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# **Improving Engagement: The Use of ‘Authentic Self and Peer Assessment for Learning’ to Enhance the Student Learning Experience**

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## Abstract

The University system in the United States has been criticized for depersonalizing education (Tae 2009). The depersonalization of learning shows a lack of engagement on the part of the educator and the student and consequently the university. We ask the question: Can incorporating self and peer assessment into tertiary studies help to reengage students in their education?

Innovative assessment practices have the capacity to significantly change the perceptions of students with regard to their tertiary studies. Assessment drives learning (Boud, 1990); however, the wrong type of assessment drives the wrong type of learning. Traditional tests, meaningless essays, research projects that do not have value outside of the classroom reinforce surface learning and memorization (Gardner, 1997). What is needed is a reinvigoration of authentic assessment practices that foster useful metacognitive skills and are focused on deep, sustainable, authentic learning. While initiating innovative assessment practices might not solve the problem of overcrowded lecture theatres, it may be able to guide learning and encourage students to be more engaged.

In a recent study conducted at a small private university in Australia, we found that by incorporating the ASPAL Model (Authentic Self & Peer Assessment for Learning) (Kearney & Perkins, 2010), students were more engaged, had increased efficacy and felt that they were a part of the educative process, rather than being subjected to it.

This paper will present initial, qualitative findings, from research conducted in the School of Education at the University of Notre Dame, Australia where 280 undergraduate primary education students were surveyed prior to undertaking ASPAL and after undertaking ASPAL. While the quantitative results are still being analysed, the students’ perceptions of the process in the post survey will be reported and discussed in this paper and some broad conclusions drawn with regard to the use of self and peer assessment in engaging students in their studies.

## Key Words

Higher education, Assessment, Sustainable Learning, Authentic Learning, Self -Assessment, Peer-Assessment

## Introduction

There is a widely held belief that assessment drives student learning (Joughin, 2010; Boud, 1990) and that students' experience of assessment in higher education is that it is central to their learning experience (James, McInnis & Devlin, 2002). If we are to accept the point of view that students place value, artificial though it may be, on their assessments, it offers us, as their instructors, the opportunity to improve the student experience by designing assessments that foster the type of learning we want to encourage. Unfortunately, most students do not attend our lectures and tutorials for the academic quality of the course or for the possibility to be engaged in academic discourse relevant to the subject; rather they want to know how to pass the course and get a job (Lamprianou & Athanasou, 2009). The vast majority of students want the proficiencies, skills and expertise necessary to execute their role in the workforce (Lamprianou & Athanasou, 2009); regrettably, in our experience the traditional forms of assessment that pervades many of our universities, is not up to the challenge of meeting these demands.

Traditionally in higher education, Graff says, "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" (2009 p.160). Traditional forms of assessment focus on scientific principles that seek to be objective and are seen to be separate from learning and built on uniformity and fairness (Shepard, 2000). We contend that traditional assessments are simply not able to adequately meet the demands of society by providing the proficiencies and skills students require to prosper, not only in their respective job markets, but in becoming autonomous, free-thinking, progressive citizens in the modern world. Not only are traditional assessments inadequate at providing students with the requisite skill set to thrive in society, this paper seeks to show that they are also responsible for disengaging students from the learning process.

As many universities are seeking to improve the student experience by revising their assessment practices (James et al., 2002), in this paper we describe the implementation of a new model of assessment at the University of Notre Dame, Australia, developed to increase students' engagement through co-creating authentic assessment tasks that seek to encourage collaboration and critical thinking, improve judgment, and allow learners to become active participants in the assessment process.

## Literature Review

### *Engagement*

Engagement in formal education at any level is the one of the most essential yet complicated tasks of the educator. There seems to be a consensus in the literature that engagement is multi-faceted and hard to define (Sheppard, 2011; Atweh, Bland, Carrington & Cavanaugh, 2008; Fredriks, Blumenfeld & Parks, 2004). In their review of the literature on engagement Fredriks et al (2004) characterized engagement into three categories: emotional, behavioral and cognitive; Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer (2009) on the other hand, differentiate engagement from students' disaffection in an attempt to better understand what is meant by the term. This paper's focus with regard to engagement seeks to navigate and transcend these traditional debates and utilizes an operational definition based on motivational theory (Deci & Ryan 1985), as this is the particular facet of engagement this study concerns. We therefore, define engagement as: The emotional and behavioral motivations of students to be actively involved in the academic experience.

Considerable attention has been directed toward the improvement of undergraduate experience in higher education for over twenty years (AAC, 1985; Chickering & Gamson, 1987). However, the revival of the argument in recent years has made a significant impact into the ways that educational institutions address students' lack of engagement by beginning to shift focus, noting engagement as an integral aspect of the learning experience, rather than as a result of learning. Although it is becoming more commonplace for institutions to recognize the importance of engagement in higher education, it is equally as important to acknowledge that this lack of engagement that we are currently seeing, at least in formal education, is not unique in the current generation, nor is it explicitly caused by any one factor; rather, this is a struggle that has

been on-going in education at varying levels for many years. In speaking about students at Harvard in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Horowitz (1987) says:

Undergraduates at Harvard condemned with a long list of negatives those students who tried to gain teachers' approval. They labelled such behaviour with the terms 'bootlick,' 'coax,' 'fish,' or 'baum'...It was sticking your neck out if you spoke up in class and answered a professor's question to the group as a whole. It was likewise regarded as bad form to do reading for the course above and beyond the assignment and to let that be known (p.35 quoted in Stake, 1998, p.399).

The idea of the importance of engaging students and the seriousness with which it has received attention and focus in recent years can be seen by the growing number of universities participating in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the efforts at many of the country's leading research universities to refocus their efforts on teaching, rather than simply research (Rimer, 2007).

In the United States the National Survey of Student Engagement is the primary instrument used to measure student engagement at the tertiary level, and encompasses five dimensions: (1) active/collaborative learning; (2) student-faculty contact; (3) level of academic challenge; (4) enriching educational experiences; and (5) supportive campus environment. While the NSSE and its predecessor the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ) have been the predominant instrument to measure student engagement, the five dimensions that it uses as the conceptual basis of engagement has become a matter of consideration in recent years (Stake, 1998). Whether the NSSE's dimensions of engagement are accepted or universities look to other methods to define and measure engagement is not a question that we are seeking to answer here, rather the focus of this paper is about whether incorporating a new model of assessment in undergraduate teacher education courses can improve engagement, as defined previously, from the students' perspective. However, since the NSSE is the preeminent tool by which engagement is measured in higher education in the United States, we find it prudent to benchmark the outcomes from our survey and our definition of engagement to those dimensions. It should be noted however, that the foundational principles of this project and its relation to engagement were not originally based in the NSSE framework for engagement, but were based on the Australian Learning and Teaching Council's funded project Assessment Futures led by David Boud & Associates (2010) in Australia and a literature review which resulted in our operational definition of engagement. While the basis for this project was not founded in the NSSE framework, the purpose in implementing this model of assessment to improve student engagement parallels four out of five of the NSSE dimensions: Active and collaborative learning; student-faculty contact; enriching the educational experience; and level of academic challenge. And while we believe that this assessment model does have some capacity to help promote a supportive campus environment, we found this dimension too broad to be suitably affected by assessment tasks in any one class.

The NSSE surveys have found that efforts to increase the academic engagement of undergraduate students are an important means to improve their educational experience (Kuh, 2003); however, according to Kuh (2003) there are many other factors that need to be taken into consideration when it comes to engagement. As educators, improving the academic experience is the one aspect of the undergraduate experience that we have the most control over; therefore, this is where we have focused our efforts. We believe and seek to prove that a major focus of academic engagement depends on authenticity in students' learning and the sustainable nature of the tasks assigned, so that students see the value of their learning beyond the classroom. According to Brint et al., "existing cultures of engagement may not be sufficient to meet the challenges of creativity and productivity in the 21st century" (1998, p. 398); we believe that the implementation of authenticity in assessment and in learning can meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century graduate and may help to ameliorate these 'existing cultures'.

In the US there have been calls for the reform of assessment practices, specifically in reference to teacher education (Shepard, 2000); however, the heavy focus on standards and standardised testing in the United States make these reforms more political and policy-based (Stake, 1998), where in the UK and Australia, the path has already been paved for these reforms to take place (Shepard, 2000). Despite the heavy focus on

standards, the authors maintain there is still a place for this model of assessment in institutions of higher education in the United States.

According to Bloxham and Boyd (2007) the four purposes of assessment are: Certification, student learning, quality assurance and lifelong learning capacity. While the model of assessment proposed does not meet the criteria for certification nor quality assurance, it focuses on the other two components: student learning and lifelong learning capacity. Assessment practices such as the models that follow that are more collaborative and formative in nature do not necessarily need to replace the more traditional practices of standardised tests, but rather should be used in conjunction with these practices to ensure that the assessment processes that our institutions offer meet all of the purposes for assessment, rather than those that only suit the institution. Although it has been proposed that this model of assessment has the capacity to improve student learning, promote lifelong learning practices and also to improve students' judgement through reflection and self and peer assessment of their work (Kearney & Perkins 2010), the purpose of this paper is to analyse the qualitative data to determine whether or not students are more engaged in their learning through the implementation of innovative assessment models such as AASL (Authentic Assessment for Sustainable Learning) and ASPAL (Authentic Self and Peer Assessment for Learning) (Kearney & Perkins, 2010).

Authentic Assessment for Sustainable Learning (AASL) and its delivery model, Authentic Self and Peer Assessment for Learning (ASPAL)

The idea of authentic and sustainable assessment is one that focuses on assessment tasks that have applicability to the world outside the classroom and that foster autonomous learning. Sustainable assessment has been described by Boud (2000) as, "the knowledge, skills and predispositions that underpin lifelong learning activities," (p.151) and reflects the ideals of the foundation of sustainable learning. Through the implementation of sustainable assessment what we endeavor to achieve is assessment that, "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of students to meet their own future learning needs" (Boud, 2000). Research has shown strong links between the implementation of authentic assessment and high quality learning (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000; Ridley & Stern 1998; Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989). The use and implementation of authentic assessment has two significant features; it has the ability to re-engage students in the development of content-based knowledge through strengthened links with the outside world; and, it has the capacity to enhance student learning through the provision of skills such as critical thinking and creativity (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000).

For over a decade, the research has been promoting the development of professional skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, creativity, autonomy in learning, and authenticity in learning through innovative forms of assessment (Dochy, Segers & Sluijsmans, 1999); these are the skills that will be necessary for our students to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For most students, assessment is the most important aspect of their coursework (Lamprianou & Athanasou, 2009; James et.al, 2002); therefore, we as educators need to use this element of student perception to maximize the learning potential it harbors. If we can engage students through what they value in our courses and ensure that the assessments we assign are authentic and inspire the development of autonomous learning and the skills of critical and lateral thinking, we can maximize the potential for our students' future success; this is what the AASL and ASPAL models seek to achieve.

The development of the models of assessment was based on the seven propositions for assessment reform in higher education recommended in the Assessment 2020 paper by Boud & Associates (2010). Through an intensive literature review on assessment, with specific emphasis on the implementation of self and peer assessment at the tertiary level; informal interviews with undergraduate education students; and, our own perceptions of the limited levels of engagement in our courses, we sought to develop a model of assessment

that could have the potential to shift the ways that students regard assessment and transform the manner in which assessment occurs.

While these two models have been described in detail in previous papers (see Kearney & Perkins 2010; Kearney & Perkins 2011), the premise of this model of assessment is that the task must be authentic; that is, it must have a direct correlation or relevance to the students' world outside of the classroom. In designing authentic assessment tasks, we inevitably encourage learning that has applicability outside of the classroom, which makes the learning sustainable. The delivery approach of these tasks is what defines the model: First, by allowing students and lecturers to collaboratively develop marking criteria we sought to engage students from the outset in the assessment process; next, students underwent a pilot marking session to learn how to mark against the set criteria and come to an understanding of how to judge work based on those criteria; thirdly, peers would collaboratively mark anonymous assignments and assign a mark; students would then have an opportunity to mark their own papers against the criteria and be able to judge their own work on the basis of the work of their peers they had just marked; the last stage of the marking process was the lecturer's mark, which would be added to both the self assessment and the peer assessment to arrive at a cumulative total mark for the assignment; finally, a debriefing session was held and feedback from the peers and lecturers were distributed (see appendix 1).

## Methodology

This research was conducted in a primary education program at the University of Notre Dame, Australia. The cohort selected to participate in the research were 230 first year students in their second semester of study. At the beginning of the semester the process of ASPAL was explained to the students and they were asked to complete a preliminary survey, which sought to ascertain their current dispositions towards university assessments, engagement in their units<sup>1</sup>, and their levels of satisfaction with various aspects of their course<sup>2</sup>. Three weeks later the assessment task was due and the process of ASPAL (see appendix 1) took place. During the last week of the unit, students were asked to fill in a post-ASPAL survey; again, looking at aspects of engagement, satisfaction of their course and their experiences of assessment, this time focusing specifically on the ASPAL process. We found it necessary, specifically in the post-ASPAL survey to have students provide qualitative data in order to justify their responses to validate whether or not the undertaking of ASPAL was the basis of their responses.

The results that will be analysed and described in this paper are those that were collected from the post-ASPAL survey, focusing specifically on the qualitative responses of the students to see if their view on assessments and their overall engagement was affected by undergoing the process.

## Results

While it is difficult to quantify the overall success of the AASL and ASPAL models at this stage of the data analysis, we seek to open a discussion through the analysis of one aspect of the data with regard to the capacity to affect student engagement through assessment practices. In looking at the data collected and thematically collating the results, certain trends begin to arise, from which we can make some broad generalisations with regard to the research and how it may be able to aid in engaging students.

At first glance the qualitative responses paint a positive picture of the students' perceptions of the process. An average of the four qualitative questions' results found that 63% of students answered positively regarding the model, and 30% answered negatively. Two aspects of the model that the students were asked to respond to were: whether they found the process beneficial to their learning; and, the degree to which they felt more or less engaged with their assessments by undertaking the process. Students were also asked two open ended

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<sup>1</sup> Unit refers to the specific class they are enrolled in, in this case ED1724 Key Learning Area: Mathematics 1

<sup>2</sup> Course, refers to the nature of their degree enrolment, in this case all students were enrolled in a Bachelor of Primary Education

questions: the first asked students to note any aspects of the process that were not valuable, and the second asked students for any additional comments.

While only one of these questions asks specifically about engagement, the qualitative remarks made on other questions also provide valuable data with regard to engagement as defined by the NSSE, specifically, enriching their educational experiences.

Firstly, in looking at the data dealing specifically with engagement, 61.5% of respondents rated the process as either 'highly' or 'very highly' beneficial in engaging their interest and would help them better engage with future assessments; a further 12.8% rated it as 'moderately'; and 25% as not beneficial.. A favourable response to the question can be typified by the following:

[S]ince this process I find that I am more aware now of what's expected of me in assessments and the marking criteria and how markers approach them is now more clear. I'm also no longer disappointed with a mark as I have some idea of what I'll receive (Anon, post-survey response).

Another reads:

[I]t has assisted me with understanding what to look for in a given assessment task whilst allowing me to analyse my own work and use the feedback given by the fellow peers and my tutor in future assessments (Anon, post-survey response).

Positive responses such as these, which were rated on a 4-point (0-3) scale<sup>3</sup> as 3 and 2, respectively, are indicators that the students found some value in undertaking a process that was new to them. As much as these responses showcase the positive, there were those who rated the experience lower. A favourable 'moderate' response can be typified by the following:

I think that I would be more likely to get another person to proofread my work. I already proofread my own work, but another person's perspective, I can now see, will be beneficial to my marks – assuming that they are the right person to ask (Anon, post-survey response).

A more general 'moderate' response was: "I focus on marking rubrics because I could only mark form (sic) the rubric." While most of the 'moderate' and 'not at all' responses didn't include a qualitative comment, typical 'not at all' responses can be summarized by the following: "all the skills it aim (sic) at achieving I already do with the exception for knowing what peers (sic) assessments are like;" and, "what I did for this assessment did not differ from what I do for others;" and lastly, "no real learning."

In this question, and more generally on all the questions that offered the opportunity to add a qualitative response, those who found the most value in the process were able to articulate that value and provided useful feedback to the researchers, while those who either found the process only somewhat valuable or not valuable at all, provided less articulate feedback, which often times was not constructive enough to build upon.

The next question asked students about the benefits of undertaking the ASPAL process with regard to their learning; the responses, in this case, were much more definitive. 71% of respondents answered that the process was beneficial to their learning, 18% that it was not, and 10% of respondents were ambiguous, noting both positive and negative aspects of the process. A trend arose in the remarks of students who answered positively and/or ambiguously in that the aspect they found most beneficial was the opportunity to see the quality of the work of their peers, which helped them better judge their own work.

Some typical responses were: "it shows us each others (sic) work and we are able to put our marking skills to use as well as knowing what level our work should be;" "it gives us the opportunity as students to look at what others have done and what we can improve in our own work;" and, "it allows students to see what their

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<b>Not At All (0)</b>	<b>Moderate (1)</b>	<b>Highly (2)</b>	<b>Very Highly (3)</b>
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fellow students think of their work with not just teachers, and it allows us to get feedback from both perspectives and use that for further tasks” (Anon, post-survey responses).

While these were just a few of the responses that mention the opportunity to and benefit of seeing other students’ work, in analyzing all the responses to this question, positive, negative and ambiguous, 82% of all respondents mention that seeing others’ work was an aspect of the process they found valuable. This is an essential outcome of the research, specifically with regard to engagement, for a number of reasons: One of the driving forces in the implementation of this assessment model was for students to actively collaborate and learn from one another; another important aspect of this result is that with regard to engagement, active and collaborative learning is one of the five dimensions in the NSSE framework, which validates the process with regard to engagement; and lastly, the prominence that student collaboration has in the literature with regard to assessment and engagement (James et al., 2002; Kuh, 2003; Boud et al., 2010) validates the students’ perception of the importance of the active collaboration that this assessment model offers.

The negative responses for the same question express discontent with the model, but mostly focus on the outcome of the task, rather than the process itself. While the researchers have yet to complete their data analysis with regard to the actual correlational results between the lecturer, self, and peer marks on the task, the negative responses to this question in particular make reference to some of the inaccuracy that took place: “[I]here were too many problems with it. I did not find it very helpful. The marks were all different so you did not find out what your actual mark was;” and another student remarked:

[S]ome of the marks given by students for peer assessment were way off the marks given by teachers themselves. I think there should be a few practice runs before students mark other peoples (sic) work to understand how they should really be marking (Anon, post-survey responses).

While these responses are fair and express one of the problems that often arise in tasks that rely on peer assessment (see Zariski, 1996), we feel that through a continued acculturation into a self and peer assessment throughout students’ course of study, we can help to mitigate this problem by improving their judgment. One of the factors that led us to choose first year students to participate in the study was that we had time to change their culture of learning and build upon their first year experience to improve their skills of judgment over time, resulting in a better prepared teacher for the classroom.

Initial feedback we received from colleagues on our post-ASPAL survey revealed that the questions could be perceived as positively geared, which according to Esterman (2003) is a shortcoming of the four point scale. Despite the possibility of positively gearing our question, we were unyielding in our use of this scale as we wanted to force students to take a side, rather than opting for an ambiguous response as is more common in five or seven point scales (Esterman, 2003). Instead of revising the scale, we decided to include a question specifically asking for comments about the negative or ‘not valuable’ aspects of the model to try and gain critical feedback in relation to the process from the students’ perspective. Not surprisingly, this question provided the most constructive and useful feedback on the post-ASPAL survey. It should be noted however, that while the feedback we received from this question was valuable, only 40% of respondents provided a qualitative remark to this question, from which we can deduce that 60% of respondents found some value in undertaking this process. Looking at a few of these responses gives us a good indication of what, from the students’ point of view, needs improving:

Where to start... I didn’t like it on (sic) the most part. There was more pilot-marking required – example from each of the grades would have been extremely beneficial. There wasn’t enough time allocated to mark the papers. The fact that we had to hand one in before marking the next one meant that there was no correction of marks allowed (Anon, post-survey response)

Another student remarked:

I found that there was not enough time to analyse the work, and give the best feedback possible to the student who’s (sic) work I was marking (Anon, post-survey response)



Both of these comments typify the constructive responses received: 25% of students' remarked that there was not enough time to properly grade the tasks and another 15% said that more pilot marking was required. This is incredibly useful feedback for improving the process for future cohorts.

The last question, which asked for 'additional comments' also provided, not only valuable constructive feedback, but also allowed students the opportunity to justify their impressions in undertaking the process. While only 34% of respondents answered this question, 90% of their comments were positive. The positive responses to this question helped to confirm earlier comments with regard to the aspects that students found both beneficial and those that needed improvement. One such response was:

It was an interesting experience to be a part of. I think the more it is incorporated the easier it would be to get more people involved, yet hard to motivate a lot of people to start with (Anon, post-survey response)

Another student discusses both positives and negatives of the process:

I found this assessment model interesting and enjoyable. The time constraints did impact on the way I marked the assessments I was given; however, I believe I did mark consistently with the aid of the rubric. I found this to be a beneficial form of assessment and would definitely take part in it again. Thankyou (sic) (Anon, post-survey response).

Lastly, a student discusses how their perception changed over the duration of the unit:

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 it's (sic) positive effects on all future assessments (Anon, post-survey responses).

This last comment, encapsulates the impact we were hoping to have on students through the implementation of this model of assessment. We anticipated a degree of resistance and skepticism from students when the model was first introduced and explained; however, the way in which most students were able to embrace the process and try to see the positive impacts it could have in their future learning has seemingly made the process and the challenges worthwhile.

## Discussion

The analysis of these results provides a glimpse into the capacity for innovative assessment practices to engage students, not only in the assessment process, but also, more broadly, into other aspects of their learning. The results, while mostly positive, cannot definitively classify the implementation of the model as a success; rather, what can be ascertained from these results is openness on behalf of a significant proportion of students to new methods of assessment that attempt to be more transparent, authentic and seek to involve them in the process of their own learning.

Trends that started to develop from the qualitative responses will be integral in the improvement of this process over time; three such categories that emerged were: the time given to peer assess; the quality and thoroughness of the pilot marking; and the motivation of the students to engage with the process.

To say that the majority of students found this process valuable and therefore it should be more widely employed, would be premature at this stage. After analysing all of the results, both qualitative and quantitative we will be able to make more definitive conclusions. At this time though, we only seek to encourage others, through the mostly positive responses we received, to be innovative with assessment despite the challenges and hardships that arise and to do what they believe is in the best interests of the intellectual pursuits of their students. And to reiterate that the purposes of assessment need not be for the sole purpose of evaluating students' learning, but rather it can be used to help students learn and develop skills such as: collaboration, sophisticated problem-solving, decision making, and use of new technologies, which according to CTB McGraw-Hill (2008) will help them succeed both in university and in life outside university.

By focusing on what drives students' learning we have the capacity to reshape the ways that students engage with the content of their studies. By fostering the principles of sustainable learning and authenticity in learning we encourage the development of those skills that our students need to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (CTB McGraw-Hill, 2008). It is our contention that if we choose not to reform our practice and instead continue with the traditional forms of assessment that pervade higher education, we devalue the education we provide, disengage students in the process, and send our students into a workforce for which they will be ill-prepared.

### Implications

This paper does not seek to be conclusive in the results of the survey with regard to whether or not AASL and ASPAL were successful in engaging students in the assessment process, but rather it seeks to open a discussion with regard to innovative assessments and their capacity to engage students. There has been ongoing demand for the reform of assessment both at school level (Hargreaves, Earl, & Schmidt, 2002) and in higher education (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007), which encourages educators to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century through authentic assessments that require the skills that students will require in their careers (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson & Orphanos, 2009). Through the implementation of the AASL and ASPAL models students experience something new, which, whether seen as beneficial or otherwise, seeks to open their mind to different experiences and encourages innovation and creativity within their own practice. The advantage of implementing ASPAL with pre-service teachers is that the process of marking and evaluation of assignments is an authentic teaching endeavor; however, we feel that these models, with some contextualized variation, are relevant across a spectrum of fields of study and could be applied at all levels.

Innovative forms of assessment have the power to drive student learning in a positive direction in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; whether or not the AASL and ASPAL models have this capacity is yet to be seen; however, according to the data presented, we feel it is a step in the right direction. Conventional thinking with regard to assessment in higher education is multi-faceted and has a number of factors that need to be considered, not the least of which is the academic integrity of the unit, course and the degree the university is bestowing on its graduates. We ask the question, what is the value of that degree if the student doesn't have the capacity to function effectively in the workforce? While standards and benchmarks are valid reasons for, and necessary mechanisms of assessment, so too are the skills students require to thrive in society; our challenge, as educators, is to find the proper balance.

### Note

The AASL model and its delivery method ASPAL (Kearney & Perkins, 2010) relied to a great extent on the work of Boud and Associates, (2010) and James, McInnis & Devlin, (2002). This study sought to show that the use of self and peer assessment on authentic tasks has the capacity to improve students' autonomy, judgment, critical thinking skills, and to promote reflection and sustainable learning, and as a result of these factors, how academic engagement in the course of study could be improved. The study focused on a group of 240 undergraduate primary education students, who undertook AASL and ASAPL on one of their summative assessment tasks in a mathematics pedagogy unit in their second semester of study in a four-year education degree. The results of the self, peer and lecturer assessments and the empirical data collected on the two surveys is still undergoing analysis and should be released in early 2012. For more information about these models, their on-going development and implementation, please contact the authors directly.

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# The ASPAL Model

