

Why a Unit for Academic Language and Practice Should be a Part of a University

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WHY A UNIT FOR ACADEMIC LANGUAGE AND PRACTICE SHOULD BE A PART OF A UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

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Abstract

The main task of a university library is to serve the teaching, learning and research needs of staff and students in higher education. However, the lecturers, students and researchers need more than a collection of sources of information provided by librarians. Globalisation in general and the universities' internationalisation policy have led to a large international researcher and student population and thus increased requirements when it comes to language proficiency, intercultural competence and teaching and learning in a multicultural environment. As a result of internationalisation and the principle of widening participation, the student population has become more heterogeneous. In 2016, the participation rate for Norwegian students (age range 19-24) in higher education in Norway was 35.1%.

The Centre for Academic Language and Practice is located in the University Library at OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University. The centre's mission is to contribute to the quality of education and professional development by increasing the academic literacy of staff and students. Academic literacy is defined as receptive and productive skills to participate, learn, guide, teach and publish in an academic context. The Centre for Academic Language and Practice offers linguistic and pedagogical support and conducts research in the fields of academic literacy and pedagogy targeting students in higher education. This paper will look into the history and the portfolio of the Centre for Academic Language and Practice and illustrate why its competence and type of work belongs in a university library.

Keywords

Academic Literacy, University Library, Writing in Higher Education, Internationalisation, Parallel Language, Multilingualism, Diversity in Higher Education

Introduction

OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University (OsloMet) has a student body of 20530 students and 2157 employees. The numbers are increasing. The university offers a unique range of professional programmes that qualify students for professions that will contribute to future welfare and value creation. OsloMet has four faculties. The Faculty of Social Sciences, the Faculty of Health Sciences, the Faculty of Education and International Studies and the Faculty of Technology, Art and Design. OsloMet also has three centres: Centre for Welfare and Labour Research, Study of Professions and National Centre for Multicultural Education. In the University Library there is a fourth center located – Centre for Academic Language and Practice (CALP). OsloMet consists of three campuses. Two of them are just outside Oslo, in Akershus and Bærum, and the third and largest campus is located in the centre of Oslo City. In Oslo, more than 33.1% of the population are immigrants or Norwegian born with immigrant parents (Statistics Norway, 2018). Many of them apply to OsloMet. They, together with our international students and employees, contribute to the university's multicultural and multilingual environment.

OsloMet is not only responsible for educating highly qualified professional practitioners for the welfare state, but also for supporting students to develop linguistic and academic skills in order to succeed in their studies and working life, and to enable the staff to develop their skills in teaching,

research and dissemination, nationally and internationally. This paper will look into the history and the portfolio of the CALP and illustrate why its competence and type of work belongs in a university library.

Background

CALP comprises three former academic entities that all worked on language, learning and knowledge dissemination in academia and that shared the same theoretical basis. However, they differed in that they had different target groups and thus also different programmes and work methods. The three entities were English for Academic Purposes, whose target group was researchers, Diversity in Pedagogical Practise that had teaching and research staff as its target group and the Learning Support Centre that targeted students. These three entities had the same overriding goal: to improve programme quality and academic development by increasing students and employees' academic literacy. Academic literacy is defined as receptive and productive skills to participate, learn, guide, teach and publish in an academic context.

The Learning Support Centre was established as a permanent service for students in 2011. It was located in the University Library and was the result of educational development work initiated and led by Diversity in Pedagogical Practise. The goal was to improve programme quality for the students in general, and for students with Norwegian as their second language in particular. Until 2012, Diversity in Pedagogical Practise and English for Academic Purposes were under the Centre for Educational Research and Development. When the Centre for Educational Research and Development was closed in 2012, the entities chose to become part of the University Library and formed CALP. This was not a random move. The University Library provides services for the whole university – for students, lecturers and researchers – as does CALP.

Norwegian universities, like other universities, are international arenas. The proportion of international students and staff is growing (Maximova-Mentzoni et al. 2016). An example of this is that although the programmes at OsloMet mainly educate candidates for and provide research on the Norwegian welfare state, it is international by nature and both its students and staff have different academic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This means, among other things, that English is being used more and more as the working language on programmes and in research. Globalisation and internationalisation have made their mark on higher education, and more students and staff thereby need competence in intercultural communication, English for Academic Purposes, the Norwegian language and Norwegian language culture in academia.

The fact that more people are taking higher education than ever before (Statistics Norway, 2017a), also contributes to making the student population more heterogeneous. Students come from all over Norway and from further afield to study at OsloMet. Some of them are immigrants or Norwegian-born with immigrant parents. Some of them come straight from upper secondary school, some have studied before, while others may have worked for years and have had their prior learning and work experience assessed. In other words, the student body is very complex with respect to work experience, education and cultural and linguistic background, but also with respect to age. Norwegian students are among the oldest in Europe – every fourth student is aged 30 or more (Keute, 2018).

The high average age indicates that many students have a lot of life knowledge, which can in itself be an important learning resource in their studies. However, this also means that some students are not used to studying, and have not been in a formal learning situation for a long time. Many of them are unsure about what studying entails and whether they will be able to study (Jonsmoen, 2015). Most of them have commitments outside their studies. Many have children, and as many as 33% of the full-time students work alongside their studies (Statistics Norway, 2017b). Paid work and other commitments mean many students are pressed for time, and they thus need to learn in a goal-oriented and effective manner.

The proportion who complete degrees within the nominal length of study is just below 40% at bachelor's level and slightly higher at master's level (the Ministry of Education and Research, 2017a). In 2013, Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HiOA, now OsloMet)

assumed a drop-out rate of 43.4% (Tønnessen, 2013), and there are differences in the completion rates between different programmes, between genders, between ethnic minorities and between minority and majority backgrounds (Andersen, 2012; Andersen & Skaarer-Kreutz, 2007). Studies at HiOA have also shown that many students with Norwegian as their second language encounter greater challenges in connection with completing their studies than first language users (Greek 2002; Greek & Jonsmoen, 2012, 2007; Jonsmoen 2008a, 2008b). In addition, we must acknowledge that not all the students who start a programme are motivated enough to complete it, or are suitable for the programme. A certain drop-out level is natural, but we live in a society that needs a highly-educated workforce, and there are both social and personal costs when students fail to complete their studies. Increased student throughput and students completing their studies within the nominal length of time are therefore goals. Measures must be implemented to encourage students to complete their studies within the nominal length of time: teaching, supervision and other educational services must be adapted to the students and their needs. Such adaptation requires lecturers to have pedagogical competence that enables them to facilitate diversity. CALP helps teachers to develop such competence.

Many programmes of professional study have been incorporated into academia in Norway (Messel, 2015; Osland, 2018). This applies in particular to health and social care programmes, e.g. nursing, and teaching, e.g. pre-school teaching. Students must write more than they used to and teaching and research staff must publish more than before. Increased academisation and digitalisation (the Ministry of Education and Research 2017b) contributes to new educational and pedagogical practices.

Higher education in Norway is characterised by a socio-cultural view of learning. Learning is seen as a social practice – you learn from and together with others. Cooperating with fellow students and with colleagues is thus unavoidable. In this socio-cultural understanding, knowledge and the individual are seen as part of a context and cannot be understood outside it. Both interaction and cooperation are seen as being vital to learning. Socio-cultural learning theory claims that knowledge is situated. Knowledge depends on the culture it is part of and is incorporated into a historical and cultural context (Dysthe, 1999). It is in this context that CALP operates.

CALP works with linguistic practices in academia, which explains the name. ‘Academic’ because CALP is limited to higher education, pertaining research institutes and to academics and students. ‘Language’ because CALP is concerned with oral and written text. ‘Practice’ because it deals with linguistic acts – i.e. exercising language. In other words, a fancy way of saying ‘language use in higher education and research’. But the name CALP is more than just that. It shows that distance, albeit a linguistic distance, can be a good way of taking a critical look at what you are part of.

CALP’s goal is to improve the quality of programmes and academic development through relevant research and services that help to increase students and staff’s academic literacy. CALP’s activities take place in cooperation with expert communities at the faculty and centre, and comprise:

- R&D activity of relevance to OsloMet and the centre’s core activity
- courses, guidance, workshops to develop students and staff’s competence in academic and Norwegian and English profession-oriented language practices
- support for pedagogical practice in a multicultural and international learning environment

Research and Development

The CALP research field is language as a tool for learning and working in academia. When we look at the language in use in higher education and research, we are forced to acknowledge the linguistic diversity in action. Every subject has its own text cultures with pertaining genres and specialist terminology. In reality, there is parallel language use at the university. OsloMet’s Language Policy Guidelines state that: ‘In parallel with Norwegian, English is used as the main language of international work’ (OsloMet a), and the guidelines for information in English at HiOA state that ‘the university college’s international target groups shall receive information in English. HiOA shall therefore have an increased focus on parallel language use and the use of English in communication’ (OsloMet b). The main guideline for using Norwegian and English is that the

language that is most expedient in the given situation should be used. However, if both Norwegian and English are to be used effectively as working languages, many of us will have to improve our language skills. The language in use has an impact on both our day-to-day work and social interaction. 'I freeze when anyone speaks to me in Norwegian,' one of our colleagues said at one of the Norwegian courses run by CALP. Many of our international colleagues only use English as their working language, and cannot converse on everyday topics in Norwegian. We also see that many employees whose first language is Norwegian find it difficult and thus also uncomfortable to speak English in both academic and social contexts, which leads to them avoiding situations where they may have to speak English (Jonsmoen, Greek, & Johansen, 2017).

CALP, like many other fields of expertise, finds itself in the intersection between a number of different scientific disciplines. CALP publishes in peer reviewed journals in the fields of intercultural communication, migration, second languages, writing in higher education, literature, pedagogy, gender research, action research and e-learning. CALP draws on linguistic knowledge and methods – i.e. the study of language as a system and means of communication. In particular, CALP uses knowledge from text linguistics, which deals with how meaningful content is structured in different ways depending on the communication situation, and sociolinguistics, which deals with variation in language in the context of social factors such as gender and class, and covers, among other things, the study of multilingualism and language planning. CALP has, for example, looked at the interaction in heterogeneous study groups, and initiated a project where students are personal language trainers for fellow students who wish to improve their oral proficiency in Norwegian. Both of these studies touch upon the field of intercultural communication. CALP now has a project that is in its start-up phase that aims to increase understanding of how to achieve equal interaction between international staff and their Norwegian colleagues in an academic work community.

CALP also uses methods and knowledge from the field of literary science. Among other things, CALP uses literary science methods to explore the field English for Academic Purposes and academic writing in a foreign language, which English is for the majority of staff and students at OsloMet. Learning a new language means both learning the language's system (syntax, semantics, phonology) and how to use the language. To be able to study, work and publish, you have to master the language at the level required.

As already mentioned, CALP's goal is to improve programme quality and academic development, which means that we need knowledge about pedagogy and what affects individuals' identity and mastery. The fields in which CALP operates in particular in this context are university pedagogy, adult pedagogy, migration pedagogy and didactics, e.g. how do you teach students to write papers in the discipline?

The socio-cultural view of learning has contributed to a lot of pedagogical research being carried out in real learning environments, and to a large spectrum of methods being used, including from social anthropology. Several of the studies at CALP are ethnographical, which entails observation and analysis of what is actually happening, for example in the classroom.

By drawing on these different fields, CALP aims to develop knowledge about language use in academia. The centre's staff includes linguists, literary scholars, educationalists and social anthropologists. Two of the seven permanent members of staff have been recruited internationally. CALP believes that an interdisciplinary environment is necessary to developing knowledge within the research field of Academic Language Practice.

Services for students and staff

As well as conducting research and educational development work, CALP is, as already mentioned, a resource centre for students and staff, providing linguistic and pedagogical support to improve mastery and learning in study programmes, academic work and working life. The support provided shall be based on its own and others' research of relevance to OsloMet's profile.

CALP offers a wide range of services to both students and staff. Most of the services provided by CALP are the result of research conducted at the centre and development work in cooperation with

faculties. CALP organises its services to bachelor's students, as far as possible, through the Learning Support Centre. A list of the services for the 2017–2018 academic year is provided below.

Services for students

Preliminary courses

- Preliminary course for applicants to health and social care programmes
- Preliminary course in English at the Faculty of Technology, Art and Design

ECTS courses

- European Project Semester (EPS). EPS is a one-semester programme designed to train mainly third-year engineering students to carry out project work in international teams and at the same time improve their English proficiency (30 ECTS)
- Four classes in Norwegian for Foreign Students – Beginner Level (A1-level, 5 ECTS)
- One class in Norwegian for Foreign Students – Intermediate Level (A2-level, 5 ECTS)

Learning support

- Writing courses and writing seminars at BA and MA level
- Course and guidance in study techniques
- Course and guidance in coping with stress
- Course and guidance in 'nursing Norwegian' for students with Norwegian as a second language
- Course and guidance for students with Norwegian as their second language in academic skills and the Norwegian language
- Students who wish to discuss academic texts and, if applicable, get help in the writing process can receive guidance from a writing mentor (students who mentor fellow students in academic writing)
- Students with Norwegian as their second language can receive ten hours of individual writing follow-up from a writing mentor
- Students with Norwegian as their second language who need to improve their oral Norwegian skills can be assigned a personal language trainer (fellow student) to practise Norwegian with for one hour twice a week.

Training

Writing mentor training, training of personal language trainers training of study group leaders (students who lead a study group they are part of themselves).

Services for staff

- One-to-one writing supervision in Norwegian and English for researchers
- Writing supervision in Norwegian and English in researcher groups
- Academic writing course
- Two-day workshop on writing for international journals
- Workshop on how to write the introduction to article-based dissertations
- Presenting at international conferences
- Norwegian course for international staff (three–four classes, A1-C2)
- Norwegian course for the partners of international staff (one class, A1-A2)
- Pedagogical supervision linked to linguistic and cultural diversity
- Pedagogical supervision linked to how to supervise students in writing and language development
- Training lecturers in digital storytelling

In addition to carrying out research and providing concrete services for students and staff in our field, CALP also produces learning material – the staff write books and develop online resource pages, among other things.

CALP belongs in a university library

Students, researchers and lecturers are in need of guidance to improve their language skills, academic writing skills, and teaching and learning skills in an international and a multicultural academic environment. The question is how higher education can establish and implement relevant, coherent and integrated support for students, researchers and lecturers. CALP is one possible organisation.

Like the University Library, CALP's target group is both students and staff. The library supports students and staff in their academic work, as does CALP. Not least, the University Library contributes to knowledge production by, among other things, providing access to knowledge and research sources, support for knowledge overviews, assistance with systematic literature searches and training in source criticism and reference systems. These services cover some of the needs students and staff have in connection with their academic work, but they only cover a fraction of research work or a writing process, for example, and do not touch upon intercultural communication, language development or university pedagogy. Students and staff at universities today need support beyond that provided by libraries. The diversity of the students and staff means a diverse range of support services are required. Many need help to master the international, multilingual, multicultural and academic arena they are a part of.

CALP is concerned with the language in use in higher education and in research. Language use in academia has received little attention, despite the major changes that have taken place with respect to the increase in the number of students, the heterogeneity of the student population, international staff, internationalisation and academisation. The language that we use is an expression of a text culture community, a social practice with shared norms. The genres of the workplace are functional for the working environment in question and the discipline's specific genres are functional for the field and for the individual party in the field – both the student and the professional. Being able to master the language that is specific to the field is fundamental. Language proficiency in the field one is a part of is vital to being able to participate as an equal within an academic community as well as being pivotal to academic social competence.

A university must provide the necessary knowledge to the staff to enable for example lecturers to impart the competence the students need to succeed in their programmes. University librarians can guide students and staff in academic library topics, but when it comes to guiding students and staff in producing texts in academia, they also need guides who have the language needed to discuss texts and who have expertise in linguistics, literary science and pedagogy. This can be achieved through an organisation such as CALP. The biggest challenge however is to get everyone who provides guidance to and teaches students and colleagues to enter into dialogue with each other, in order to develop uniform and easily accessible services across faculties and research centres. It is easier to establish a holistic range of services if the providers are in close dialogue with each other, with faculties and with research centres. Students and staff should as a rule further their own needs, but the University Library and CALP can also reach their users in known channels where a number of the parties are already represented, such as researcher groups or as contributors to university pedagogy, which Greek and Jonsmoen write about in their article 'The troublesome guidance towards academic literacy' (Greek & Jonsmoen 2018). If the University Library and CALP are going to be able to share their expertise with as many people as possible, the students' lecturers should be the primary target group. Through the lecturers, it is possible to reach students and the researchers of the future.

Conclusion

If a university aims to provide high quality programmes and highly qualified candidates, we need research that contributes to awareness and knowledge of how students and staff at all levels can develop relevant academic literacy and how we can establish a language practice that includes everyone, both students and staff, in a linguistic and cultural fellowship in an international

environment. We must also come together to coordinate our services to ensure they are relevant, coherent and integrated in the academic work performed by students and staff.

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