Informed Interdependence: A model for collaboration in fostering communicative competencies in a Commerce curriculum

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Abstract:

The current orthodoxy among academics in higher education studies is that content and language learning should be integrated in order to facilitate communicative competencies in degrees seeking to prepare students for business and the professions. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL, see Coyle, 2007) has been well-theorized and its goals are laudable, however we contend that a one-size-fits-all solution of complete integration is not the most practicable or pedagogically-sound option in all contexts. Instead, we argue that establishing relationships of *Informed Interdependence* between content and language courses may offer greater benefits in specific contexts. This argument may appear counter-intuitive, but we believe it has significant insights to add to the continuing dialogue around the use of CLIL.

Accordingly, we describe a Professional Communication course at Rhodes University and then outline how we have responded to changes in our context through a process of engagement which led to a new course, namely, Professional Communication for Accountants, and recurriculation of the original Professional Communication course. In reporting on this process we foreground the importance of suitable boundary objects and discursive spaces around which interdisciplinary collaboration can occur. We provide staff and student reactions to a pilot project designed to test the curricular innovations made thus far, and conclude by reflecting on the efficacy of an *Informed Interdependence* model in our context.

1.   Background and Overview

Learning and teaching communicative competencies in higher education qualifications for business and professions such as Accounting, Engineering and Pharmacy is a complex task. These competencies lie at the intersection of linguistic competence with discipline-specific and profession-specific literacies, creating a tension as to how to address each adequately in the curriculum: does one teach them in independent courses focusing on language, or does one integrate them into the content disciplines? There is much at stake in this decision, and various factors apart from disciplinary content and language are implicated in it, including matters of disciplinary boundary-keeping and the challenges of a changing context. In this article we report on how we confronted these factors through a variety of changes that led us to review the curriculum for Professional Communication, a semester-long course teaching communicative competencies to undergraduate Commerce students at Rhodes University.

This article was prompted by our response, as members of the Department of English Language and Linguistics at Rhodes University, to a call by the Dean of Commerce to members of the faculty to reconsider their curricula and to interact with other departments over possibilities for interdisciplinary integration in the faculty's undergraduate programme. This was after extensive changes to the Bachelor of Commerce (Accounting) curriculum were proposed in the light of changes to the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants' (SAICA) Competency Framework, which "defines the key competencies required by Chartered Accountants upon entry to the profession" (Department of Accounting, 2010:2). The new SAICA Competency Framework (discussed in Section 4) generally moves away from requiring certain service courses in an Accounting degree towards a more integrated approach to teaching pervasive skills, including communicative competencies. The Dean perceived this as an opportunity to explore means of integrating learning across disciplines in the Commerce curriculum, and to reduce the credit load of the BCom (Accounting) degree. In addition to the changes in SAICA's competency framework, there have been many changes in school curricula, resulting in changes in the literacies which students possess on entering university. The type of students who take Professional Communication at Rhodes University has also changed significantly, from a majority of English first-language speakers to a majority of students speaking English as an additional language. These changes are all reasons why it was necessary to review the teaching of communicative competencies in the Commerce curriculum, and they are explained in more detail in Section 4.

The current orthodoxy among academics in higher education studies is that content and language

learning should be combined, in what has become known as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL, see Coyle, 2007). This method of learning is rooted in a well-established research tradition in applied linguistics, the New Literacy Studies (see e.g. Street, 1984; Gee, 1996; Lea & Street, 1998), which suggests that literacy learning cannot be divorced from the context in which it is practised. Thus it is not enough for students to learn literacy (or any linguistic competency) in a stand-alone course that teaches literacy in the abstract, in a decontextualized manner; students need to learn the literacies of the various disciplines they study while embedded within those disciplines themselves. This approach has been implemented in a variety of higher education settings in South Africa (see Angelil-Carter & Paxton, 1993; Jacobs, 2005; Jacobs, Winberg, Wright & Wyrley-Birch, 2011; Paxton, 2003), two of which are discussed in Section 5 of this article. We argue that while CLIL is well-theorized and its goals are praiseworthy, complete integration is not ideal for all contexts. Instead, we argue, that establishing relationships of *Informed Interdependence* between content and language courses also has much to offer. Our approach is embedded in applied linguistic theory and seeks to challenge and build on this body of theory.

We understand "applied linguistics" to mean any use of the study of the structure and usage of language to address some practical problem or improve people's lives in some way. The use of linguistic theory to improve teaching of communicative competencies in higher education definitely falls under the purview of applied linguistics. However, we are concerned with how linguistic theory needs to be reinterpreted, or recontextualized (Bernstein, 2003) to suit the contexts in which it is applied. Bernstein (2003) shows how knowledge produced through research needs to be transformed through the process of recontextualization before it can be delivered to students in the classroom. Similarly, we contend that linguistic theory, including the well-established body of theory supporting CLIL, needs to be recontextualized to fit the specificities of the context in which learning takes place if it is to be applied effectively in redesigning curricula. In this article we show how this recontextualization has taken place in our process of recurriculation.

Section 2 of this article introduces three models for teaching communicative competencies in content curricula: *Independence, Informed Interdependence* and *Integration.* In Section 3, we describe the Professional Communication course prior to our review of its curriculum as an instance of the *Independence* model. In Section 4 we describe the context of change in which this review took place since it shaped our approach. We focus on the changes in the literacies which students possess when entering university, transformation in the demographics of Professional Communication students and curricular changes in the university's Accounting department, which prompted our review of the

Professional Communication curriculum. In Section 5 we review two case studies of how CLIL has been implemented in two other South African universities. Following this, we describe in Section 6 how we negotiated obstacles to interdisciplinary collaboration at our university by seeking discursive spaces for collaboration and identifying boundary objects around which such collaboration could occur (Jacobs et al, 2011). Section 7 describes the pilot project we undertook to evaluate the success of implementing the *Informed Interdependence* model at Rhodes University. Finally, in Section 8, we reflect on the lessons learned from this process of curriculum review, and what insights it can add to the ongoing discussion on CLIL.

2.   Three Models of Teaching Communicative Competencies

In the initial steps of our curriculum review, we constructed three models of teaching and learning communicative competencies in professional curricula, based on our experiences with Professional Communication and ideas of other ways in which these competencies could be taught. These we label the *Independence*, *Informed Interdependence* and *Integration* models, respectively.

2.1.   The Independence model

According to this model, teaching communicative competencies is understood as being completely separate from the teaching of content within content subjects. Communication is therefore taught in a stand-alone course, and there is little or no interaction between communication lecturers and content specialists. As a result, communication lecturers and content specialists typically devise their own curricula, and there is no collaboration between them. This model essentially reflects the *status quo* at Rhodes University when the old Professional Communication curriculum was in place, i.e. there was little to no interaction between those teaching on the Professional Communication course and those responsible for such Commerce content subjects as Accounting, Management and Information Systems. It also reflects the *status quo* in faculties at other universities, such as the University of Cape Town (UCT), before curriculum review took place (Angelil-Carter and Paxton, 1993; see Section 5.1). As we explain in Section 3, this curriculum was effective at Rhodes University and its importance was acknowledged by past students. However, possibilities for interdisciplinary collaboration promised to improve the course considerably.

2.2.   The Integration model

In this model, teaching communicative competencies is achieved through communication lecturers embedded in the departments which teach the content disciplines and themselves teaching aspects of the content of these disciplines in conjunction with communicative competencies. They both lecture

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in the content disciplines and work closely with the lecturers in the content disciplines in designing modules and assignments that develop students' communicative competencies along with the core competencies taught in those disciplines. This model is often envisaged as the "standard" way of doing CLIL (Coyle, 2007), but we show in this article that it is by no means the only way of doing CLIL, and that interesting alternatives to it may be more beneficial in specific contexts.

2.3.   *The Informed Interdependence model*

In this model, teaching communicative competencies is done by means of a separate communication course, but, unlike the *Independence* model, there is consistent and meaningful interaction between those teaching the communication course and those who lecture the content subjects. An important outcome of this model is that students are encouraged to see how the communicative competencies encouraged in their communication course relate to their other subjects. This model is thus *informed* by the needs of the workplace and the content disciplines, and the curricula of the content disciplines recognize and reinforce what is taught in the communication course. This reciprocal relationship allows for *interdependence* in which the communication course is responsive to the content disciplines' requirements, and what is taught in the communication course is applied and assessed in the content disciplines in ways that prepare students for workplace demands by modelling the types of tasks that they may encounter in the workplace. Although this model is not based on any precedents found in the literature, it draws some of its inspiration from Jacobs et al's (2011) work on interdisciplinary collaboration in teaching and learning of communicative competencies, which is reviewed in further detail in Section 5.2.

3.   **The Original Professional Communication Course: an Instance of *Independence***

Professional Communication at Rhodes University is a one-credit, semester-length course which all students registered for Commerce degrees are required to pass. It is normally completed in the second year of study, but can be completed in the third year of study, especially in four-year undergraduate degree curricula. The purpose of the course is to equip students with communicative competencies for the workplace in four main areas as articulated in Canale & Swain's (1980) well-known model of communicative competence:

- Grammatical competence: knowledge of the rules of language
- Sociocultural competence: knowledge of what is appropriate to say or write in a given context
- Discourse competence: knowledge of how to structure written and spoken texts
- Strategic competence: knowledge of how to use communication to achieve one's goals.

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The four-part model is a recontextualization of Hymes' (1972) theory of communicative competence, which states that it is not enough for speakers of a language simply to know the grammatical rules of a language; they need also to know what types of communication are feasible, what language is appropriate in what contexts, and what it means for communication to be accomplished successfully. Hymes' well-established theory is applied in the teaching of communication at many levels across the world. Adendorff, Chick & Seneque (1985) provide an example of this theory being applied successfully to teach communicative competencies to a group of bankers in South Africa.

Table 1 lists the topics covered in the Professional Communication course under the four types of competency indicated in Canale & Swain's (1980) model. This table shows how we have recontextualized this model, allowing it to form a structuring principle for the course.

Table 1 to come here

The Professional Communication course is geared to helping students acquire business literacy practices. The theoretical framework is therefore further undergirded by the New Literacy Studies, in terms of which 'literacy' refers to much more than knowing how to read written texts. It refers to the social practices in which communication takes place in a given context (Street, 1984). Thus, for example, literacy embraces not only being able to understand a business report, but also understanding why such reports are typically commissioned, under what circumstances they are written, who usually reads them, and what they are commonly used for in business; all of which form part of the literacy practice of report-writing and reading. Business literacy therefore includes an understanding of how communicative processes happen in businesses and the ability to use these communicative processes to bring across information appropriately and effectively.

A distinctive feature of the course is the opportunity it affords students to practise creating a wide variety of written and spoken texts used in business. The five main course assignments are integral to accomplishing this:
1.   A business letter and email assignment
2.   A group report assignment
3.   A group spoken presentation assignment based on the report assignment
4.   An individual prepared spoken presentation assignment
5.   An individual unprepared speaking assignment.

One important outcome of the assignments is that students should learn to recontextualize (Bernstein, 2003) information from one genre of business communication to another. For instance, students need to recontextualize their written report assignments into spoken presentations, learning to adapt knowledge expressed in one genre using one mode of communication into other genres and modes.

The course also equips students for a diverse workplace by sensitizing them to issues surrounding cultural, racial and gender diversity, thereby enabling them "to tackle the issue of 'difference' with sensitivity, honesty and courage, and begin to respect and embrace diversity in all its rich and myriad forms" (Badat, 2011:5). A large portion of the section of the course on sociocultural competence addresses these issues (a) by teaching students about what kind of language is construed discriminatory and discouraging its use and (b) by encouraging them to reflect critically on questions of social power and inequality (a more cognitively-demanding and therefore more empowering task).

The concern for developing students' sociocultural competence addresses critics of Hymes' (1972) theory of communicative competence (such as Fairclough, 1992) who argue that students should not simply be taught the norms of appropriate communication, but should also be equipped to interrogate these norms so that they can transform them, should they wish to, through their communicative practice. Consequently, the course seeks to inculcate critical language awareness (an aspect of Critical Discourse Analysis; see Fairclough, 1992) in students, i.e. it encourages them to ask why established norms of communication are as they are, whose interests they serve and, stemming from this, who is empowered and who is disempowered through use of these norms. A critical language awareness perspective also aims to show students how they can use communication to convince readers and hearers of their viewpoints, so influencing their ideas and actions. As Fairclough (1992) explains, critical language awareness should not push learners into oppositional practices which condemn them to disadvantage and marginalisation; it should equip them with the capacities and understanding that are preconditions for meaningful choice and effective citizenship in the domain of language. Thus, in addition to fostering their communicative competencies, the Professional Communication course also contributes to students' understandings of ethical behaviour and corporate citizenship, both of which are foregrounded in SAICA's (2010) Competency Framework.

Roos (2008) administered a survey to 39 Rhodes University alumni who were working in the business sector to discover the relative importance these alumni accorded to the different subjects they had studied while at the university. Her study reveals that Professional Communication was regarded as

the sixth most important and relevant course that her research participants studied. Those ranked above it were Financial Management, Accounting, Strategic Management, Management Accounting, Finance, and Ethics.

From the above it is clear that the Professional Communication course recontextualizes theory from several movements in applied linguistics in the service of teaching communicative competencies to Commerce students. In so doing, it adds significant value to the Commerce curricula. At the same time, the call to reconsider departmental curricula offered us an opportunity to enhance the teaching of communicative competencies in the faculty further, and to investigate whether a stand-alone course (the prevailing arrangement at the time) was indeed the best way of teaching these competencies in the Rhodes University context.

4.   A Context of Change

While the old Professional Communication curriculum had its merits, a variety of changes in the context of the course made it necessary for the curriculum to be revised. These changes were mentioned briefly in the introduction to this article: the basic education system in South Africa is in a state of flux, leading to changes in the literacies that students possess on entering university; the "size and shape" of Rhodes University's student body is undergoing transformation; and the undergraduate curricula of an important discipline in Rhodes University's Commerce faculty, Accounting, is changing in response to changes in the SAICA Competency Framework. In what follows we examine each of these changes briefly, showing how they necessitate change in the way communicative competencies are taught and learned in our context.

To begin with, South Africa's basic education curriculum has changed radically several times since 1994. Outcomes-based education (OBE) was introduced in South Africa, and codified as the dominant philosophy behind school education in Curriculum 2005, introduced from 1998 onwards (Kallaway, 2012). Quickly, OBE's inadequacies in addressing South Africa's unequal education system became apparent (see, for example, Allais, 2007) and Curriculum 2005 was supplemented with the Revised National Curriculum Statement in 2002, and the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements, released in 2010 and 2011 (Kallaway, 2012). Although plenty of critique has been levelled at these curricula, it seems as though very little research has been done on how they have affected the literacies with which students leave the basic education system and enter university. Taking the perspective of the New Literacy Studies (Street, 1984), we believe it is a dangerous oversimplification to suppose that university entrants' literacy skills have deteriorated over the past

ten years or so, but suspect that students are entering university with a qualitatively different set of literacies from previously.

While there have been changes in the basic education system, there has also been transformation in the profile of Rhodes University's students, and particularly those in the Faculty of Commerce. The number of students taking Professional Communication each year has remained relatively stable over the past ten years, decreasing slightly from 374 students in 2003 to 340 students in 2012. However, there has been a significant change in the linguistic profile of these students, according to statistics compiled by the university's Data Management Unit. In 2003, only 27% of Professional Communication students were English additional-language speakers, while in 2012, 53% of students were. This is a slight decrease from a peak of 55% of students speaking English as an additional language in 2010. Thus, over the past ten years, English additional-language speakers have become the majority in the Professional Communication class. This poses a challenge for the way in which the course teaches business literacies in English.

This proportion of students speaking English as an additional language is likely to remain steady, if not grow, for the foreseeable future as a result of the university's efforts to redress the inequities of the past. These efforts are encoded in the university's Admissions Policy, the goal of which is "to achieve academic access and success based on social equity" (Rhodes University, 2010:3). In recent years, this emphasis on social equity has been realized as an effort to enrol more students from working-class backgrounds, who have typically received schooling at historically disadvantaged schools and thus in addition to speaking English as an additional language, also arrive at university with a vastly different background from students educated at historically advantaged schools. For these students, Professional Communication has the potential to be particularly empowering through opening access to the powerful literacies of business.

However, a significant number of students still speak English as a first language and have received a privileged education at historically advantaged schools. These students are likely to be resistant to Professional Communication, often viewing it incorrectly as a simple rehash of material they have already learnt at school. This has created challenges in working with such a diversity of students, providing epistemological access (Boughey, 2005) to those from disadvantaged backgrounds while pushing the more advantaged students to the realization that they need to develop their communicative competencies further.

In the midst of these changes in the South African educational system and in the institutional context of Rhodes University, it is no surprise that curricula at the university have also been changing. Some of these changes in the Commerce Faculty have been precipitated by changes in SAICA's Competency Framework (2010). Previous versions of this framework had stipulated a detailed curriculum that an Accounting degree leading to qualification as a chartered accountant, or CA(SA), needed to follow, including a very specific array of support courses. As a result of this, the number of credits required for a Bachelor of Commerce in Accounting was higher than for any other three-year degree at Rhodes University. Concerns had been raised about the time pressure that this placed on students following this curriculum.

The new SAICA Competency Framework (2010) replaced the detailed curriculum stipulations with an emphasis on competencies that need to be acquired during the course of a qualifying degree, making it possible for the credit load of the BCom (Accounting) to be reduced by following a more integrated approach towards the teaching and learning of what the Competency Framework names "pervasive qualities and skills" (SAICA, 2010:25), the competencies required of accountants that stretch beyond their disciplinary knowledge of Accounting as such. These include communicative competencies. The Competency Framework says of these skills,

> …. the acquisition of competencies cannot, in all cases, be compartmentalised into dedicated courses. Many competencies will be addressed across the curriculum and also, perhaps, in courses focused on that category of competency. Many of the pervasive qualities will, for example, be addressed across the curriculum (e.g. communication, problem solving, team work, time management) while some may be addressed in dedicated courses (e.g. legal concepts, IT) and also directly addressed in other courses.
>
> (SAICA 2010:16)

As a result of this, Rhodes University's Department of Accounting proposed, among other things, that acquisition of communicative competencies be integrated into the core Accounting courses, rather than being taught in Professional Communication as a separate course. We took this as an opportunity to investigate the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of teaching and learning communicative competencies in the university's Commerce curricula, in order to find a model that would be most appropriate in Rhodes University's changing context. In the following section, we report on two case studies from other South African universities that we investigated in this process.

5.   Theorizing Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Two South African Case Studies

As mentioned earlier, lessons can be learned from two South African cases in which language specialists collaborated with lecturers from content disciplines (referred to hereafter as "content

lecturers") in teaching communicative competencies. These case studies, described below, reveal the advantages and disadvantages of the *Integration* and *Informed Interdependence* models in contrast to the *Independence* model originally in effect at Rhodes University.

5.1.   The University of Cape Town (UCT) case study: from Independence to Integration

In the first case study (Angelil-Carter & Paxton, 1993), a Language Development Group was created to assist a variety of departments across each faculty at UCT with the teaching of communicative competencies within English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses. Over a period of about three years, this group moved steadily from applying an *Independence* model to applying CLIL in the form of the *Informed Interdependence* and *Integration* models, influenced largely by their reading of educational theorists such as Vygotsky (1962) and Cummins (1984). These theorists see language as inextricably tied to concept development. According to this view, for students to gain any benefit from language courses, there has to be some degree of integration with content subjects. Cummins (1984), in particular, argues that there is a distinction between basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP), meaning that students fluent in conversational English may still battle to apply their communicative competence in their studies or in the workplace. For this reason the EAP course in the Science faculty at UCT was eventually abandoned in favour of the full *Integration* model, and those in the Arts and Social Sciences and Commerce faculties moved to what we would term the *Informed Interdependence* model, by teaching basic content relating to those faculties along with communicative competencies.

5.2.   The Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) case study: challenges of Integration

The second case study, by Jacobs et al (2011), highlights some of the practical problems posed by the *Integration* model of CLIL. Most academics' mental 'default setting' is the *Independence* model, and so *Integration* requires overcoming many disciplinary barriers. Individual disciplines each have their own ontology, epistemology, typical research methodologies, systems of professional regulation, teaching styles, learning styles, values, academic styles and learning practices, and academics in these disciplines tend to feel a strong sense of commitment to each of these characteristics of the discipline. In short, one uses different literacy practices (as defined in Section 3) in each discipline. These different types of practices may be called disciplinary literacy practices. In most cases, academics' professional identities are strongly bound to these literacy practices. Attempts at interdisciplinary collaboration in teaching and learning may often therefore involve threats to their professional identities.

Disciplinary literacy practices can also conflict in ways that are not easily predictable. Jacobs et al (2011) report on an example at CPUT in which a class was coached by their communication lecturers for their final-year research project presentations. The communication lecturers encouraged them to 'sell' their projects as though they were selling solutions to clients. However, the science lecturers on the course were unimpressed, saying that the persuasiveness of the presentations detracted from their scientific rigour and professionalism.

5.3. *A two-part solution: finding "boundary objects" and opening up "discursive spaces"*

Jacobs et al (2011) propose a two-part solution for conflicts of disciplinary literacy practices based on their own ethnographic research, and drawing from other ethnographic studies of institutional culture. The first step of the solution is for lecturers to find boundary objects around which collaboration can take place. Boundary objects are issues or topics which are located at the boundary between the content discipline and teaching of communicative competencies. These may "include departmental or institutional projects such as the collaborative development of teaching materials, text books, team teaching programmes, joint tasks and integrative assessment approaches" (2011:14). In the CPUT example used above, the final-year research project presentations formed a boundary object between the communication lecturers and the science lecturers because they allowed the students to exhibit both the knowledge gained from their scientific research, and the communicative competencies taught by their communication lecturers.

Secondly, lecturers can open up "discursive spaces", that is, areas "where, in an environment that is non-threatening and free from the hierarchical lines of power operating within academic departments and faculties, [content lecturers and communication lecturers] can engage around the 'boundary object'" (2011:15). Such discursive spaces might take the form of regular meetings between content lecturers and communication lecturers, joint curriculum planning sessions, occasions where both the content and communication lecturers give feedback on student assignments together, or any other means of fostering productive interaction between the content lecturers and communication lecturers. As Jacobs et al (2011) point out, there are many vested interests at stake in any discussions regarding interdisciplinary collaboration, as departments stand to gain or lose funding depending on the ways in which student numbers are divided between them as part of the collaboration. These discussions also have the potential to threaten academics' professional identities, since as mentioned above, these are often bound to disciplinary literacy practices that must be combined or cast aside for the purposes of the collaboration. The more the participants in interdisciplinary collaboration seek to minimize

these threats in the discursive spaces they create, the more productive their collaboration is likely to be, because they will feel more at ease to propose creative means of teaching and learning across the disciplines.

We found Jacobs et al's (2011) assessment applicable to the context of Rhodes University. As will be made clear when we report in section 6 on our meetings with various departments in the Faculty of Commerce, each department has its own set of expectations of a course in communicative competencies. The literacy practices which are required in Commercial Law, for example, are vastly different from those used in Accounting or Economics.

5.4.   Application to the Rhodes University context

The most significant difference between the two case studies and the Rhodes University context is that while the communication lecturers in both of the case studies considered themselves primarily as teachers of *academic literacy practices*, the Professional Communication course at Rhodes University, as mentioned in section 3, aims to help students acquire *business literacy practices*. Academic literacy practices include essay writing and academic presentations, while the business literacy practices taught in the Professional Communication course include a focus on business writing for purposes of business correspondence such as letter, email and report writing as well as business presentations and the management of other workplace concerns, such as conflicts and recruitment processes. One distinct disadvantage to the *Integration* model, in the case of Commerce students for example, is that it holds the temptation for the communication lecturers to become academic literacy specialists, coaching students in the literacy that will enable them to perform well academically, but failing to teach the business literacy that will be required of those students in the workplace. This is because there is generally not enough space in the curricula of content subjects for the teaching or practice of business literacy practices; content lecturers are loath to allow communication lecturers a week to teach business report writing, for example, because they are under pressure to complete their own syllabi. Without the time and space to teach business literacies, communication lecturers can find their roles limited to helping students with their academic essays and other assignments.

While the UCT case study highlights the problem with the *Independence* model, namely that students do not learn to apply their communicative competencies to their other academic disciplines, the CPUT case study implies a problem with implementing the *Integration* model in formative qualifications, such as those at Rhodes University. Because teaching of communicative competence integrated with

academic disciplines tends towards academic literacy practices rather than business literacy practices, it may not equip students to apply their communicative competencies beyond their academic disciplines to the workplace. These two problems are illustrated graphically in Figure 1. The severity of both of these problems is magnified when one considers Teichler's (1999) findings that higher education needs to interact more with the world of work in order to remain relevant to it in a context of changing job requirements.

Insert Figure 1 here

It should be noted that this situation may not be problematic in *vocational qualifications*, such as most of those offered by CPUT, but is so in the *formative qualifications* offered by Rhodes University. In vocational qualifications, students' academic literacies are more strongly related to the career they may eventually pursue than they are in formative qualifications. For example, the engineering reports produced for academic purposes in an engineering qualification should be fairly similar to those that would be commissioned in the workplace, whereas in a formative Commerce qualification, students are required to write academic essays in Management and Economics, using a genre which would seldom, if ever, be required in the workplace. Thus, while in vocational qualifications the disjuncture between academic and business literacies might not pose a great problem for implementation of the *Integration* model, it certainly does in formative qualifications.

The *Informed Interdependence* model offers a solution to this problem by making the links between the content disciplines and communicative competencies explicit so that the competencies acquired in the communication course are applied in the content disciplines, while continuing to teach the business literacy practices that will enable students to apply their communicative competencies to the workplace. This solution is illustrated in Figure 2. The realization of this solution using the *Informed Interdependence* model must involve finding boundary objects shared between communication lecturers and different content disciplines, such as assignments in which both content knowledge and communicative competencies can be assessed or modules in which joint teaching of communication and content can occur. It must also involve opening up discursive spaces for productive exchange about how these boundary objects can be used to the greatest advantage.

Insert Figure 2 here

In the following sections, we record how we have searched for such boundary objects and discursive

spaces through interaction with members of staff from various Commerce content subjects.

6.   Engagement with Other Commerce Departments

In order to find out how members of the Faculty of Commerce view the Professional Communication course and how willing they and their departments would be to contribute towards the collaborative teaching of communicative competences we did three things, which we report on below. We met with most departments in the Commerce faculty, as well as with those who teach Commercial Law in the Law faculty. Having drafted a proposal to the Commerce faculty, we then met with the head of the Department of Accounting.

6.1.   Meetings with other Commerce departments

In our meetings with representatives of the different Commerce departments we presented the three models of teaching communicative competencies. All members of the Economics and Management departments (with one exception) as well as the Commercial Law lecturers favoured the *Informed Interdependence* model.   The Information Systems department, by contrast, favoured the *Independence* model, as they felt that the *Informed Interdependence* model would create an unnecessary increase in workloads (including administration) for the departments involved. However, they agreed to participate in a pilot project to test the feasibility of the *Informed Interdependence* model.

All departments felt that implementing the *Integration* model was undesirable and that the following outcomes were possible, were communicative competencies taught in a separate course, as was the case with Professional Communication:

- it would limit the need for these competencies to be taught in other subjects, allowing more time for subject-specific content to be taught in these subjects
- it would reduce the chances of the students experiencing repetition in all of their subjects
- it would ensure that all Commerce students receive the same level and quality of tuition on communicative competencies.

In light of the strong support for the *Informed Interdependence* model, our discussions turned to how this model could be implemented with the aid of 'boundary objects' around which collaboration could occur. Three such boundary objects emerged as key opportunities for future collaboration.

- Both Commercial Law and Professional Communication teach sections on plain language, as

the National Credit Act and Consumer Protection Act prescribe that plain language should be used in a wide variety of business documents. These two pieces of legislation thus form a potentially useful boundary object between the two courses.

- The Department of Management's second-year course includes a module on Marketing, which forms a useful boundary object with Professional Communication's content on persuasive communication. Management invited Professional Communication to give a guest lecture in Management 2 on the topic of using language persuasively, which we accepted as part of a pilot project testing the *Informed Interdependence* model. (This lecture is described in 7.2).

- All Professional Communication students complete a group report assignment in which they report on a simple piece of research they have conducted, and then give a spoken presentation on this report. The topic of this assignment could easily be made to relate to the curricula of the Commerce content subjects, giving students the opportunity to recontextualize material learned in one of their content subjects into genres that are frequently used in business literacies, namely reports and spoken presentations (Bernstein, 2003). We agreed with the departments that we met with that this would also assist students to see the relevance of Professional Communication to their other subjects. Thus we asked the departments of Economics, Management and Information Systems to devise a group report assignment topic for Professional Communication. The interdisciplinary collaboration engendered through use of these group assignment topics played a significant role in the pilot project we embarked on to evaluate the effectiveness of the *Informed Interdependence* model, as described in Section 7.

Following our meetings with the departments, the three opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration mentioned above were built into a proposal in which we argued that the *Informed Interdependence* model should be tried out in a pilot project. This proposal was presented to the Commerce Faculty Board and met with widespread acceptance, although it was acknowledged that we were still in the process of engaging with the Accounting department regarding the place of communicative competencies in the Accounting curriculum – which we describe next.

6.2. *Engagement with Accounting department*

On reading our draft proposal for implementing the *Informed Interdependence* model of teaching communicative competences, the staff of the Department of Accounting agreed to pursue the *Informed Interdependence* model. As a result, they proposed a new second-year course, *Introduction to Professional Accounting*, which would include a module on communicative competencies

developed collaboratively by the Accounting and English Language and Linguistics departments and taught annually in four weeks of one term, with Commerce students following curricula other than the BCom (Accounting) completing the full Professional Communication course during another two terms. They suggested that a variety of sections in the Professional Communication course should be omitted for the new (reduced) course.

Our response was to argue, in keeping with Hymes' (1972) conception of communicative competence, for a holistic approach which ensured that Rhodes University's Accounting students, given their varying backgrounds, received the best possible education in these competencies. We argued, moreover, that the approach taken should teach not only *business literacy* but also inculcate in students *critical language awareness* (Fairclough, 1992), hence we argued for the retention of the sections that the Accounting department had suggested could be omitted. We argued that at least one term of sustained contact sessions was required since such communicative competencies are not mastered simply at a theoretical level, but need practice and then need to be assessed holistically. When it became evident that a full term of contact sessions on communicative competencies could not fit into the Introduction to Professional Accounting course, it was agreed that a new one-term course named *Professional Communication for Accountants* should be created.

In addition, the staff of the Department of Accounting indicated that they wanted Accounting students to complete a long assignment, jointly devised, scaffolded and assessed by Professional Communication and Accounting lecturers. We welcomed this possibility, as it would create a new boundary object in which we could engage with the Accounting department staff and students to demonstrate the direct relevance of Professional Communication to the practice of Accounting. This assignment, the Integrated Tax Opinion Assignment, would be run in the *Introduction to Taxation* course, which Accounting students would be required to complete in their second year. It would assess the writing of tax opinions, a specialist genre with which accountants should be familiar. For the Integrated Tax Opinion Assignment, 40% of the mark would be allocated to content, assessed by staff of the Accounting department; 40% would be allocated to presentation, assessed by the Professional Communication lecturers and tutors, and 20% to peer assessment in which group members would rate each other on their contributions to the group assignment.

The outcome of our interaction with the Accounting department was a joint proposal to the Commerce faculty presented by both departments. This proposal met with almost unanimous approval, and it was agreed that it should be implemented from 2013 onwards. What became apparent from our

engagement in setting up this new course with the Accounting department was that there were variant understandings of each other's roles and intentions, and the need to guard disciplinary territories. In many ways, this was unsurprising, as Jacobs et al (2011) point out that many factors impede understanding between content lecturers and language (or communication) lecturers in CLIL. Although disagreement occurred in our discussions with the Accounting department, we experienced this disagreement as extremely productive in creating an opportunity to come to a better understanding of each other's positions, and in ultimately precipitating an agreement which fosters *Informed Interdependence* to the benefit of students.

7.   Pilot Project

The pilot project in which we evaluated the effectiveness of implementing the *Informed Interdependence* model took place in two parts. In the first part, the model was phased into the Professional Communication course in the second semester of 2011; in the second part, Professional Communication for Accountants and the Integrated Tax Opinion Assignment were run for the first time in the first semester of 2013. In the section that follows, we reflect on each of these parts of the pilot project in turn, focusing particularly on students' and tutors' interests and their reception of the changes to the curriculum.

7.1.   *Informed Interdependence in the Professional Communication course*

In the second semester of 2011, *Informed Interdependence* was introduced in the Professional Communication course in two ways. Firstly, two departments, namely Information Systems and Economics, set topics for the Professional Communication integrated report assignment. The topic contributed by Information Systems asked students to investigate how a business of their choice could use virtual collaboration and social networking to maximize their profits, while the topic contributed by Economics asked students to assess attitudes to financial globalization among students and local businesspeople. These topics helped students to apply what they had learned in Professional Communication to issues and debates in their content disciplines.

Secondly, one of the authors gave a guest lecture in the Management 2 course on persuasive communication in marketing. This lecture also aimed to show students how material from the Professional Communication course was relevant to marketing.

The assignment topics set by the departments of Information Systems and Economics were generally well-received by students, tutors and lecturers from other departments. Some Professional

Communication students commented in the course evaluation that it was a very good idea to have related the topics to other disciplines. One group wrote, "Integration with other subjects was interesting." Another group wrote, "Report topics were relevant, layout and research was different to what we've ever done before." The tutors commented that the students were more enthusiastic about the integrated assignment as it related to their Commerce content subjects. Furthermore, the students appeared to take the assignment more seriously. As far as marking the reports was concerned, the tutors commented that the new topics were more interesting.

However, both students and tutors also had negative comments about the integrated report assignment. The students commented that the topics for the report were limiting since the students worked in groups and in most cases, one or two members did not take the same subjects as the rest of the group members and were therefore unfamiliar with the content covered in the assignment topic chosen. Some students complained that the assignments were more difficult than in the first semester: one group wrote, "Topics were more technical than last semester, and were excessively harder." The integrated assignment topics are indeed more technical, but it was one of our aims to increase the level of difficulty fractionally from the previous assignments, so these comments in fact illustrate the value of the new topics provided by content disciplines.

One group of students complained that a report topic on financial globalization "was too similar to Economics": it did not differ enough from the topic of an Economics assignment that students were also completing at the time. Tutors also commented that the integrated report seemed like repetition or duplication of work and merely led to self-plagiarism of the Commerce essays. This is unfortunate as it indicates that those students had misinterpreted the task. What the Professional Communication integrated report assignment requires is for content from another discipline to be recontexualized in a different genre for a different audience (Bernstein, 2003). In future this needs to be made clearer to the students to avoid the impression that this task merely requires them to duplicate work.

One tutor commented that marking the assignments in the first semester was easier than doing so in the second semester as the tutors had to become familiar with some complex economic "jargon" in order to mark the integrated assignments. This concern highlights how *Informed Interdependence*, or any form of CLIL, for that matter, requires language specialists to learn disciplinary knowledge from content subjects, and content specialists to learn more about language (Jacobs et al, 2011). This is not necessarily a disadvantage of CLIL, but offers an opportunity for language specialists as well as content specialists to expand their range of competencies.

To summarize, the new Integrated Report Assignment topics were successful in helping students to build links between Professional Communication and their content subjects. They demonstrate that care needs to be taken in explaining to students how there is a qualitative difference between the business genres of texts produced in Professional Communication and the academic genres produced in other subjects, in order to prevent the problem of students simply self-plagiarizing work from those subjects rather than recontextualizing it. The new assignments challenged students and tutors alike to integrate content knowledge with communicative competencies.

7.2. Informed Interdependence in Content Subjects: the Management 2 Guest Lecture

One of the authors adapted insights from his research on how powerful knowledge is produced in Parliament (see Siebörger, 2012) into a new guest lecture entitled "Building Influential Ideas", which he presented to the Management 2 students. The lecture seemed to meet with a lukewarm response from the students, as they did not ask many questions, respond readily to questions asked in the lecture or otherwise show much enthusiasm for what was presented. Nevertheless, this produced valuable insights on the considerations that need to be taken into account when teaching according to the *Informed Interdependence* model.

Although the main lecturer for the Marketing module had assured students that the guest lecture would be examinable, students appeared sceptical as to the examinability of the content because it did not come directly from their textbook for the module, as most of the other lecture content in the module had. For the most part, the module lecturer followed lecture slides distributed with the textbook in these other lectures. It appeared that students experienced difficulty integrating the knowledge taught in the lecture with the rest of their course material. This led us to conclude that the lecture would have been more helpful for the students if he had adhered more closely to the textbook's content, altering and nuancing it in places to show the benefits of the approach taken in Professional Communication. For example, the lecture could cross-refer back to principles taught in Professional Communication on topics such as the persuasive use of visual information in combination with written text, to show the relevance of these principles to effective marketing.

This experience demonstrates that it is difficult to assess the particular needs of a class if a communication lecturer simply does one or two guest lectures in a particular course and then leaves it. This in turn shows the limits of the *Integration* model, in that if communication lecturers have to teach in a number of different courses, time constraints make it difficult for them to keep up-to-date

with the needs and cultures of all these courses. Even in the *Informed Interdependence* model, collaboration with staff members teaching on the course does not fully allow one to assess these needs. It is not enough for content and language specialists to engage briefly around one boundary object; more sustained contact is required. This is also clearly demonstrated in Jacobs et al's (2011) work. The benefits of such sustained contact were shown clearly in the collaboration between the departments of Accounting and English Language and Linguistics in the Professional Communication for Accountants course and the subsequent Integrated Tax Opinion Assignment.

7.3. *Informed Interdependence in Professional Communication for Accountants and the Integrated Tax Opinion Assignment*

In the first term of 2013, Professional Communication for Accountants was presented for the first time as a separate course from Professional Communication, and the Integrated Tax Opinion Assignment was run for the first time in the second term. The course and assignment both met with great success in helping students to develop their communicative competencies and apply them to their practice as developing accountants.

The course was shortened from two terms to one term, mainly through removing the contact sessions relating to the scaffolding and assessment of the Integrated Report Assignment, as this was replaced by the Integrated Tax Opinion Assignment which took place in the Introduction to Taxation course. An unprepared individual spoken presentation assignment was also removed, as accountants were deemed to have less need to develop impromptu speaking competencies than those in other business careers. Also omitted were contact sessions on job searches, CVs, covering letters and job interviews (as guidance on these is readily available through the university's career centre); graphic presentation of information (as this is covered in the Information Systems 2 course); proposal writing (as this was deemed not to be an essential genre for accountants to learn); and branding (as this was also not deemed an essential competency for accountants).

The course was adapted to the particular needs of Accounting students by ensuring that tutorial discussion questions related directly to matters that accountants would be likely to encounter in their careers. For example, in a tutorial on intercultural business communication, students were given a reading on how culture affects the differences in accounting standards from one country to another, and were asked to discuss what they would do to understand these differences in accounting principles if they had to audit a set of financial statements from a different country.

Assessment activities such as the Business Letter and Email Assignment and test were also based on scenarios that accountants would be likely to find themselves in. In the Business Letter and Email Assignment, students had to take on the role of auditors, writing a letter to request an appointment with a business employee to gather information on suspected irregularities in that business's records. They then had to write an email to the business's CEO, recommending that he commission a full forensic audit into the business's activities. These scenarios formed the boundary objects that participants in the course could use to reflect on how effective communication is essential to the practice of accounting.

To aid in making the course more relevant to accountants, we diversified our tutoring complement for the course. In previous years, our tutors have been drawn from the English Language and Linguistics third year and Honours classes, but this year a student who achieved excellent results in Professional Communication and had taken Accounting 2 was appointed as one of the six tutors. She helped to familiarize the tutors from the English Language and Linguistics department with some disciplinary knowledge from Accounting, and was asked to check all the tutorial discussion questions and many assessment tasks to ensure that these reflected concepts relating to Accounting accurately. Her presence in tutors' meetings and her comments on tutorial discussion questions opened up a new discursive space in which discussions of communicative competencies' application to the Accounting profession could take place.

Students' feedback on the course was overwhelmingly positive, far more so than for any semester of Professional Communication that the authors have been involved in. One question on the students' course evaluation questionnaire asked students to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement "I found the course extremely relevant to my career", on a Likert scale where 1 stood for "I do not agree with this statement at all" and 5 stood for "I completely agree with the statement." The average of all students' responses was 4,6, indicating that the relevance of the course to students' careers as accountants was clear.

A few verbatim comments supplied by students in an electronic course evaluation questionnaire illustrate how the students had felt encouraged to apply what they had learned in the course to their practice as accountants:

> The course is designed for accountants and how [they] can best fit in the business environment therefore it will give me a better assessment of myself and how i can improve

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in order to cope in the business world. It was very helpful.

> The course is necessary because it is not just about balancing books only but also being able to convey fluently and clearly that information inorder to influence sound decision making to people.

As can be expected, there were also a few more critical comments about the course, such as the following:

> i found the work that we were doing did not push me at all in the way of finding out more about the subject matter learnt and i thought it was a bit of a waste of time in the end. can't really recommend any suggestions as i feel for some it might prove helpful. i have grown up in a very english background with my mother teaching english and that is the reason for my feelings.

This comment shows that despite the efforts made to demonstrate that Professional Communication does not simply teach the English language in isolation, there are still some who see it primarily as a language course. One area in which the course can improve, therefore, is in catering for the diversity of students (mentioned in section 4) by stimulating English first-language speakers to develop their business literacies further. Northedge (2003) points out that working with diversity is a challenge for all courses and lecturers in higher education.

A week of the Introduction to Taxation course was dedicated to scaffolding the assignment for students. During this week, we gave two guest lectures to students on the textual conventions that define a tax opinion and the documents related to them. We taught from a set of notes on this topic prepared by a Tax Accounting lecturer, but elaborated on these notes by applying material taught in Professional Communication for Accountants to this particular genre. A Tax Accounting lecturer gave a third lecture on the specifics of the assignment topic, giving examples of the type of situation requiring a tax opinion and providing guidance on how to find the information needed to complete the assignment. Finally, we facilitated a tutorial session in which students had a chance to practise writing a tax opinion and to plan their assignments.

The first Integrated Tax Opinion Assignment, while not without its teething problems, was a success. In the module evaluation questionnaire for Introduction to Taxation, one student commented that the assignment "was helpful in integrating aspects from the different subjects together". Another commented, "It was helpful because it gave me a feel of how to handle things in the business environment". There were, however, a number of students who asked for the mark allocation for the assignment to be changed to give the content a higher weighting than presentation. This feedback

could be seen as a sign that these students had missed one of the important pedagogical aims of the assignment, namely to show that it is not enough merely to present accurate information to clients, but that care must be taken to communicate this information in the clearest and most user-friendly way possible. However, it also reflects that as Accounting students, these students have had more experience in practising the core Accounting competencies than they have had in presenting information to clients.

The Tax Accounting lecturers were very pleased with the way in which the assignment had taken place. There was a concern that many of the students used too much specialized legal terminology in their assignments without explaining it in terms the clients would understand. The Tax Accounting lecturers agreed that the students need to be able to refer to the legal terminology but also explain it to clients in plain language and that this should be emphasized to the students in the assignment brief. This lesson demonstrates that while the first Integrated Tax Opinion Assignment was well-received both by students and the Tax Accounting lecturers, it also provided plenty of opportunities for learning about how the assignment can be improved in future.

Professional Communication for Accountants and the Integrated Tax Opinion Assignment are our most successful and best developed practical implementations of the *Informed Interdependence* model thus far. We have used the course and the assignment as boundary objects that show the relevance of communicative competencies to accounting practice, and have opened discursive spaces in which students, tutors and lecturers can work on these boundary objects together in an environment in which both content and language specialists are treated with mutual respect (Jacobs et al, 2011). In so doing, they show how the principles of CLIL can be recontextualized successfully to suit the complex and changing context of a specific curriculum.

8.   Conclusion

In this article we have described the complexities, challenges and successes of our process of reviewing the Professional Communication curriculum at Rhodes University to present it as a case study of how applied linguistics can be recontextualized to fit the dimensions of a specific educational context (Bernstein, 2003). We showed, in Section 3, how we recontextualized Hymes' (1972) view of communicative competence, via Canale & Swain (1980), as an organizing principle for the original Professional Communication course. We also recontextualized aspects of the New Literacy Studies (Lea & Street, 1998) and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992) in the content of this course.

When it became clear that Professional Communication needed to change to adapt to its changing context, we investigated a variety of approaches to CLIL (e.g. Angelil-Carter & Paxton, 1993; Jacobs et al 2011). We have sought to problematize a simplistic one-size-fits-all application of the *Integration* model. Instead, our central argument is that while CLIL is a well-founded approach to the teaching and learning of communicative competencies in content curricula, it needs to be modified for application in a diversity of contexts.

This can be illustrated by comparing the case studies from UCT and CPUT described in Section 5 with our situation as described in this article. In each of these three situations, applied linguistics has been recontextualized in a different way to suit the context: in UCT, it persuaded English for Academic Purposes lecturers to adopt the *Integration* and *Informed Interdependence* models; in CPUT, it was used to help communication lecturers overcome the challenges posed by the *Integration* model. In our experience, it has led us to investigate which model of learning could best allow us to respond to changes in our context.

We have found that the *Informed Interdependence* model, a recontextualization of CLIL, offers our students and us the flexibility that is required in such a dynamic context. It is particularly adaptable to the diverse curricular needs of students such as those at Rhodes University, where students do not for the most part follow focused vocational programmes but choose from a variety of courses in formative degrees. It is also responsive to the needs of students from a diversity of backgrounds, who possess different sets of literacies on entry to university.

In formative degrees, full *Integration* could lead to unnecessary duplication, with communication lecturers over-extended by having to repeat the same content in many subjects (so that all students have an opportunity to develop their communicative competencies). Alternatively, communicative competencies could be developed only in selected content subjects, in which case some students would miss out on the opportunity to develop these competencies because they did not take these subjects. At the same time, full *Integration* introduces a tendency to focus on developing students' academic literacies, while *Informed Interdependence* allows more space for students to develop their business literacies for their careers, while integrating these with disciplinary knowledge.

This is not to say that *Informed Interdependence* is the easy option; far from it, it may entail challenges and confrontation, as illustrated in the account in Section 6 of our contact with colleagues in Commerce departments at our university. As Jacobs et al (2011) show, this confrontation is common

in interdisciplinary engagement, and can be surmounted through finding boundary objects between disciplines and opening discursive spaces for collaboration. We have shown that initial confrontation can be productive if it is handled well, resulting in a compromise solution or "third way" that is pedagogically more satisfactory than either side's initial proposals. It was a confrontation between us and our Accounting department that was largely responsible for our process of recurriculation. That confrontation first led us to propose the *Informed Interdependence* model as a feasible way in which to implement CLIL in our context, and to begin the difficult task of finding boundary objects and discursive spaces in which collaboration could happen.

The set of educational "experiments" that we embarked on as a result of this, as described in Section 7, have reminded us that *Informed Interdependence* is most successful as a process of sustained engagement with fewer academic disciplines rather than a hit-and-miss engagement with many different disciplines. Our experience with Professional Communication for Accountants and the Integrated Tax Opinion Assignment, while far from perfect, has demonstrated that well-conceptualized interdisciplinary collaboration is possible, and offers a far richer learning experience for students than either a communication or a content discipline could offer on its own.

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Communicative Competence			
Grammatical Competence Knowledge of the rules of **language**: grammar, spelling, pronunciation and the meanings of words	**Sociolinguistic Competence**		**Strategic Competence** Knowledge of how to use communication to achieve one's **goals**
	Sociocultural Competence Knowledge of what is **appropriate** to say or write in a given context	**Discourse Competence** Knowledge of how to **structure** and put together written and spoken texts	
Grammar for business writing **Effective business writing** **Plain language**	**English in the workplace** **Style and tone in business communication** **Politeness strategies in business communication** **Intercultural communication in the workplace** **Sexism and racism in business communication**	**Business letters, memos and emails** **Business reports** **Curricula Vitae** **Prepared spoken presentations in business** **Unprepared speaking in business** **Business meetings**	**Persuasive communication in business** **Branding** **Strategies in business conflict negotiation** **Interviews** **Visual communication in business messages**

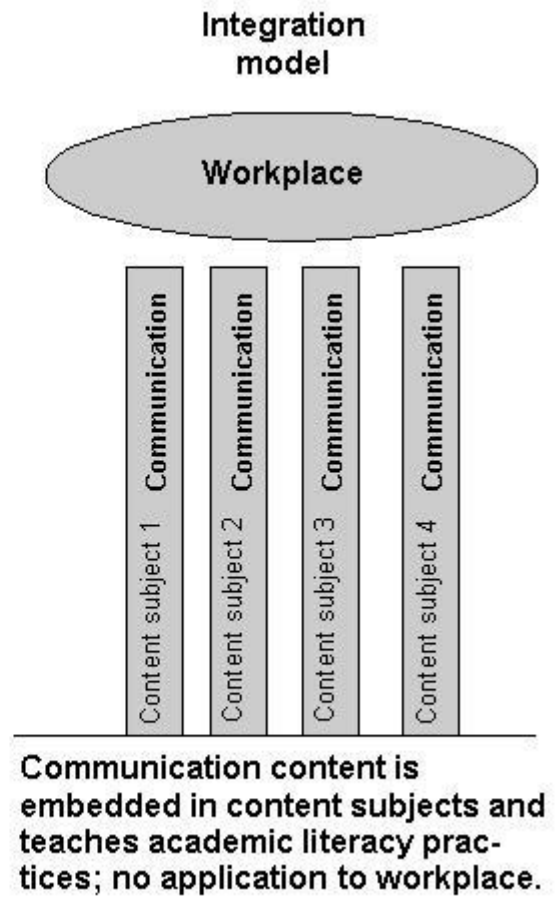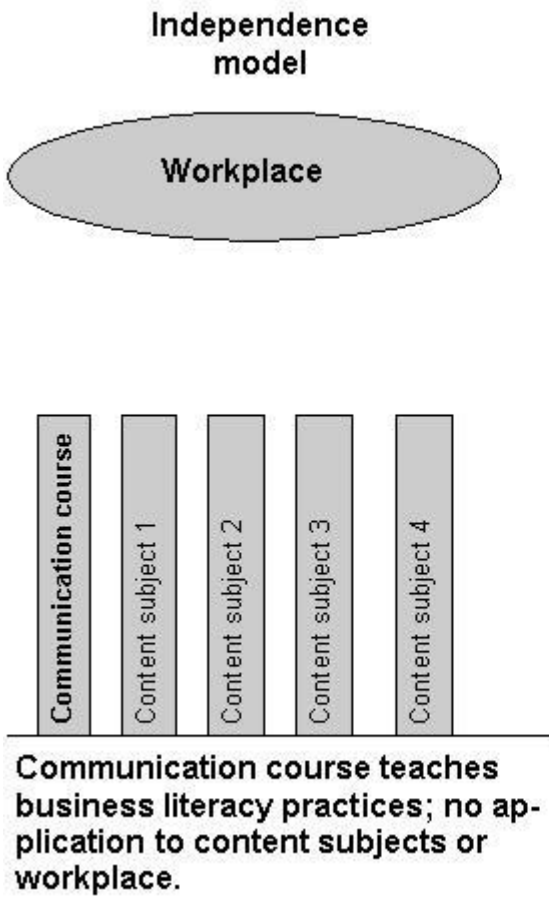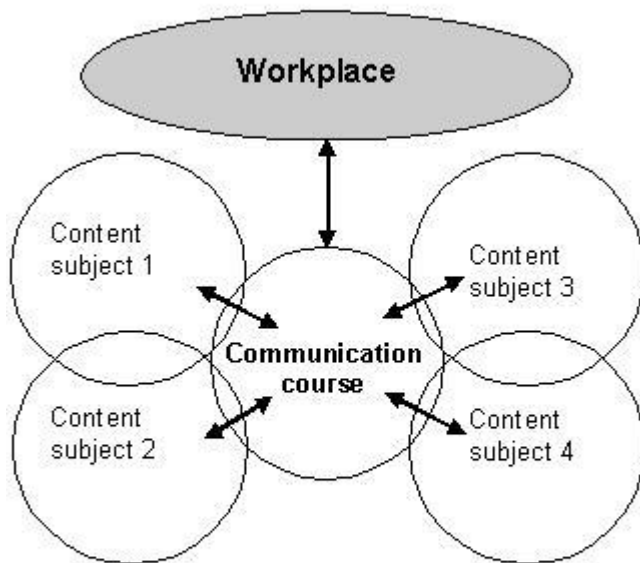Table 1: Topics covered in the Professional Communication course

Figure 1: Problems associated with the *Independence* and *Integration* models

Informed Interdependence model

Workplace

Content subject 1

Content subject 3

Communication course

Content subject 2

Content subject 4

Communication course teaches business literacy practices; competencies are applied in content subjects and in the workplace.

Figure 2: The *Informed Interdependence* model