

# From dot points to disciplinarity: the theory and practice of disciplinary literacies in secondary schooling

by

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## Candidate's certification

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis and all sources used have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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# Abstract

This thesis explores the disciplinary literacies of Business Studies and Music, with a focus on the written component of the HSC examination in the final year of schooling in New South Wales. The syllabus contains dot points of topics to be covered in the course but these offer little guidance for teachers or students in how to compose an answer to an HSC examination question and they obscure relations between different aspects of disciplinary knowledge

To help teachers move beyond syllabus dot points, this thesis aims to illuminate the distinctive literacy demands of Business Studies and Music. This is achieved by using analytical frameworks from Systemic Functional Linguistics and Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis to explore the features of successful HSC writing in these two subjects. Analysis reveals that successful writing in Business Studies explains patterns of cause and effect with profit as the main motive. In contrast, successful HSC writing in Music describes musical events in terms of concepts of music and principles of musical composition. In the analysis, concepts of music are systematised as networks and taxonomies to reveal the relations within and between concepts. The analysis also includes a typology of images (graphic notation and non-traditional notation) used to represent music to enable an investigation of how image and written text are inter-related in successful HSC responses.

To explore the enacted curriculum, this thesis also describes a literacy intervention in five classrooms. Analysis of five case studies provides insights into the challenges and opportunities of explicit teaching of disciplinary literacies, as some teachers diverged from agreed lesson plans or disengaged altogether. To explain why the intervention was embraced by some teachers and resisted by others, a sociological perspective provided

by Legitimation Code Theory (Specialisation) interprets the intervention as a series of ‘code clashes’ and ‘code matches’ that help to account for teacher engagement and provide insights into potential pitfalls of literacy research.

Despite these challenges, when students were taught how to structure their answer and ‘make a point’, they were able to produce the kinds of answers that receive high marks for the HSC. Even though these gains were not sustained, given the short intervention, findings indicate promising areas for further exploration and suggest that it is possible to make aspects of the theory and practice of disciplinary literacies visible and available to teachers and students.

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