

Purpose, Meaning and Alignment: Dual frameworks to scaffold understanding and design of assessment to enhance the student and teacher experience

Amanda Janssen and Roslyn Rowen

School of Academic Language and Learning, Charles Darwin University, Darwin NT, Australia

Email: roz.rowen@cdu.edu.au

(Received 24 November 2015; Published 30 January, 2016)

Assessments are sometimes ambiguous and not always aligned to learning outcomes or rubrics, causing confusion between stakeholders. At Charles Darwin University (CDU) this problem is often first identified by students, where during one-on-one consultations with the Academic Language and Learning (ALL) team, they present with questions seeking clarification on the purpose and meaning of an assessment task. While these tasks would often benefit from re-wording, they cannot be altered in the current delivery of the course. To help address this problem, two inter-related frameworks have been developed: the Assessing Assessment (AA) framework 1 is used to diagnose where assessments are lacking in purpose, meaning and alignment; and the Challenge/Support (C/S) framework 2 uses the above diagnosis to plan for the necessary ALL support to ensure a challenging yet achievable task. This paper describes the frameworks and their development and discusses their application through a case study. The paper suggests that beyond the practicality of using the frameworks in a responsive way to provide 'just-in-time' curriculum-integrated student learning support, they also have the potential to be used in a proactive way to improve assessment design and plan for integrated ALL support where problems can be pre-empted. This transition from a temporary to a long-term application is discussed.

Key Words: assessment framework, just-in-time scaffolding, professional development.

1. Introduction

Assessments are a formal measure for ascertaining the effectiveness of both the student's ability to achieve key outcomes and the lecturer's ability to help the student reach such academic outcomes. One of the key roles of the Academic Language and Learning (ALL) lecturer is to develop students' understanding of the expected outcomes of the units they undertake and the assessments used to measure those outcomes. Usually, the ALL lecturer is able to guide the student through their assessments by referring to the unit outcomes, the rubric and the assessments themselves. However, in some assessments that are presented to ALL lecturers, the purpose of the assessment, meaning of the assessment and how it aligns, cannot be determined.

Over the course of one semester, ALL lecturers conducted 371 unique individual consultations with students seeking academic support with their assessment tasks. During these sessions, students were asked a series of semi-structured questions to ascertain why they sought support and the areas of concern they had regarding the assessment task. Of the total 371 students who were seeking academic support, 354 (95.4%) were seeking academic support related to understanding an assessment task or structuring and writing their response to the task.

To support understanding of the assessments and how they should be approached, two frameworks have been developed: the Assessing Assessment (AA) framework (Figure 1) was developed to systematically identify the problematic areas of assessment tasks; and the Challenge /Support (C/S) framework (Figure 2) was developed to design an intervention using ‘just-in-time’ scaffolding to transition the task into a high challenge/high support domain. This paper outlines the process of using these frameworks, from the identification of problematic assessment, to the implementation of the frameworks, through to the design and delivery of ‘just-in-time’ support. The ‘just-in-time’ approach requires the lecturer to reflect on the three pillars of purpose, meaning and alignment that underpin their assessment, and allows them to identify areas where improvement may be needed and additional academic support required. This short-term intervention process also facilitates a longer-term strategy for assisting lecturers to more clearly amalgamate these pillars and incorporate high challenge/high support scaffolding as a conscious design feature in their assessments and within their courses in future iterations. The use of the frameworks, therefore, has the dual benefit of facilitating the development of students’ knowledge and academic literacy throughout their studies, as well as increasing lecturers’ awareness and understanding of strategic assessment design, leading to an improved lecturer and student learning experience.

The purpose of this paper is to showcase the process of developing and implementing the frameworks. While the framework and ‘just-in-time’ process have been implemented in 11 units to date, the overall approach will be demonstrated by a single case from a Health course. This paper will firstly address how problematic assessments are identified, followed by a review of the task and design of ‘just-in-time’ scaffolding. It will conclude with a discussion on how the framework’s short-term strategy for clarifying purpose, meaning and alignment, matched with commensurate support, was perceived as beneficial and has the capacity to be transitioned into a long-term strategy for assessment design and accreditation.

2. A framework for assessing Purpose, Meaning and Alignment in assessment

To determine areas when an assessment may be problematic for students, the Assessing Assessment framework shown in Figure 1 has been developed based on a theoretical understanding of best practice in assessment (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Boud & Falchikov, 2007; QAA, 2011; Ramsden, 2003), as well as the collective knowledge and experience of the Academic Language and Learning Advisers at Charles Darwin University. The purpose of the framework is to enable staff to apply a clear set of criteria for evaluating the design and communication of their existing assessment tasks. Applying these criteria will help highlight areas where students may experience issues with understanding existing assessments and provide guidance on the design of future assessment.

The framework is divided into three pillars: purpose, meaning and alignment. The three pillars are then divided into sub-sections to help clarify where the assessment may need an intervention to help students’ understanding of the task. Assessments are a crucial part of a student’s educational journey, and they need to be designed well; poor assessment design has been linked to high attrition (Ramsden, 2003). In addition, deep learning occurs when teaching and assessment methods foster engagement and the academic expectations are clear. Assessments are what drive student learning because of the vital part they play in teaching and learning, they need to achieve their educational purpose (Boud & Associates, 2010). In addition, they should follow the principles set out regarding good teaching (The University of Sydney, 2011).

The first pillar of the framework is purpose. The purpose of the specific assessment needs to be clearly articulated to both the student and the lecturer. In other words, the purpose of the assessment needs to be described ‘in sufficient detail to allow students to plan their approach to assessment’ (The University of Sydney, 2011, p. 5). According to the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) (2011) there are different purposes for assessment, which can vary from promoting learning, measuring performance (of both student and lecturer), educating, diagnosing difficulties and improving practice. Macquarie University (2008) proposes that purpose is paramount when designing an assessment and all parties need to know what learning is

to be achieved. If the educational purpose is clear, students can deliver a higher quality response and relate the purpose to their own study; if it is not clear, then students are less likely to achieve higher results (Boud & Associates, 2010). ‘Why’ students are partaking in the assessment, therefore, needs to reflect what knowledge is being tested (CSHE, 2002). Gibbs and Simpon (2004, p. 22) confirm this by stating that assessments need to be explicit and have clear ‘goals, criteria and standards’. The AA framework shown in Figure 1 addresses this by targeting whether the task has outlined its purpose. The framework also considers if the genre is purposeful, the task is linked to the outcomes and the purpose is evident in the marking criteria.

	Coding Number	Element	Coding Question	Discussion required Y/N	Explanation
	Purpose	P1	Purpose	Does the task articulate the purpose clearly?	
P2		Purpose related to outcomes	Does the task clearly relate to the outcomes?		
P3		Purpose of genre	Is the purpose of the genre specified?		
P4		Purpose and rubric	Are purpose and genre in the criteria?		
Meaning	M1	Meaning	Is the task clear? Are there ambiguities?		
	M2	Meaning and outcomes	Are the outcomes explicit?		
	M3	Meaning and genre	Is the genre meaning clear?		
	M4	Meaning and rubric	Is the meaning of the rubric clear?		
Alignment	A1	Alignment and outcomes	Is the assessment aligned to the unit outcomes?		
	A2	Alignment and genre	Does the genre link to the outcomes?		
	A3	Alignment and purpose	Does the title align to the task?		
	A4	Alignment and rubric	Are the outcomes aligned in the rubric?		

Figure 1. Assessing Assessment (AA) framework: Purpose, Meaning and Alignment.

The second pillar of the framework is meaning. Meaning is construed through language. If the language used is unclear, students cannot easily engage in the assessment. This ties in with the principle of validity and fairness, which states that assessments need to be articulated clearly

within an ‘appropriate disciplinary or professional context’ (The University of Sydney, 2011, p. 5). The concepts need to be couched in everyday experience and articulated in accessible language (Entwistle, 2000). This clarity in assessment is also commented on by Knight (2002, p. 283), who explains that the message being sent needs to be interpreted by the ‘receiver’ who needs to be able to understand meaning from the original message. Where assessments are poorly written, have ambiguous language or use language and genre that are not clear within the specific context of study, students may not be able to interpret the meaning. This can result in students losing interest and thus adopting a surface learning approach as they are not able to ascertain and address the key concepts required of the course (Gore, Ladwig, Elsworth, & Ellis, 2009). To determine whether an assessment has clear meaning, this pillar of the framework is further divided into four sub-themes. These sub-themes are used to identify any ambiguities in language, whether outcomes are explicit and if the meaning of genre and the rubric is clear.

The third pillar of the framework is alignment. Assessments need to align to the key outcomes to ensure that students can clearly understand how the assessment links to the objectives of the unit. If this is not clear, students may not be able to reach the desired outcome. This alignment of the assessment needs to reflect and develop skills that are going to be required in professional practice in the future. Where assessments are perceived to be inauthentic or where they do not seem to be assessing the important outcomes, students may start believing that the assessment is irrelevant (James, McInnis, & Devlin, 2002). Assessments need to be consistent with the course and what needs to be taught and learned, because if this is not shown, the assessment has no apparent value. However, to ensure that what is being assessed is achieved, the criteria against which the assessment is marked needs to be specific, detailed, transparent and checked against the course outcomes (James, McInnis, & Devlin, 2002). Apart from the criteria being clearly aligned to the outcomes, the genre or text type required needs to reflect the ‘discourse’ required by the discipline (Rowntree, 1987). Therefore, when designing or assessing an assessment, it is important that the assessment aligns to the outcomes required of the course. To ascertain if this is achieved, the framework contains four sub-categories that question the alignment of the assessment to the unit outcomes, whether the genre links to the outcomes, if the title aligns to the task and whether the outcomes are aligned to the rubric.

3. Designing and applying the framework

The design of the framework is based on grounded theory. As a starting point, to identify broad themes, 11 assessments that students found difficult were coded using comments from the students, the ALL advisors and subject lecturers. In their consultation with ALL advisors, students completed questionnaires identifying their assessment concerns (Table 1). In most responses, purpose, meaning and alignment were themes that were identified as being of concern. The student interview responses highlighted a core of specific assessments that students were finding problematic. From the main themes, sub-themes emerged that had an influence on the way students engaged with the assessment. These sub-themes related to the outcomes, text types and rubric. Considering all these areas, the framework was designed with sub-questions to highlight where the assessments were lacking against these pillars. During ALL advisor discussions, the framework (Figure 1) was completed for assessments that had clear discrepancies. Unit coordinators were contacted after these meetings to discuss the assessments and the support options that ALL could offer.

The framework can be used by lecturers as a professional development tool. By reflecting on areas where they can grow and develop they can assess their own professional practice, professional development occurs (Reeves, 2010). One of the main purposes of the framework is to have a consistent instrument with a consistent set of rules. In other words, unit co-ordinators can use the framework to assess their own assessments. This approach fosters a collegial interaction and assists with reflection on practice to improve the experience of the lecturer and student. In this process all parties have equal status and a learning environment is co-constructed in a positive way.

Table 1. Student responses to Purpose, Meaning and Alignment in their assessment tasks.

Question	Agree	Disagree
Does the task clearly explain the purpose?	0%	100%
Does the task clearly tell you what the outcomes are for completing the assessment?	5%	95%
Is the purpose of the genre you must write in clear?	15%	85%
Is the task well explained and the meaning easy to follow?	5%	95%
Is the meaning of the genre explained in the task?	15%	85%
Are the task guidelines easy to follow?	5%	95%
Is the task linked to clear outcomes to be achieved?	0%	100%
Is the genre of the task linked to clear outcomes to be achieved?	0%	100%
Are the outcomes to be achieved included in the rubric?	0%	100%
Do you feel confident to complete the task?	0%	100%

To gauge the usefulness of the framework, assessments were coded from different faculties, and discussed with individual unit coordinators. One example of this process was an assessment task for a third year Health unit that was causing students exceptional stress. The lecturer approached ALL staff after a number of students had highlighted that they did not know what was expected and could not engage in the task. Working with the co-ordinator, the framework was completed (appendix 1) and by asking the questions it became apparent that there was no clear purpose, the meaning was ambiguous and that the students could not understand how the assessment aligned to the unit learning outcomes. Using the problems identified in the framework as a guideline, the next phase of the ALL strategy then took place, which was to design a 'just-in-time' workshop to help clarify the assessment and the genre type required.

4. Using a framework to commence the collaborative 'just-in-time' scaffolding process

From the 371 individual consultations with ALL advisors, the unit coordinators were contacted and advised of the students' concerns. They were offered a meeting to discuss ways to help the students in understanding and completing the assessment. Of those contacted, 7 coordinators agreed to meet to consider a 'just-in-time' workshop and 4, knowing of the service offered, contacted ALL directly requesting assistance for their assessment. The Assessing Assessment framework (Figure 1) was used to lead discussion based on the questions detailed for ensuring purpose, meaning and alignment. Following the coding session with the unit lecturers, 11 'just-in-time' workshops were designed and delivered throughout the semester. All workshops were delivered a minimum of two weeks prior to the submission date of the task. Each workshop had different design features that were guided by the Challenge/Support model (Figure 2). The 11 workshops prior to intervention were graded as being high challenge/low support. One Health task has been selected as an example to outline the overall process leading to an intervention. A full list of the 11 workshops, assessment coding and challenge/support strategies is available from the authors upon request.

The 'just-in-time' scaffold draws on the contingent and designed-in support styles by Hammond and Gibbons (Hammond, 2001; Hammond & Gibbons, 2005). Contingent scaffolding involves spontaneous in-class interaction with students in conjunction with providing formative feedback on their work. This type of scaffolding is often applied in group settings, and also has merit in one-on-one consultations. This is particularly used by ALL practitioners to scaffold student contributions relevant to a particular assessment task and to foster their learning independence (Vygotsky, 1978). As such, contingent scaffolding is unplanned and highly dependent on lectur-

er talk as a tool for summing up concepts and helping students make more links to prior knowledge, thus leading them forward into new knowledge. The role of lecturer talk through questioning forms the basis from which “increased prospectiveness” can be afforded by using cued elicitation to move students to a deeper level of understanding (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005, p. 23).

In contrast, designed-in scaffolding is well planned and uses scaffolding as a tool for the design, development and co-ordination of a program. Within this model of scaffolding, additional scaffolding can be dedicated toward assessment tasks to achieve high support for high challenge tasks (Mariani, 1997). This can be thought of as a longitudinal approach to scaffolding that involves a guided organisation of learning activities that follow a constructivist approach by designing the unit to consider students’ prior knowledge and knowledge to be assessed (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Hammond, 2001). Designed-in scaffolding draws on the use of multi-modal texts as semiotic systems, to stimulate students’ ability to understand, interpret and reflect on their developing and existing knowledge as they carry out tasks within the scaffolded workshop. Semiotic systems engage students in the multi-literacies in which they require competency, in order to become socialised in and participants of the discipline-specific discourse and its associated practices (Mickan, 2013). This is often supported with the contingent approach, which bridges the gap of any additional literacy needs of students as they arise through the planned activities or deeper understanding of students learning experiences and needs (Hammond, 2001; Hammond & Gibbons, 2005).

A ‘just-in-time’ scaffolded approach is a valuable hybrid between the contingent and designed-in styles (see Table 2). This approach incorporates the lecturer and offers professional development at the centre of the scaffolding strategy to enhance the student learning experience. ‘Just-in-time’ refers to the context in which the scaffold is implemented 2-3 weeks before the assessment submission date. Literacy is framed around the assessment task and structured to clarify problematic areas of purpose, meaning and alignment that were identified using the AA framework in Figure 1.

The ‘just-in-time’ workshops are thus directed towards improving the student experience and engagement in the task by moving it to a beneficial high challenge/high support model. A comparison of the three scaffolded approaches can be found in Table 2. The intention behind the ‘just-in-time’ approach is to implement clarity through scaffolding understanding at a crucial, high-stakes time for students to increase their likelihood of being able to successfully complete the task. The longer-term initiative which has been identified throughout will feed-forward into a long-term designed-in approach guided by the process captured in the two frameworks.

Table 2. Key features of contingent, designed-in and ‘just-in-time’ scaffolding (adapted from Hammond & Gibbons, 2005).

contingent	designed-in	‘just-in-time’
- On the spot interaction with students	- Planned sequencing of tasks	- Minimal planning
- Unplanned	- Planned selection of tasks	- Embedded literacy for the assessment task
- Embedded group activities	- Use of participant structures	- Fixed assessment design
- Cued elicitation	- Use of mediational texts	- Recasting assessment with purpose, meaning and alignment activities
- Increased prospectiveness	- Use of semiotic systems to facilitate discipline specific understanding and language competency	- Structured elicitation of prior knowledge to stimulate deeper understanding of task

In undertaking an intervention in the assessment within a course, there can be a fine line between optimal and detrimental challenge (of task). This also stands for the level of ALL support

through scaffolding of task understanding. This continuum ranges from high challenge/high support (optimal) to low challenge/ low support (problematic), which can have equally adverse impacts if not carefully and systematically implemented. In a high challenge/low support environment, clarity of the task's purpose, meaning and alignment are not clear, and the assessment task's weighting, length and value may not be appropriate for the undergraduate or postgraduate year level. In addition, clear parameters or support strategies are often not implemented. Transitioning to a high challenge/high support environment would see the 'just-in-time' workshop target these problematic areas and implement ALL support strategies to bridge the gap. This was the case for the example undergraduate health task provided in Figure 2.

CASE 1: HEALTH			
Step 1: Identify current assessment challenge/support ratio.			
High Challenge Task Low ALL Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Frustration with students ● Unable to engage students ● Student attrition increases ● Academic misconduct 		High Challenge Task High ALL Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lecturer empowerment ● Transformation of assessment ● Improved academic integrity ● Improved student engagement 	
Low Challenge Task Low ALL Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Frustration with students ● Unable to engage with students ● Student learning needs ignored ● Student attrition increases ● Minimal effort put into completing task 		Low Challenge Task High ALL Support <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Frustration with students ● Unable to engage with students ● Students feel 'dumbed-down' ● Student attrition increases ● Minimal effort put into completing task 	
Step 2. Identify problematic areas of purpose, meaning and alignment and propose 'just-in-time' strategies.			
Course Unit	High Challenge/Low Support features	High Challenge/High Support 'just-in-time' strategies	Delivery Mode
Health	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Task does not articulate the purpose; a rationale is given but does not contextualise what students are required to answer. 2. The task appears to be about reflection on professional practice but is not addressed in the learning outcomes. 3. Three rubrics provided for one task each referring to multiple genres. 4. There is no reference to how the marks will be divided up. 5. There is no reference to how the task aligns to the outcomes. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Purpose of the task explained and contextualised by a student-guided activity. 2. Genre of reflective essay specified and structure explained to students and outcomes revised to connect the purpose, genre and outcomes. 3. One revised rubric designed for students linked to only one genre and the new outcomes. 4. Division of marks explained 5. Learning outcomes explained and activities structured around development for assessment. 	On-campus/ online

Figure 2. A framework for using a support/challenge framework to aid in lecturer professional development (adapted from Mariani, 1997; cf. Wilson & Devereux, 2014, p. 93).

In low challenge/low support tasks, there is usually evidence of unclear purpose, meaning and alignment. In addition, some parameters and strategies may be provided to the student to complete the task but they are not adequate. However, the weighting, and relative ease of the task

often sees students compile a last minute response, where they do not engage with the purpose of the task and often resort to academic misconduct. Low challenge/high support tasks can have equally negative impacts on the student. In most cases purpose, meaning and alignment are not clear due to the heavily scaffolded and restrictive parameters the lecturer has prescribed to complete the task. Over-scaffolding can in these instances, reduce the task to a cloze activity for students. This discourages active engagement with the material. In many instances, students resort to copy and paste tactics as the task has not advocated for them to develop innovative and creative ideas and demonstrate critical thought (Devereux & Wilson, 2008).

5. Integrating dual frameworks to optimize challenge and support

Framework 2 was designed to streamline the 'just-in-time' scaffolding of task understanding to ensure that a transition into the high challenge/high support domain occurred. The Challenge/Support framework (Figure 2) follows on from the identification of problematic areas of purpose, meaning and alignment identified in the first framework (Figure 1) and foregrounds the three elements. This results in the assessment task transitioning the lecturer and student learning experience into the high challenge/high support domain. Using the lecturer as the primary conduit of the challenge/support model, it gives the lecturer the opportunity to pinpoint areas where the student learning experience is lacking and, with support of ALL practitioners, better highlight the purpose, meaning and alignment of the assessment to the course. The students are then able to see changes in their learning experience that have been initiated by the lecturer. This often leads to improvements in the learning experience of both the student and lecturer, given that student development often triggers more positive teaching practices where the lecturer feels more successful in their approach (Biggs & Tang, 2011).

To begin the process, informal interviews with discipline lecturers were conducted to determine from the lecturers' perspective, problematic areas of purpose, meaning and alignment. The interview data was then compared with the data collected from semi-structured interviews with students on their perceptions of the most problematic aspects of the task. Both student and lecturer interviews were recorded in a central database and coded using the same schema outlined in the first framework. This data combined with ALL lecturer feedback informed the design of the 'just-in-time' workshop that would scaffold students' understanding of the task. The areas of purpose, meaning and alignment that were flagged as essential in scaffolding understanding to students were used in conjunction with the challenge/support model (Figure 2) to ensure the workshop provided the optimal high challenge/high support environment for students.

Academic staff often do not acknowledge that assessment may be problematically designed and lacking in adequate support, and instead, focus on the students' lack of academic knowledge and experiences as the problem. The 'just-in-time' scaffold takes a short-term approach to improve students' understanding of assessment, which feeds forward into the ability of the lecturer to implement a long-term designed-in approach. This has the potential to provide a stronger collaborative focus on enhancing assessment to better promote student mastery of academic literacy and language from the beginning of a course.

In designing the 'just-in-time' workshop, the primary strategy was to increase student engagement and thus promote self-regulated or independent learning in a high challenge/high support environment. Allowing students to engage in assessment through scaffolding understanding of a task is linked to improved success and a deeper connection with both the assessment task and the course material (Farmer & Eastcott, 1995; Gibbs, 1999). The framework (Figure 2) achieves this through two steps. The first examines the lecturers' concerns they have identified when students complete assessments in their course. In the example case in the Challenge/Support framework, the Health lecturer had experienced high levels of academic misconduct, poor attendance and students' complaints about their inability to understand the relevance of the assessment. Students indicated that they therefore could not engage in the task. This accentuated that the assessment task fell under a high challenge/ low support classification (see high challenge/low support criteria in Figure 2).

The second part of the framework draws on the groundwork set by the AA framework (Figure 1), by honing in on the most problematic areas of purpose, meaning and alignment which the scaffolding workshop address. Support strategies are then designed in the form of the ‘just-in-time’ workshop. The example below identified five essential areas for clarification (see Figure 2) and addressed these in the workshop through guided activities to explain the purpose of the task, clarify the genre and the relevant structure, present a modified rubric with clear outcomes and division of marks, and used activities to help students understand how the learning outcomes fit into the task. This approach created transparency in both the learning and assessment process for all stakeholders (students, lecturers and ALL practitioners). This allowed for assessment and scaffolding to be seen as a shared learning experience, activated through mutually beneficial identities and knowledge, shaped by participation in the experience in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2000). This approach to scaffolding positions learning as the central tenet to creating a social structure around the understanding of assessment. It involved the direct engagement of both lecturer and students in the participation of learning activities (*social*) and reified this through activities that encouraged students to connect with the physical and conceptual artefacts that emulate the community’s shared experiences making a meaningful learning environment and clarifying the assessment (Wenger, 1998; 2000).

In this scaffolding framework, the dominant artefact is the scaffolded understanding of the task, which runs concurrently with the accompanying learning activities in the workshops that articulate the purpose, meaning and alignment. This encouraged the students to have their own experience of practice facilitated by the workshop. This is situated within the broader community of practice that is the unit. With this in mind, the Challenge/Support framework first identified where the Health assessment is placed in the four categories of challenge/support. Step 1 is based on the feedback and observations made by the lecturer in relation to student performance and challenges. The next step (Step 2) then identified issues with the assessment that need to be addressed in the ‘just-in-time’ workshop. The interactive workshop was delivered on-campus online using Blackboard Collaborate with students afforded time at the end of the workshop to have a question and answer session with both the lecturer and the ALL advisor. This proved valuable as the lecturer had an opportunity to receive feedback on the assessment and the students were able to clarify questions with both the lecturer about content and the ALL advisor regarding structure.

6. Student and lecturer perspectives on assessment

The feedback from lecturers and students was positive. Post-delivery of the ‘just-in-time’ workshops delivered to 567 students across the 11 units, the students were asked to complete a voluntary survey regarding their opinions of the workshop and integrated scaffolded assessment (Table 3). From the cohort, 209 students provided responses with a 98% average of positive responses with students believing they had benefited and the interventions had improved engagement in the task. This information shows the value of ‘just-in-time’ support.

Table 3. Value of ‘just-in-time’ Workshop (student).

Question	Strongly Agree	Disagree
My understanding of the task improved	98.81%	1.19%
The workshop was relevant to my needs	98.81%	1.19%
The workshop provided clearer explanations of the task	96.43%	3.57%
The content was relevant to my discipline	98.81%	1.19%
The activities were valid and stimulated my learning and understanding of the task	97.62%	2.38%
I gained confidence in completing the assessment	98.81%	1.19%
I felt more engaged in completing the task	98.81%	1.19%
I felt more confident to continue with my studies	97.62%	2.38%

Students were also given the opportunity to provide additional qualitative commentary regarding their experiences of the workshops.

Comments regarding the benefits included:

- Saved time in trying to understand genre
- Helped me understand what was expected
- Made me pay more attention in class
- Gave me better understanding on the topic and the assessment
- Lecturer and ALL combined approach helped understand benefit of both in my study

Comments regarding limitations included:

- Conducting workshop two weeks prior to submission is not enough time
- Should be implemented for all confusing assessment tasks
- Took away from scheduled content delivery lecturers

The findings from the student survey highlight the range of benefits gained by students who participate in ‘just-in-time’ workshops to clarify problematic assessment tasks and demonstrate the integrated nature of academic literacy in their disciplines. This study has also revealed that the assessments flagged by students as problematic can often be a trigger for disengagement. This disengagement could be a factor for students taking a surface approach when responding to assessments and is an avenue for further investigation. Students see discipline knowledge, academic literacy and assessment as three mutually exclusive learning activities, as opposed to one mutually informative learning experience. Embedding academic literacy through assessment scaffolding has proven an effective strategy to overcoming this divide.

Follow-up interviews with the unit lecturers also revealed a pattern of similar strengths and limitations.

Strengths included:

- Improvement in quality of students’ academic writing
- Improvement in student’s understanding of task
- Reduced frustration with students not understanding task
- Reduced academic misconduct
- Specialised ALL support
- Professional development tool guided by framework

Limitations:

- Apparent limited buy-in from unit lecturers
- Need to find time in class schedule for delivery
- Can be seen as a critique on teaching

Comments provided by the unit lecturers indicated that although they have provided buy-in to improve their assessments, this is not a mandated process and they often felt discouraged by the lack of uptake from other lecturers. However, they did observe improvement in the quality of their students work with reductions in academic misconduct. Students were able make connections with academic literacy conventions and understand how to integrate into their discipline specific content in the future. The scaffolded workshop design was helpful in guiding students to become more aware of what the lecturer means in the assessment and why the assessment needs to be written to achieve the outcomes of the unit. This is without giving away the answer, merely pointing them in the right direction (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Mariani, 1997). The collaborative approach through the use of the framework as a pedagogical tool, was also a recurring theme in the lecturer feedback. This suggests that learning takes place in a socio-cultural milieu with other peers, students, the lecturer and ALL as experts in a field and in this way students are able to move forward to become independent learners who know what is expected of them (Wilson & Devereux, 2014).

Overall, this study has revealed largely positive results to the dual-framework approach. The qualitative responses from students and lecturers have recognised key areas which require review and further development. The initial implementation of 'just-in-time' workshops has revealed that to have maximum reach across units and assessment, the professional development side of the project needs to be more visible to detract from lecturers feeling as if they are being critiqued on assessment design. Buy-in from discipline staff and support for collaboration and professional development is one area of the project that will need to be enhanced as it expands. The other is the ability to develop the frameworks as self-directed pedagogical tools to review and improve assessment tasks and courses that better integrate academic literacy into assessment and consequently the unit.

7. Using frameworks as a long-term strategy for designing assessment

This study has indicated that there is considerable benefit to using a 'just-in-time' approach to improve purpose, meaning and alignment of assessments. It has demonstrated the merit of using the frameworks for improving student and lecturer understanding and communication of assessment tasks, where these are already being used within units. However, provisions have been made to upscale the short-term targeted 'just-in-time' approach to a long-term university-wide approach offered as an integrated feature of assessment and course design. The School of Education in conjunction with ALL lecturers are trialling the frameworks in their assessment review and design for re-accreditation. Using the frameworks to design assessment should help to ensure consistency in design; clarity in purpose, meaning and alignment; and the implementation of necessary ALL support. It is anticipated that well-executed assessment design will result in potentially less need for ALL support. The results of a larger scale adoption of these frameworks should act as a catalyst for implementation across the university and as a benchmark for assessment design strategies.

8. Conclusion

This paper has highlighted how assessments as a formal measure of student competencies and academic literacy ability are often problematic for all stakeholders due to discrepancies in the purpose, meaning and alignment of the task. The view taken in this paper is that to ensure consistency in approach, a framework is required that can be utilised across all subjects to highlight where problematic assessments need to be addressed. As all students undertake some form of assessment, the paper has taken the view that proposes that assessment is a critical site for the implementation of 'just-in-time' scaffolding to improve literacy. The frameworks were used to pinpoint problematic areas of assessment and guide a 'just-in-time' intervention in order to shift the task to a high challenge/high support model. Additionally, the frameworks have acted as professional development tools for the lecturers to reflect on and implement the three pillars of purpose, meaning and alignment that underpin their assessment. This can then feed-forward into longer-term improvements to assessment design and pedagogical practices in higher education. This paper has focussed on providing a snapshot of the systematic processes involved in implementing the frameworks and their effectiveness of this overall approach as a short-term strategy to help students and academic staff. There is evidence to suggest that a longer term initiative to scaffold understanding of assessments and designing assessments is equally valid by using these frameworks. With the ongoing need to support both students and academic staff to develop academic literacy and enhance the purpose, meaning and alignment of assessments, a more longitudinal study into the benefits of using a consistent framework to designing assessment in higher education is warranted.

References

- Bandura, A. (1991). Self-regulation of motivation through anticipatory and self-regulatory mechanisms. In R. Dienstbier (Ed.), *Perspectives on motivation: Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*. (Vol. 38, pp. 69-164). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

- Bandura, A. (2012). On the Functional Properties of Perceived Self-Efficacy Revisited. *Journal of Management*, 38(1), 9-44.
- Barrie, S., & Jones, J. (1999). Integration of academic writing skills in curriculum: making them stick: a model for generic attributes curriculum development. In G. Rust (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 6th International Improving Student Learning Symposium*, (pp. 268-278). Brighton UK.
- Barthel, A. (2008). *Association for Academic Language and Learning (AALL Inc.) submission to DEEWR 'Good Practice Principles for English Language Proficiency for international students in Australian universities' Project*. Canberra: DEEWR. Retrieved from <http://www.deewr.gov.au/highereducation/publications/pages/goodpracticeprinciples.aspx>
- Biggs, J. (1999). What the Student Does: teaching for enhanced learning. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 18(1), 57-75.
- Biggs, J., & Tang, C. (2011). *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*. Berkshire: McGraw-Hill.
- Bonanno, H., & Jones, J. (1996). Integrating lifelong learning skills into first year collaborative approaches to curriculum design. *Proceeding for the Improving University Teaching Conference* (pp. 297-308). Nottingham Trent University.
- Boud, D., & Associates. (2010). *Assessment 2020: Seven propositions for assessment reform in higher education*. Sydney: Australian Learning and Teaching Council.
- Boud, D., & Falchikov, N. (2007). *Rethinking Assessment in Higher Education: Learning for the longer term*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE). (2002). *Assessing Learning in Australian Universities: Ideas, strategies and resources for quality student assessment*. Melbourne: Australian Universities Teaching Committee.
- Chanock, K. (2013). Teaching subject literacies through blended learning: Reflections on a collaboration between academic learning staff and teachers in the disciplines. *Journal of Academic Language & Learning*, 7(2), A106-A119.
- Devereux, L., & Wilson, K. (2008). Scaffolding literacies across the Bachelor of Education program: a course-wide approach. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(2), 121-134.
- Earl, L. (2003). *Assessment as Learning: using classroom assessment to maximise student learning*. London: Sage.
- Entwistle, N. (2000). Promoting deep learning through teaching and assessment: conceptual frameworks and educational contexts. *TLRP Conference* (pp. 1-12). Leicester.
- Farmer, B., & Eastcott, D. (1995). Making assessment a positive experience. In P. Knight, *Assessment for learning in Higher Education*. London: Kogan Page.
- Gibbs, G. (1999). Using assessment strategically to change the way students learn. In S. Brown, & A. Glasner, *Assessment matters in higher education: choosing and using diverse approaches*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Gibbs, G., & Simpson, C. (2004). Conditions under which assessment supports student learning. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education* (1), 1-31.
- Gibbs, G., & Simpson, C. (2004-5). Conditions Under Which Assessment Supports Student Learning. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education* (1), 1-31.
- Gore, J., Ladwig, J., Elsworth, W., & Ellis, H. (2009). *Quality Assessment Framework: A guide for Assessment Practice in Higher Education*. Australian Learning & Teaching Council. The University of Newcastle.
- Grbich, C. (2015, January 19-23). Qualitative Methodologies, Data Collection and Analytical Approaches. *ACSPRI 2015 Summer Program in Social Research Methods and Research Technology*. Adelaide, South Australia, Australia: ACSPRI.

- Gunn, C., Hearne, S., & Sibthorpe, J. (2011). Right from the Start: A Rationale for Embedding Academic Literacy Skills in University Courses. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 8(1), 1-10.
- Hammond, J. (2001). *Scaffolding: Teaching and Learning in Language and Literacy Education*. Newtown, NSW: PETA.
- Hammond, J., & Gibbons, P. (2005). Putting scaffolding to work: The contribution of scaffolding in articulating ESL education. *Prospect*, 20(1), 6-30.
- James, R., McInnis, C., & Devlin, M. (2002). *Assessing Learning in Australian Universities: Ideas, strategies and resources for quality in student assessment*. Centre for the study for Higher Education for the Australian Universities Teaching Committee (CSHE), University of Melbourne. Accessed via <http://www.cshe.unimelb.edu.au/assessinglearning/docs/AssessingLearning.pdf>
- Knight, P. (2002). Summative Assessment in Higher Education: practices in disarray. *Studies in Higher Education*, 27(3), 275-286.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Macquarie University: Learning and Teaching Centre. (2008). Guide to implementation of assessment policies. Sydney, New South Wales: Macquarie University.
- Mariani, L. (1997). Teacher Support and TEacher Challenge in Promoting Learner Autonomy. *Perspectives - TESOL Italy*, 23(2), 1-9. Retrieved from <http://www.learningpaths.org/papers/papersupport.htm>
- Mickan, P. (2013). *Language, Curriculum, Design and Socialisation*. Bristol: MPG Books Group.
- Murtagh, L., & Webster, M. (2010). Scaffolding teaching, learning and assessment in Higher Education. *TEAN Journal*, 1(2), 1-19.
- QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education). (2011). *Understanding assessment: its role in safeguarding academic standards and quality in higher education*. Gloucester: QAA.
- Ramsden, P. (2003). *Learning to Teach in Higher Education* (2nd ed.). Abingdon, Oxon: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Reeves, D. (2010). *Transforming Professional Development into student results*.
- Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rowntree, D. (1987). *Assessing students, how shall we know them*. Retrieved from [sfubusiness.ca: http://www.sfulbusiness.ca/files/PDF/teaching_facilitation/designing_an_assessment_system.pdf](http://www.sfulbusiness.ca/files/PDF/teaching_facilitation/designing_an_assessment_system.pdf)
- The University of Sydney. (2011, November 9). Assessment Policy 2011. Sydney, New South Wales: The University of Sydney.
- Thies, A., Wallis, B., Turner, A., & Wishart, L. (2014). Embedded academic literacies curricula: The challenges of measuring success. *Journal of Academic Language & Learning*, 8(2), 43-59.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenger, E. (2000). Communities of Practice and Social Learning Systems. *Organization*, 7(2), 225-246.

- Wilson, K., & Devereux, L. (2014). Scaffolding theory: High challenge, high support in Academic Language and Learning (ALL) contexts. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, A91-A100.
- Wilson, K., Collins, G., Couchman, J., & Li, L. (2011). Co-constructing academic literacy: Examining teacher-student discourse in a one-to-one consultation. *Journal of Academic Language and Learning*, 5(1), A139-A153.
- Wingate, U., Andon, N., & Cogo, A. (2011). Embedding academic writing instruction into subject teaching: A case study. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 12(1), 69-81.
- Woodward-Kron, R. (2007). Negotiating meanings and scaffolding learning: Writing support for non-English speaking background postgraduate students. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 26(3), 253-268.

Appendix: Coded Health Assessment: Framework 1

HEA XXX					
	Coding			Discussion	
	Number	Element	Coding Question	required Y/N	Explanation
Purpose	P1	Purpose	Does the task articulate the purpose clearly?	N	<i>Has rationale, but this is a list of definitions not why the student needs to answer the question.</i>
	P2	Purpose related to outcomes	Does the task clearly relate to the outcomes?	N	<i>This assessment appears to be about the dissemination of knowledge, a PowerPoint this is not addressed in the learning outcomes</i>
	P3	Purpose of genre	Is the purpose of the genre specified?	Y/N	<i>The reason for the PP is explicit and there is a general reference to the reason for the written aspect but the reason for lesson plan is a</i>
	P4	Purpose and rubric	Are purpose and genre in the criteria?	Y	<i>Scant reference to demonstration of unit outcomes</i>
Meaning	M1	Meaning	Is the task clear? Are there ambiguities?	N Y	<i>Not sure what the assessment focus is. Option C states there will be a separate marking option? Where?</i>
	M2	Meaning and outcomes	Are the outcomes explicit?	Y	<i>The assessment states link to all the outcomes. Not clear how.</i>
	M3	Meaning and genre	Is the genre meaning clear?	N	<i>Only option 1d has reference to a genre. Not sure if all options are an essay.</i>
	M4	Meaning and rubric	Is the meaning of the rubric clear?	N	<i>There is no reference to how the marks will be made up.</i>
Alignment	A1	Alignment and outcomes	Is the assessment aligned to the unit outcomes?	Y/N	<i>Only after a lot of questions and delving, however, no reference in outcomes to presentation and lesson plan not clear.</i>
	A2	Alignment and genre	Does the genre link to the outcomes?	Y	<i>Critical reflection and literature review.</i>
	A3	Alignment and purpose	Does the focus align to the task?	Y	<i>Title 'Written paper, PowerPoint and Lesson Plan'</i>
	A4	Alignment and rubric	Are the outcomes aligned in the rubric?	N	<i>Not sure what link is to course. Course outcomes are not about presentations or lesson plans.</i>