, we faced challenges with the design, delivery and uptake of the resources; however, these problems themselves illustrate the challenges of trying to develop responsive and contextualised resources, and legitimise the importance of doing so. By designing a set of videos using screen capture to try to record the real-time challenges of critical reading and repeating the message that these were some of many possible ways into reading, we (perhaps unavoidably) reified a selection of practices. Moreover, we note the tutors' concern about the videos being used instead of, rather than to support, in-class teaching. ALL specialists commonly lament the tendency of relegating issues of reading and writing to the side, making students seek out ALL instruction elsewhere rather than integrating instruction as part of coursework (Wingate, 2018). Our findings demonstrate this issue clearly; even in a course that intentionally built literacies instruction into the course, we fell into the trap of creating resources that sat to the side of the face-to-face instruction. This was likely due to issues that are frequently addressed in literature on embedding – we lacked time to establish the centrality of ALL instruction within an already fully designed, discipline-specific course co-taught by specialists from different subject areas (Jacobs, 2007; McWilliams and Allan, 2014; Thies, 2016). Given students' and tutors' positive responses to content in spite of design and integration flaws, our findings simply speak to the importance of both embedded ALL instruction and human-centred course design in digital spaces.

Despite these challenges, our findings do clearly demonstrate the need for guided ALL instruction in a tutorial environment. Our participants articulated a keen desire for this type of content in undergraduate coursework; indeed, one student wrote in the course evaluation survey that s/he wanted to “download [the videos] and keep them with me”. We argue that such responses offer a stark indicator of how starved first-year university students are for effective, targeted ALL instruction, even for resources deemed ‘dry’.

### **No such thing as a digital panacea: Limitations of online tools for developing students' ALL practices**

Higher education researchers have acknowledged the increasingly complex textual worlds our students inhabit (for example, Henderson et al., 2015). While digital access has streamlined many facets of the research process, from locating source material to storing and referencing literature, it has also created new literacy barriers for students from less privileged backgrounds (Devlin and McKay, 2016), further marginalising some students. In some ways, we would argue that technology actually allows lecturers to sideline ALL instruction even further; with all the supporting source material, tutorial videos and access to university library resources available online, instructors have a warrant to require students to locate their own ALL instruction online. Moreover, the move to digital modes of literacies development allows institutions to invest in the development of online resources, rather than the ongoing funding of ALL specialists.

It is important to note, then, that access to digital resources on reading and writing cannot take the place of in-kind guided instruction. Many institutions make generic ALL resources available to students via a centralised learning support portal, but our findings indicate that these resources need

to be carefully scaffolded into tutorial time in order for students and tutors to find them useful, It would not even be necessary to watch videos during tutorial time; flipped classroom approaches could easily be used so that students engage with digital content outside the course and bring questions and discussion points to synchronous sessions for further engagement.

We acknowledge that the DRC process has many positive aspects. For universities to maintain currency, they need to effectively exploit the technological tools that many students use daily, both to leverage student interest and to demonstrate ongoing relevance in shifting sociocultural teaching environments. We argue, however, that it is critical that universities not treat digital applications, programs, and processes as a ‘panacea’ for literacy issues. ALL specialists argue that literacies instruction should not be outsourced to ‘skills’ advisors (Jacobs, 2007; Wingate, 2018), and universities should not use digital technology to the same end; students should not be expected to powerfully navigate digital textscapes in order to access support for their own academic literacy needs. Instead, more needs to be done to make space for collaborative efforts in embedding ALL instruction directly into coursework.

## **Conclusion**

Our approach represents a significant departure from the more prevalent decontextualised ‘study skills’ approaches to ALL development, which are known to be largely ineffectual (Lea and Street, 1998; Wingate, 2006). It also moves beyond the hybrid models espoused by proponents of embedding literacies within disciplinary instruction (although we contend that more resources should be dedicated to facilitating this within epistemological communities/ faculties). By viewing ALL development (practice, process, and product) as ‘core business’ of research methods courses, we have identified a sustainable site for the explicit teaching of critical ALL practices.

We contend, however, that developing resources that can move beyond decontextualised ‘skills’ approaches needs careful consideration. They need to be accessible and embedded within synchronous teaching time, rather than sitting outside of the core content of the course and essentially functioning as another set of resources for students to use to ‘fix’ themselves. While we faced challenges in doing that, we have also demonstrated the need for bringing issues related to students’ development of ALL to the fore. The onus, however, remains with universities to make space for more purposeful and contextualised approaches to developing student ALL to be more widely practised.

Due to COVID-19, digital video has become an integral component of teaching and learning in higher education. While such technology has largely been dedicated to sharing lectures, this study’s findings suggest that digital video offers pertinent opportunities to embed ALL into social research courses. Yet its shortcomings also indicate how educators might adapt this approach to embedding ALL practices in future. Careful consideration is required about how and where ALL should be situated within social research course curriculum to ensure these resources are truly embedded. The length of each digital video also needs to be a factor in their initial development. Finally, tutors could receive explicit professional development in academic literacies to support them in realising the potential of this approach to ALL. Since degrees of blended learning will remain central to higher education for years to come, these insights offer new methods for systematically embedding ALL into social research courses.

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