Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice

Volume 16 | Issue 5 Article 3

2019

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Sean Kearney
University of Notre Dame Australia, sean.kearney@nd.edu.au

Recommended Citation

Kearney, S. (2019). Transforming the first-year experience through self and peer assessment. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice, 16*(5). https://doi.org/10.53761/1.16.5.3

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Introduction

Many students are overcome by the transition from school to tertiary study (van der Meer, Scott & Pratt 2018), which has led universities to establish institutional-wide programs that focus on supporting the transition of students entering higher education (Nelson, Clarke & Kift 2010). This is a timely reminder of the Australian Commonwealth's Bradley Review, which in 2008 set an agenda for a 20% increase in students entering tertiary education by 2020 (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales 2008). While an increase in the total number of students may be seen as an overall positive, this comes at a time when universities in Australia are also finding that the number of first-year students who seriously consider leaving university is 27%, and the number of those considering leaving in later years even higher, at 34% (Coates & Ranson 2011). Harvey, Drew and Smith (2006) note that many students withdraw in their first year of study due to dissatisfaction with their experience and their expectations, and Coates and Ranson (2011) have found that boredom is the most cited cause. The expectations of first-year students are poorly understood by many university academics; this makes it more likely that students will get lost in their first year (Goldingay et al. 2014). When students first enroll at university, there is an institutional expectation that they will adjust; however, there is ongoing recognition that this adjustment is hard. Consequently, many universities are initiating "transition units" to help first-year students feel oriented (Scutter, Palmer, Luzeckyj, Burke da Silva & Brinkworth 2011).

Student engagement has been linked to academic success (Thomas 2012), and many tertiary institutions have recognised that engagement is a fundamental aspect of learning (Brint, Cantwell & Hanneman 2008). There is also acknowledgment that assessment is a main driver of learning (Boud 1990; James, McInnis & Devlin 2002). If one accepts that engagement is foundational in learning and that assessment is a major driver of learning, then engaging assessments, specifically for first-year students who often struggle with their transition to university and subsequently with engagement, are especially crucial. The current paper explores a specific model of self- and peer-assessment as a means of engaging and orienting first-year students to the assessment process at the tertiary level. Although this model has previously been published, this article shifts the focus and purpose of the assessment model to one specifically aimed at student success in first-year tertiary education.

The Authentic Self- and Peer Assessment for Learning (ASPAL) (Kearney 2013) is a replicable process model of self-, peer and lecturer assessment that seeks to better engage students in the learning process through assessment. In 2016, as part of a shift in focus, the model was moulded to better suit first-year students in their second semester of tertiary study at a university in Sydney, Australia. The focal point of the minor changes made was to help teach students about assessment through a transparent process that included them in all stages of the assessment process.

This article will briefly outline the ASPAL process that was used with first-year undergraduate students. Qualitative data, in the form of students' responses to a survey, will be presented. In addition to the survey responses, the results of the self and peer assessment will provide an example of the success and challenges of self- and peer assessment in the first-year experience.

Background

Student engagement, the first-year experience and assessment in higher education are all contemporary and well-researched topics within the higher-education sector. There is limited research focusing specifically on learning in the transition period into higher education (Burton, Taylor, Dowling & Lawrence 2009). The changing nature of students' first-year experiences means that many are often involved in student-centred learning (Taylor 2013). While this can be positive,

ensuring stimulating and engaging high-quality learning environments is at least equally important (Nelson, Clarke & Kift 2010).

Engagement

Considerable attention has been directed toward the improvement of undergraduates' experience in higher education for over 20 years (Association of American Colleges 1985; Chickering & Gamson 1987). The sheer number of reviews of student engagement illustrates the current interest in engagement as a means of academic success (Zepke 2013). Wimpenny and Savin-Baden (2012) identified 2,530 articles published between 2000 and 2012 on the subject. Much of the existing research notes that successful engagement depends on how students deal with the academic requirements of their chosen courses and on an understanding of the diverse range of social, economic and physical factors that may affect their success, which is significant in their transition into being successful tertiary students (Tinto 2012). That said, the research is conclusive that student engagement is positively associated with learning outcomes (Delialio lu 2012; Schlenker, Schlenker & Schlenker 2013; Troisi 2014; Webber, Krylow & Zhang 2013)

There seems to be a consensus in the literature that engagement is multi-faceted and hard to define (Atweh, Bland, Carrington & Cavanaugh 2008; Collaco 2017; Sheppard 2011). For example, Brint et al. (2008, p. 398) note that "existing cultures of engagement may not be sufficient to meet the challenges of creativity and productivity in the 21st century". From this viewpoint, with a specific focus on the first-year experience, teaching academics need to ensure that their students are actively engaged in learning experiences so they can find meaning in their studies (Coates & Ranson 2011). There is an established body of literature on transition and engagement in the first year in higher education (Penn-Edwards 2010) that recognises the importance of various means of support for successful student transition and engagement with learning (Masters & Donnison 2010; Wingate 2007). As Lizzio (2006, p. 2) explains, "successful students not only know how to study but also how to proactively manage the challenges of their whole university experience".

Students are at the core of engagement, and student success relies, at least in part, on high levels of academic engagement, which in turn depend on students' level of interest and involvement in their academic studies (Kearney & Perkins 2014). Fredericks, Blumenfield and Paris (2004) note that students must cognitively, emotionally and actively invest in their learning before they will succeed. Hockings et al. write that students who are expected to reflect, question, conjecture, evaluate and make connections between ideas are more likely to be deeply engaged in their studies (Hockings, Cooke, Yamashita, McGinty & Bowl 2008). Embedded in these notions of academic success and engagement is that teaching academics must help students become more engaged to increase their likelihood of success, and subsequently to complete their studies (Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE), 2012).

Assessment

Assessment is a principal component in academic learning processes, and most students focus heavily on it (Boud 1990; James et al. 2002). The consequence of that focus is that assessment has the potential to drive student learning (Suri & Krishnan 2019). For most students, according to James et al. (2002, p. 7), "assessment requirements literally define the curriculum"; therefore, it provides a means by which teaching academics can help guide student learning and engagement to maximise the learning potential it harbours. Assessment activities have the capacity to inspire students to engage with criteria and evaluate their own performance, thereby becoming self-regulated learners (Tai, Ajjawi, Boud, Dawson & Panadero 2018; Villarroel, Bloxham, Bruna, Bruna & Herrera-Seda 2018). Exploiting what students rate as most important in their studies to

engage them and improve learning may have the capacity to change the landscape of learning, specifically in the first-year transition period.

There has been ongoing demand for the reform of assessment, in both schools (Hargreaves, Earl & Schmidt 2002) and higher education for a number of years (Bloxham & Boyd 2007; Boud & Associates 2010; Wanner & Palmer 2018). Recognition of the importance of assessment for learning (formative assessment) and assessment of learning (summative assessment) has been central in research concerning recommendations for reform in higher education (Boud & Associates 2010; Lamprianou & Athanasou 2009, Suri & Krishnan 2019; Wanner & Palmer 2018). However, what has become obvious more recently is that student expectations regarding assessment do not match their experience at university (Thalluri & King 2009; Suri & Krishnan 2019; Wanner & Palmer 2018).

In the first-year experience, when most students are coming to terms with new expectations and new levels of responsibility for learning, these issues can be exacerbated and become problematic. Most commonly, according to Suri and Krishnan (2019), assessment in the first year is summative and used to assess how much students have learned or what they have learned, rather than being seen as part of the learning process. For assessment to be effective, specifically in the first-year experience, it should become part of the curriculum (Leach 2012) and be "guided by effective transition pedagogies where students are supported in building resilience and achieving learning outcomes essential for success" (Suri & Krishnan 2019, p. 1), as opposed to solely evaluating student learning.

First-year experience

The first-year experience in higher education has become an area of significance in recent years, mostly due to concerns about retention (Coates & Ranson 2011). In one review of literature on engagement in the Australasian region, Nelson et al. (2011) found approximately 400 studies between 2000 and 2010 on the first-year experience. The growth in interest of this important transition period is in response to and recognition of the unique needs and significance of the first-year experience for student learning, retention, engagement and success in higher education (Adam, Hartigan & Brown 2010; Coates & Ranson 2011; van der Meer, Scott & Pratt 2018).

Students in their first year of higher education deal with a range of transition issues, such as boredom, a sense of belonging, support, academic engagement and workloads (Coates & Ranson 2011; Morosanu, Handley & O'Donovan 2010; Naylor, Baik & Arkoudis 2017; van der Meer, Scott & Pratt 2018). These issues can significantly affect students' ability to succeed in an environment that is unfamiliar and complex (Harvey, Drew & Smith 2006). Wingate (2007, p. 395) explains that these students arrive "with epistemological beliefs that stem from their previous learning experience at school; [and] they see learning as the 'passive absorption' of external knowledge that is owned by authorities such as their tutors or their textbooks". Van der Meer et al. (2018, p. 8), add that many students feel "overwhelmed" by the prospect of higher education and the expectations of higher-educational institutions.

One of the areas of major difference between high school and university assessment is in the marking and grading schema, where some state systems in Australia have moved away from high-stakes assessment and marking schemes that induce failure. In New South Wales, for example, there is no such terminology as failure in school; failure, as a concept, does not exist. Poor performance or lack of effort result in the same progression through the system as academic success. This shift in paradigms of success and failure can confuse many borderline tertiary students who have never experienced consequences associated with poor performance. Tertiary institutions need to recognise this paradigm shift in student learning and focus on ways to help students transition into higher

education. According to Suri and Krishnan (2019), universities should be leading the way and educating others, specifically regulatory authorities, about the "value and validity" of different forms of assessment in higher education. This is specifically essential in the first-year experience, where students are transitioning from one form of education to another.

In focusing on the transition period, Kift (2009, p. 1) suggests that the first year "should be designed to be consistent and explicit in assisting students' transition from their previous experience to the nature of learning in higher education and learning in their discipline as part of their lifelong learning". To assist in the transition period, Kift (2009) advocates a "top-down, bottom-up" (p. 3) approach. This type of approach advocates specific programs and practices designed to engage students. Kift, Nelson and Clark (2010, p. 16) offer six principles of what they call transition pedagogy: transition, diversity, design, engagement, assessment, evaluation and monitoring.

The six principles of transition pedagogy as proposed by Kift et al. (2010) will be the basis for this study's evaluation of the ASPAL model as a useful tool for transition students to successfully acculturate to university practices of assessment. Transition refers to the realisation that students are making a significant change to their education by continuing into higher education. Institutions should recognise this transition period as a unique time in students' education continuum, during which they need specific support mechanisms to succeed. Diversity refers to the need for the curriculum to be "accessible by, and inclusive of, all students" (Kift 2009a). In this context, it is especially important to ensure that transition pedagogy is inclusive and does not further marginalise groups of students who are usually underrepresented in universities. Design refers to the specific design principles of curriculum and pedagogy focused on first-year students, which should be adaptable to a range of situations and focused on learning, with explicit success criteria (Kift 2009a). Learning communities are an integral aspect of the engagement principle (Kift 2009a). Students should be allowed to collaborate and be active in their learning. One specific aspect Kift (2009a) refers to is peer-peer collaboration and teacher-student interactions, which are both specifically relevant to ASPAL. Assessment and evaluation and monitoring refer to how the curriculum can be shaped to ensure that students are assessed and provided with appropriate feedback to aid their future learning in line with explicit criteria for assessment, evaluation and feedback.

The ASPAL model has the capacity to aid in students' transition because it illustrates learning and assessment and includes students in every step of the process, which allows for transparency. If it is true what Norman (1980, p. 256) says about the educative experience, that "it is strange that we expect students to learn, yet seldom teach them anything about learning", then this is crucial during students' transition year into university; the ASPAL model can be used to counter Norman's assertion.

Authentic Self- and Peer Assessment for Learning (ASPAL)

The ASPAL model was developed within the context of the Australian government's call for reform in higher education, the launch of the Assessment Futures Project at the University of Technology Sydney and the publication of the Assessment 2020 paper (Boud & Associates 2010), which called for reform in the nature of assessment in higher education. The conceptual foundation of the models and the results of the ASPAL process have been previously published (see Kearney 2013; Kearney & Perkins 2014; Kearney, Perkins & Kennedy-Clark 2016).

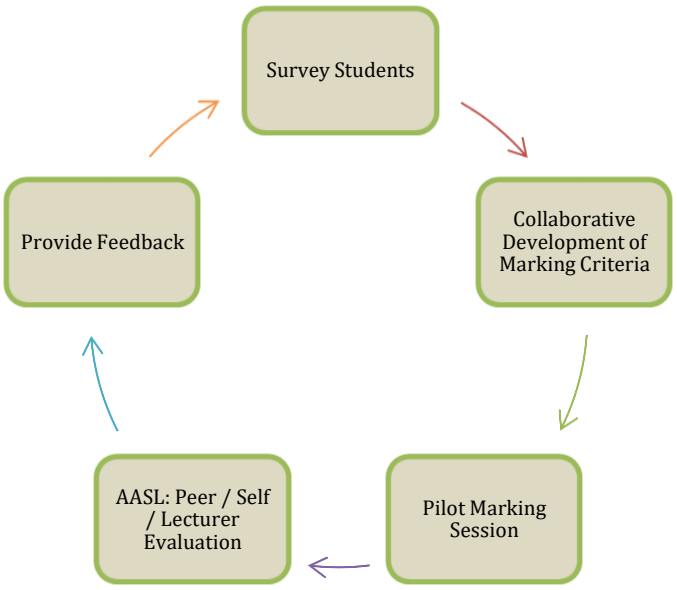

Figure 1. The ASPAL model

The initial development of ASPAL was informed by surveys of approximately 200 first-year undergraduate education students in 2010, which found:

- More than 80% of students were not reading their own assessments before submitting them.
- More than 85% of students had not seen a sample task on which they could base their own.
- Almost 100% of students were not collaborating with peers.
- More than 90% of students reported they had not been given adequate information about what was required on tasks.

In response to these results, the ASPAL model was developed and built on the premise of the value of self- and peer assessment and the associated and related benefits of authentic assessment. There is abundant evidence in the literature attesting that the use of self- and peer assessment has the capacity to enhance student learning (Boud 2013; Falchikov 2013; Yan & Brown 2017). Neary et al. (2014, p. 9) point out that "engagement is created through active collaboration amongst and between students and academics". While conventional assessment allows others to make judgements about competence and success (Ajjawi, Tai, Nghia, Boud, Johnson & Patrick 2019) and "limits the potential of learner development through assessment (Spiller 2012, p. 2), the ASPAL model, by combining self-, peer and lecturer evaluation in a multi-week process focused on an authentic task, allows the learner to become a part of the teaching-learning-assessment process.

The value of self-assessment as a learning activity has been prominent in the literature for over 30 years (see Falchikov & Boud 1989), and has been shown to encourage deep approaches to learning (Ozogul & Sullivan 2007) and the acquisition of essential skills for life-long learning (Thomas, Martin & Pleasants 2011), to be positively related to student achievement, in both review (Brown & Harris 2013) and empirical (Jay & Owen 2016) studies. Peer assessment, on the other hand, has

received mixed reactions in the literature. While both the positive and negative aspects of peer-assessment have been canvassed previously (see Kearney, Perkins & Kennedy Clarke 2016), the authors believe that as part of a formative process, despite culminating in a summative mark, peer assessment can be quite useful, and that most of the negativity can be mitigated by practice and the moderating effect of the ASPAL grading system. That said, more-recent research has emerged on the reliability and validity of peer assessment (see Chang et al. 2011; Li & Gao 2016). In their recent meta-analysis on peer assessment, Li et al. (2019) found that "peer assessment in general has a nontrivial positive effect on students' learning performance", which confirms "previous literature on the benefits of peer assessment for student learning". Authentic assessment, which is the basis of this model, plays a different role, but is still essential in the process. ASPAL does not lend itself to any kind of assessment indiscriminately, but rather to one that is authentic to context. In teacher education, authenticity is embodied not only in the task itself, in this case a lesson plan, but also in the skills that ASPAL helps students develop: judging others' work; developing and applying criteria to a task; and subsequently, preparing teachers who are more work-ready.

The purpose of assessment is complicated and multidimensional; therefore, an assessment model that can mould to particular learning circumstances is imperative, specifically in the first-year experience. The use of self- and peer assessment as a summative judgement is the penultimate feature of the ASPAL model; however, it is the entire process, which occurs over a number of weeks, that allows it to be formative. The model incorporates aspects of both formative and summative assessment by continually informing student learning throughout the assessment process and counting towards students' final mark to ensure they value the process.

The ASPAL involves three stages prior to the submission of the task: surveying students about their experience with self- and peer assessment; collaboratively developing marking criteria for the authentic assessment students carry out; and undertaking a pilot marking session, in which students are given the opportunity to practise marking similar assignments to the ones they will be completing. At this point in the process students submit their task for self- and peer marking. In the this process, self-assessment, peer assessment and lecturer assessment are combined to produce a summative grade for the student. This process takes place as follows:

- Lecturer assessment accounts for 40% of the overall mark, allowing the lecturer's mark to act as a moderator for the self and peer marks.
- Two peers collaboratively mark another student's anonymous task. While the peers must collaborate during the process, they do not have to agree on the mark given. Each peer's mark accounts for 15%.
- Lastly, the student marks their own task against the criteria, with the perspective of having seen two of their peers' assignments. The self-assessment accounts for the last 30% of the overall mark. This empowers students to critically reflect on their work in relation to their peers'.

Once all the marking has been completed, a debriefing session is held in which students receive their feedback from peers and the lecturer. The final stage in the ASPAL process is another survey to elicit students' feedback about the process.

Methodology

This research was conducted in an undergraduate primary-education program at the University of Notre Dame Australia. The cohort consisted of 232 first-year students in their first semester of study in an undergraduate initial teacher-education degree. The participants (N=200) were all aged between 18 and 27, with an average age of 19.5. All first-year students must undertake this class in their first year; this particular study captured 92% of all students within this cohort. As per the

ASPAL model, at the beginning of the semester the students received an explanation of the assessment processes and completed a survey consisting of 1 questions: a mix of rating-scale, Likert-scale and open-ended responses, which sought to ascertain their current dispositions towards university assessments, the preparation practices, engagement in their courses, learning preferences and levels of satisfaction with various aspects of their degree. The ASPAL process happened over the course of approximately five weeks, which allowed the process to be formative, while still culminating in a summative grade. From the time the marking criteria were created and the pilot marking occurred, students were able to engage with each other and seek feedback on their works-in-progress. As this task was authentic (that is, it had professional application), this was an imperative aspect of the process.

The next stage was to collaboratively develop marking criteria that addressed the unit learning outcomes. This process aids in the transparency of the assessment and the learning outcomes. Allowing students to co-create the criteria gives them a stake in how they will be assessed and helps them better understand expectations. In the week after the criteria are created, students undertake a pilot marking session. In this case the task was to create a mathematics lesson plan for a stage 2 (year three or four) class: students pilot-marked lesson plans in different key learning areas, such as English, in different stages. This allowed students to understand the premise of creating the plan and how to apply the criteria, without aligning the content to the task. Pilot marking was expected to raise students' efficacy with regard to peer and self-marking. Two weeks after the pilot marking session, the peer and self-assessment would take place in class. In the weeks between the pilot marking and final submission, students were encouraged to collaborate and practise self- and peer marking of each other's assignments. The week following the peer and self-assessment, papers were returned: students received all their feedback from their peers and the lecturer, and then were debriefed through a reflective exercise where small groups of students, led by a tutor, discussed the process. The last part of the process was the final survey, consisting of 10 questions: again, a mix of rating-scale, Likert-scale and open-ended responses, which sought to gain an insight into their experience with and the impact of ASPAL on their engagement, assessment preparation, skill development and disposition towards learning and assessment. The open-ended questions asked students to reflect on the process and changes that had occurred in their perceptions since the first survey.

The results presented here are a preliminary analysis of the post-survey responses that aims to ascertain whether this process can help first-year students better understand common practices of assessment in higher education, thus leading to successful transition into university. The six principles of transition pedagogy proposed by Kift et al. (2010) will form the foundation of the discussion. Brief mention will also be made of the results of the self-, peer and lecturer marks for validation purposes.

Results

The results presented here are a snapshot of the overall outcomes of the ASPAL process. The questions on the survey were rated on a four-point scale, which did not offer a middle/neutral response. The students were also asked four questions that gave them the option of an open-ended response. Seventy-seven percent of students answered positively (2-3) regarding the model, while 23% answered negatively (0-1). Two aspects of the model to which the students were asked to respond were: whether they found the process beneficial to their understanding of university assessment processes; and the degree to which they felt more or less engaged with their assessments by undertaking the process. Students were also given two other opportunities to provide an open-ended response: the first was a question that asked students to note any aspects of the process that were not valuable, and the second allowed for additional comments to be made. While only one of

these questions was focused on the students' understanding of assessment, other questions on the survey were aimed at addressing other concerns specific to the first-year experience.

The data was analysed in relation to the issues addressed earlier as concerns related specifically to the first-year experience: engagement, processes, study skills, discipline knowledge and learning autonomy. First, in looking at the data dealing specifically with engagement, 71.5% of respondents rated the process as either "highly" or "very highly" in engaging their interest and 71% a further 12.8% rated it as "moderately" beneficial; and 14% regarded the process as not beneficial. Seventy percent of those surveyed thought it would better prepare them to engage with future assessments. One student response that exemplifies a "highly beneficial" answer was:

> *ASPAL really helped me understand the expectations of what was expected in my lesson plan. I understood what was expected at different levels and how to achieve the mark I wanted. (P1, 19 years)*

Another question asked students about the benefits of undertaking the ASPAL process with regard to their learning; the responses here were more definitive. Eighty-two percent of respondents answered that the process was beneficial to their learning, 8% that it was not, and 10% of respondents were ambiguous, noting both positive and negative aspects. One student made this comment about the process:

> *It assisted me with understanding how to use the criteria to ensure that I am meeting all the criteria. I also now know how to mark my own work so I can give it my own grade and know where I stand before I hand it in. It helped me learn about assessment, but also about lesson planning. (P124, 18 years)*

Comments on the usefulness of unpacking the criteria were typical in many statements. A commonality in the responses of students who answered positively and/or ambiguously was that they found the opportunity to see the work of their peers most beneficial in helping them better judge their own work and in their future learning. As an aside, this has been the most common benefit reported by students in all the iterations of ASPAL at all levels of learning, from primary school through to post-graduates (see Kearney 2013; Kearney & Perkins 2014; Kearney, Perkins & Kennedy-Clark 2016).

The negative comments were mostly focused on the task or a lack of understanding of the process. This lack of understanding was not unexpected, as the process was new to the students, but it was heavily outweighed by the positive student responses regarding the benefits of undertaking ASPAL. One comment exemplified how the process can be daunting in the beginning, but appreciated afterwards:

> *Before taking part I didn't quite understand or like the idea of the ASPAL model. However, after taking part in the process I now have a greater understanding what this process teaches individuals and its positive effects on all future assessments. (P57, 23 years)*

The negative responses tended not to include specific constructive feedback: "there were too many problems with it" (P91, 20 years); "I did not find it very helpful" (P186, 18 years); and "the marks were all different so you did not find out what your actual mark was" (P13, 18 years). Despite some negative feedback, an 88% satisfaction rating is regarded as substantial in indicating positive change in the transition period.

The results of self- and peer evaluation illustrated the accuracy of the self-, peer and lecturer assessment combined at 30%, 30% and 40% when compared to the lecturer marks. The following chart shows those marks.

Table 1. Comparison of means and standard deviation for lecturer, self-, peer and final assessment

	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Lecturer mark	200	61.57	7.00
Self mark	200	63.60	6.85
Peer mark	200	60.23	8.76
Final mark	200	61.76	6.76

Table 1 shows the averages and standard deviations of the lecturer, self- and peer assessments and the final mark for the assignment. The results indicate that the average marks for the self and peer marking were both within two percentage points of the lecturer mark, and that the lecturer mark, which accounted for 40% of the total final mark, worked as a moderator for both the self and peer marks. The mean final mark and the lecturer marks were almost identical, with a 0.19-mark variance, indicating that the use of self- and peer marking, even in the first year, with the right combination of training and practice, can be used for summative evaluation.

The last aspect that the survey revealed was the level of autonomy and the use of study skills provided by the ASPAL process. Larmar and Lodge (2014, p. 98) report that a major focus of research into the first-year experience has been on the "ongoing utilisation of study skills that centre upon the completion of course requirements in contrast to approaches that enable students to develop as autonomous learners". Sixty-seven percent of students in the current study found that ASPAL helped them become autonomous in their learning, and 89% percent reported that it provided valuable study skills. The combination of allowing students a significant role in the process of their own and their peers' assessments facilitated the students' ownership over the process, which helped with autonomy. While 67% is not particularly high, the authors feel that with continued exposure to ASPAL, students' confidence will grow and they will become more autonomous learners. The result for study skills was exceptionally high, and is believed to be due to the transparency and involvement of students in every stage of the assessment process. ASPAL models the assessment process from start to finish, which correlates to students' preparation for the assessment task itself, allowing the study skills to develop organically.

Discussion

The six curriculum principles and key strategies of transition pedagogy proposed by Kift et al. (2010, p. 11) – "design, transition, engagement, diversity, assessment and evaluation", with the key strategy being, "curriculum that engages students in learning; proactive and timely access to learning and life support; intentionally fostering a sense of belonging; and, sustainable academic-professional partnerships" – assist in the analysis of the results in light of the success and challenges of using ASPAL as a transition pedagogy.

The principles of ASPAL, although not created with transition pedagogy in mind, apply many, if not all, of the curriculum principles and strategy. The most important aspect of ASPAL is its ability to address the issues of engagement and misunderstanding surrounding what is arguably the most important and valued aspect of a student's course of study: assessment. Graff (2009, p. 160) reports

that in higher education, "our assumption has been that most students will not learn what we teach them, that given human nature this is to be expected, and that ultimately this is not our problem". The ASPAL model was created and continues to develop to overturn this sort of notion in higher education. Students who are deemed as being academically suited to and admitted to institutions of higher education should have an expectation to be taught and to learn. The process of teaching can only be deemed successful if the pupil learns what is taught; the ASPAL model, although it does not guarantee student success, attempts to make this process transparent and encourage students to learn the process and language of assessment to maximise their potential to succeed.

Student expectations when they enter higher education are in stark contrast to the realities of many higher-education institutions. Scutter et al. (2011) found that 68% of students expected that university lecturers and tutors would provide all materials required for learning, and that only 31% of students thought that their own time management was important for learning. These are startling statistics, but also reflect the reality of the difference between students' and institutions' expectations. Transition pedagogy and tools such as ASPAL can help to reconcile some of these expectations by meeting students halfway. While the ASPAL model does not provide all the materials for learning, it does provide the tools by which students can become more autonomous and helps with student time management by presenting assessment in stages that can mimic how students approach assessments more generally. Meeting expectations and illustrating processes so that students have more realistic expectations can help alleviate stress and lead to better adjustment to university life (Pancer, Hunsberger, Pratt & Alisat 2000).

According to Goldingay et al. (2014), students value formative assessment. The survey results in this study showed that the formative aspect of ASPAL was what students valued most, reporting the modeling of similar assignments during the pilot marking and peer assessment to be most valuable to their future learning.

The results presented here are generally lower than previous years when ASPAL was used not as a transition pedagogy, but more as a learning and assessment tool to enhance students' engagement; however, the difference is not significant. In the semester prior to this study, 92% of the third-year students (N=174) who undertook ASPAL reported that it provided valuable study skills, and 77% reported that it helped with autonomy. These numbers have been mostly consistent in all the iterations with third-year students; numbers for cohorts of second-year students have been similarly consistent. As this is the first iteration of ASPAL for use as a transition pedagogy, we do not yet have comparative data for first-year cohorts.

Returning to the principles used to analyse ASPAL for its success and limitations through the lens of transition pedagogy as proposed by Kift, Nelson and Clarke (2010), the design of ASPAL helps students better understand the processes of assessment in higher education and delineates assessment into a staged process that helps students succeed. Using ASPAL in the transition period changes the focal point of assessment. As a tool in transition pedagogy, ASPAL meets the needs of students and staff and creates a synergy between the two that helps alleviate some of the stresses that first-year students report. Engagement has always been a key feature and precursor for the development of ASPAL. This iteration yielded similar success to previous attempts: students found the process engaging (>70%) and the results indicated that engagement as facilitated by the collaboration between the lecturer and students throughout the process. Diversity, assessment and evaluation are obviously inherent in a pedagogy that essentially places assessment as the paramount feature of the curriculum and the learning. Evaluation is a key feature, as students evaluate peers by providing marks and feedback. With regard to diversity, the ASPAL model has been made to be inclusive of all students, but there may be some shortcomings within various special learning needs; however, all instruments that are available to facilitate students with special learning needs could be incorporated into the process, as in any other learning.

Conclusions

The ASPAL model has been a positive moderator in many circumstances and in many stages of students' academic careers (see Kearney & Perkins 2014; Kearney, Perkins & Kennedy-Clark 2016). Its use as a tool to help acculturate first-year students into higher education has seen similar success. There is growing recognition that students need support in acquiring the skills necessary for higher education (Horstmanshof & Brownie 2013); the ASPAL model tries to facilitate this through assessment processes that are transparent and inclusive of all students. Anderson (2004, p. 240) notes:

> For too long we have built education on models focused on teachers and institutional need. Reversing the priority to an exclusive focus on learners may have equally negative effects. Formal learning is a partnership, negotiated between and among learners and teachers. Focusing on only one side of the partnership obscures necessary input from others.

Student-centred learning has taken a prominent position in first-year transition pedagogy. However, in agreement with Anderson, the ASPAL model does not completely focus on student-centred learning; instead, it focuses on the skills and dispositions that students need to make them autonomous, independent learners as they move through higher education. The transition year needs to cultivate student engagement and foster a sense of belonging. To accomplish this, there should be a shared understanding of needs and expectations. As adult learners, these students applied for and were accepted into an institution of higher learning; thus, the institution has a responsibility to acknowledge and recognise their prior learning experiences and make expectations and processes clear and transparent. A successful transition pedagogy that can incorporate all of these things should be able to help first-year students adapt to their university experience; cultivate autonomous learning; increase student engagement; and help alleviate some of the stresses and stressors associated with the first-year experience. The ASPAL model of assessment is one tool that can be used to achieve this.

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