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Help seeking: Agentic Learners initiating Feedback

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Abstract

Effective feedback is an essential tool for making learning explicit and an essential feature of classroom practice that promotes learner autonomy. Yet, it remains a pressing challenge for teachers to scaffold the active involvement of students as critical, reflective and autonomous learners who use feedback constructively. This paper seeks to present a recalibrated perspective of feedback by exploring the concept as a student-initiated learning action, manifested within classroom practice as help seeking for learning. Teachers and students from years 2, 4 and 6 at an Australian primary school worked together on a writing project, which was structured as a three-phase learning process. The value of this approach was revealed by data gathered through students' planning templates, writing samples, interviews with students and teachers along with email correspondence with the teachers. A framework of social cognitive theory guided the analysis. It is suggested that the three-phase Assessment as Learning (AaL) process has the potential to support teachers in scaffolding students to seek help at time when they are receptive to feedback. Furthermore, this AaL approach appears to have enhanced the teachers' practice, particularly in respect to providing support for students during the forethought stage of the learning process. Practical techniques for scaffolding students' adaptive help seeking and autonomy as learners are presented in the paper.

Keywords: help-seeking, feedback, self-regulated learning, formative assessment, agency, assessment as learning

Help seeking: Agentic Learners Initiating Feedback

Introduction

Effective feedback is an essential tool for making learning explicit and an essential feature of classroom practice that promotes learner autonomy. Commonly defined as a regulatory mechanism used to communicate and help learners close a gap between current and desired performance (e.g. Swaffield 2008), feedback provides a very strong indicator of what teachers and learners regard as important. This paper seeks to present a recalibrated perspective of feedback by exploring the concept as a student-initiated learning action, manifested within classroom practice as help seeking for learning.

The importance of classroom assessment for enabling the development of learner autonomy and students' engagement in self-regulated learning processes is increasingly gaining traction through the work of formative assessment scholars (e. g. Andrade and Brookhart 2016, Dinsmore and Wilson 2016, Laveault and Allal 2016). Yet, student-initiated feedback in the form of help seeking within Assessment as Learning (AaL) has remained largely unexplored. Drawing on Newman's (2002) work, the term *help seeking* is understood in this paper as an adaptive learning strategy, in which students actively ask for the help they need to master a task. In line with Newman's definition, learners use adaptive help seeking to become independent learners —not to simply obtain the correct answer for the task at hand.

Adaptive help seeking is widely recognized within Self-Regulated Learning (SRL) research as an instrumental strategy for learning (see for example Butler 2006, Karabenick 2011, Karabenick and Newman 2006, Newman 1990, Ryan and Shin 2011, Karabenick and Berger 2013, Neitzel and Davis 2014). It is a learner strategy

that entails engaging cognitively in the learning process by identifying what help they require, and from where, or from whom to seek help. Adaptive help seeking is distinguished from other motivational indicators such as effort and persistence by requiring the learner to engage in social interaction and to come to the realization that he or she needs help (Skaalvik, Federici, and Klassen 2015). It is manifested as inquiring about task requirements (Shim, Kiefer, and Wang 2013), or seeking feedback about what process to use. Several authors suggest that students' adaptive help seeking may be associated with students' academic success (Butler 2006, Karabenick 2011), and their ability to persist with challenging tasks by adopting a mastery approach (Roussel, Elliot, and Feltman 2011). As such, help seeking is central to SRL, which in the present study denotes a learner's ability to control their thoughts, feelings and actions about the task by planning, monitoring and regulating the actions they take in pursuit of solving a learning task (Zimmerman and Schunk 2011).

This paper conceptualizes help seeking as a form of student-initiated feedback to inform future learning (Carless 2007, Hattie and Timperley 2007, Boud and Molloy 2013). In particular, students' help seeking is explored within AaL, a niche area of formative assessment. The literature includes various definitions of the concept and practice of formative assessment (e.g. Crooks 1988, Harlen and James 1997, Black et al. 2003, Popham 2008, Perrenoud 1998). However, in this paper, formative assessment is defined as assessment that is embedded as part of the learning process, and explicitly aimed at informing learners and teachers of specific gaps in a learner's understanding and skills. AaL is understood as an embodiment of formative assessment that positions learners as critically reflective connectors between task requirements and the learning process (Dann 2014, Earl 2013, Fletcher 2016), as co-

owners of their learning process (Absolum et al. 2009). As Dann (2002, 67) points out, AaL is “most notably promoted through the process of self-assessment”. Here, self-assessment refers to learning activities in which students reflect on what they have learned so far, and identify strengths and weaknesses in their learning as they make plans to help them progress to meet their learning goals. As such, self-assessment is an SRL competence (Andrade and Brown 2016, Andrade and Brookhart 2016, Harris and Brown 2013) that entails the skills of reflection, task analysis, goal setting and monitoring one’s learning progress.

Agency to inform learning

The notion of agency, defined as the influence people exert over their own functioning and the course of events that result from their actions (Bandura 2006, 2012), is a fundamental aspect of SRL. Help seeking is at the forefront of strategies used by a learner to influence their functioning, in other words to exercise agency, within the learning process.

This paper adopts a social cognitive theoretical framework (Bandura 2001, Zimmerman 2000) to conceptualize agency and the role of help seeking within the learning process. From a social cognitive perspective, learning is shaped by the interplay among students’ and teachers’ *intrapersonal* influences (e.g. deductive reasoning, knowledge and skills, self-beliefs and emotional reactions, degree of motivation, interest and agency); the *behaviour and learning actions* students and teachers engage in when working on the task at hand (e.g. help seeking); and the *situational* forces of the classroom context (curriculum demands, scaffolding and support from the teacher and peers, resources and exemplars). As such learning and teaching is perceived to be influenced by the fluctuating and reciprocal relationship

between these three domains of influences (Fletcher 2015, Bandura 2012).

In respect to the behavioural and situational dimensions of help seeking, there is wide agreement in the body of formative assessment literature that timely and specific feedback which requires the learner to act, is a key factor to informing learning which subsequently may have a significant impact on students' academic success (e.g. Black and Wiliam 1998, Hattie 2009, Hattie and Timperley 2007, Pakarinen et al. 2014, Rubie-Davies et al. 2015). Feedback is a central component of both SRL and formative assessment. As James (2008) notes, within formative assessment research feedback is commonly conceptualized as an integral part of teachers' planning, initiated by teachers as part of instruction, with the aim to deepen students' skill and understanding of concepts and enabling students to act to bring about improvement in their learning. Similarly, feedback is widely recognized within SRL literature as essential in helping people enhance their ability to regulate learning (Shute 2008, Azevedo and Johnson 2011, Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick 2006, Moyalán 2013).

While feedback and help seeking may appear to require the same learning behaviours of students and teachers, the two concepts differ in respect to agency and how students use the feedback they have been provided. Help seeking as a component of SRL, positions the learner as an agent in the learning process, with the teacher acting as a resource whom the student can consult in order to address a particular gap in their learning. In contrast, as Reeve (2013, 581) argues, formative assessments are "collaborative, constructive and sometimes proactive approaches to instruction that facilitate learning, but they represent teacher-initiated, rather than student-initiated action". Similarly, others have proposed that the feedback processes need to shift

from a unilateral act initiated by teachers to a co-constructed sequence of dialogues between students and teachers (Boud and Molloy 2013, Yang and Carless 2013).

Help seeking as a metacognitive action to inform learning

Help seeking is a constructive strategy for learning that requires the learner to identify instances when they need support to solve a task, which may entail choosing a strategy to solve the problem, identifying a suitable source of information, or guidance in processing information. As such, help seeking is framed by a learner's awareness about the context in respect to persons, strategies, goals and tasks that may be of help—collectively known as metacognitive knowledge (Efklides 2014). Help seeking requires learners to apply metacognitive knowledge and skills by judging whether they have sufficient knowledge to solve the task on their own; as well as regulating their knowledge by reflecting on where additional information can be obtained (Roll et al. 2007). In respect to teaching, this requires scaffolding students in developing help seeking behaviours to drive learning forward. It enables the teaching of content, concepts and SRL skills to occur in a context of currency—at a time when the student is receptive to instruction, having self-identified the need for, and having actively sought, help. By setting challenging tasks and providing students the opportunity to experience difficulties as a 'challenges springboard' for learning, teachers encourage students to use help seeking as a learning strategy (Butler 2006).

However, for help seeking to function as a learning strategy, it is necessary that the student seeks help, rather than trying to avoid the problem by either guessing or asking for the answer rather than guidance, or simply not using time productively (Roll et al. 2011). As Butler (2006) emphasizes, feedback can be provided when it is not solicited, which is particularly important as children commonly overestimate their

academic capabilities (Pajares 1997). Thus, providing feedback and help to students, even when they are not seeking it, is crucial. But is this enough? This paper posits that explicitly scaffolding help seeking opportunities for students goes beyond the key formative assessment notion of a teacher *providing* feedback which is timely and focused (Brookhart 2008, Hattie and Timperley 2007, Shute 2008, Wiggins 2012) — instead it proposes a three-phase process to scaffold feedback to be *sought* by students as agents of learning.

The study

The school context

The present paper draws on findings derived from a larger study (see [author's surname] 2015) exploring how primary students' learning was shaped in a student-centred AaL process. The study was conducted as a one-setting practitioner research study involving ten teachers and 256 students (121 boys and 135 girls) from classes in years 2, 4 and 6 (students aged approximately 7, 9 and 11 years), at an independent (non-government, non-religious, fee-charging) school in an urban area of the Northern Territory, in Australia. At the time of data collection, the school had an enrolment of approximately 700 students. The position of the researcher was what Dwyer and Corbin Buckle (2009) and Breen (2007) have described as being an 'insider-outsider'. As a long-standing member of staff at the school, thus well immersed in the setting and familiar with all the staff members and most of the students the researcher was predominately an insider. Yet, while the researcher was present when the projects were initiated in each class, the researcher was an outsider in the sense that she was not present in each class throughout the entire learning process. This relative distance was helpful because it helped avoid interview

participants making the assumption that the researcher already was familiar with their experiences (Breen 2007). Consequently, when reflecting on their participation in the interviews, the teachers and students provided detailed accounts of their insights and experiences to the researcher who in that sense was a trusted outsider. Thus, as a teacher at the school, with a well-developed understanding of the setting, the researcher has insider knowledge and could easily contextualize these reflections. Equally, not being in the classrooms throughout the learning process helped the researcher step outside the situation, which facilitated theorization (Burton and Bartlett 2005).

In accordance with the Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, approval to conduct the study was granted by the relevant Human Research Ethics Committee. Informed written consent was gained from the school principal, parents/guardians of the participating students, as well as from the students and teachers themselves. To protect the anonymity of the participants, all names were replaced with pseudonyms before the data was coded and analysed. The participants were assured in writing that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time, without prejudice. Care was taken to ensure that some teacher pseudonyms were gender neutral to ensure that the participants remained anonymous.

Design and instruments

To generate a contextual understanding of student agency and teacher input, a three-phase SRL framework adapted from Zimmerman (2011, see table below) was used to explore primary students' help seeking as an assessment capability (Absolum et al. 2009). The study was conducted as a writing project which ran over one school term (ten weeks). The project was structured as a learning cycle, consisting of three phases: *forethought*, *performance* and *self-reflection* (Author 2015). In the *forethought* phase,

the teachers carefully supported the students through the process of setting up the writing project. This required students to analyze the writing task, set partial goals for their writing project and identify appropriate learning strategies. The performance phase involved students monitoring and regulating their learning progress, with support from their teachers. In the self-reflection phase, students and teachers evaluated the effectiveness of the strategies they had employed. In addition, both identified the strengths and weaknesses of their approach.

Table 1: Phases of the Assessment as Learning Process (adapted from Zimmerman 2011)

Forethought phase	Performance phase	Self-reflection phase
Students...	Students...	Students...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyse relevant curriculum learning outcomes • split overall curriculum outcomes into partial, task-related goals • explore possible learning strategies to employ • create a checklist of strategies and partial goals to meet during the performance/drafting phase • determine timelines for partial goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitor their understanding and seek help • check performance against partial goals to monitor progress • seek feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify strengths and areas to improve for next time • attribute reasons for success and challenges

The three-phase approach framed the study in two ways. Firstly, it informed the design of one of the instruments, the students' planning template. Secondly, the three phases informed the sequence of the project and its data collection. Consequently, prior to commencing the project, the researcher, together with the participating teachers collaboratively developed a planning template for each of the three participating year-levels, targeting the relevant syllabus outcomes in the *Writing* strand of the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework for English (NTCF 2009).

The students' planning templates were each designed as a folded A3 sheet, consisting of three main sections to mirror the learning phases of forethought, performance and self-reflection (see example in appendix). As illustrated by the templates' first three 'thought bubble-prompts', the forethought phase was scaffolded in greater detail compared to the other two phases. To scaffold the development of students' autonomy as learners from the very beginning of the learning process, the planning template was designed to help students engage in forethought in three separate subparts. The first forethought subpart contained the relevant curriculum learning outcomes, which had been worded by the teachers in a manner that students in the particular year-level would be able to understand and use as learning intentions and success criteria for the project. The second forethought subpart provided a selection of suggested strategies for students to refer to as they undertook the task of splitting the success criteria into partial goals they would use to monitor their work. The third subpart required students to consider the type of text and audience they would target as they developed their writing sample.

The middle segment of each template was designed as a transitional phase between the forethought and performance phases of the learning cycle. It consisted of a checklist section divided into three sub-headings, *text and audience*; *structure* and

strategies. Each sub-heading had some space provided for students to scribe partial goals during the forethought phase, which then were used to prompt students' monitoring of their progress during the performance phase. In the performance phase the students commenced their writing projects by developing a draft and checking progress against the success criteria identified in the previous phase. It required students to engage SRL skills such as managing time, monitoring and regulating their use of learning strategies to persist with the task at hand. The final self-reflection phase of the cycle entailed students evaluating how well their learning strategies worked and attributing reasons for their level of achievement in the task.

Table 2: Overview of instruments to collect data within the project phases

Instrument	Forethought phase	Performance phase	Self-reflection phase
Interviews	Teacher interviews to inform design of planning templates (n= 7)	Teacher interviews (n=7) Student pair interviews (n=7)	Teacher interviews (n=7) Student pair interviews (n=7)
Follow-up emails from teachers		Follow-up emails from teachers (n=28)	
Students' planning templates	Generated throughout the project (n=126)		
Students' writing samples		Generated during performance phase (n=126)	

In addition to the students' planning templates and their subsequent writing samples, the data collection included regular semi-structured email correspondence with the teachers throughout the writing project with structured open-ended questions to prompt reflection. The study was also informed by semi-structured interviews with

seven of the teachers. The length of each interview ranged between thirty minutes and an hour. The teacher interviews were complemented with two iterations of student pair interviews. The first iteration was conducted during the performance phase, while the writing project was underway. The second iteration was conducted at the completion of the writing project. This gave the students, teachers and the researcher time to reflect on the experience with the benefit of hindsight. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by the researcher using voice-recognition software during the time of data collection. By transcribing concurrently, themes in the data started emerging early in the process.

Data analysis

The researcher adopted an inductive approach in the initial phase of data analysis, before applying cognitive theory (Bandura 2006) to synthesize the data. The first round of interviews generated the initial set of emerging codes (Lankshear and Knobel 2004). These codes were then organized as nodes in NVivo. Further codes emerged during the re-reading of the interview transcripts, email correspondence with teachers, and the self-reflection sections of the planning templates, resulting in some thirty-five codes being identified from the data.

Repeated reading of transcripts generated identification of similar data.

Through this process of synthesis, the data was narrowed to eight thematic categories (Saldaña 2013). As illustrated in Appendix 2, five of the eight thematic categories related to intrapersonal factors. These represented a range of (1) *emotions*; (2) *own preferences and choices*; (3) *cognitive considerations* such as reflective learning, strategies and predictions; expressions of (4) *self-efficacy* and (5) *persistence*. Social and situational factors, which represent a different domain within social cognitive

theory, included the following thematic categories: (6) *social considerations* such as references to peers, teachers and audience; (7) *value judgements* used to express a sense of authenticity and meaningfulness such as ‘real learning’. The behavioural domain of social cognitive theory consisted of descriptive references to (8) *teaching and learning practices*, of which help seeking was one of the codes.

Findings and discussion

The study findings suggest that the AaL project prompted students to actively engage as learners and to seek help to inform their learning, at time when they were receptive to feedback. Notably, the planning template may have served as a ‘challenges springboard’ for both teacher practice as well as student learning, by requiring students to take on an active role in engaging in the detailed, explicit planning process. For the teachers, this meant giving more explicit instructions than they normally would, as part of the emphasized forethought stage of the learning process. For the students, the templates appear to have presented detailed planning considerations they needed to address as part of the forethought phase, prompting them to seek help.

Students as active agents in the learning process

Before turning to some teachers’ accounts of how students’ help seeking was manifested in the study, it seems pertinent to begin with a student’s thoughts. Several students saw the chance to take an active, agentic role in steering their learning processes as both challenging and rewarding. The account below from a Year 2 student’s follow-up interview illustrates his sense of agency and engagement, as he grappled with the complexities of story and character development in his writing:

Q: How did you find the whole writing experience?

Clive: It was kind of tricky and fun. The tricky bit was that you had to think of your own story. And the fun bit was that you've got to make a problem and how they, like, solve it and what's the beginning and so on. So, yes, that was fun about it.

Clive's words above indicate that the AaL approach may have been helpful to promote the role of students as autonomous learners (Ryan and Deci 2002), by positioning students as constructive contributors in the learning process. The AaL process—or perhaps more the situational factor of being interviewed about his perceptions about his learning as part of it—prompted reflection. In seeking to address—as Clive put it—the “tricky bit[s]” in the learning process, the study's findings suggested that students demonstrated agency in their learning. The teachers' accounts convey that students' reflection and metacognitive knowledge about on their own learning needs, prompted students to solicit feedback. In her follow-up interview, Maria, one of the Year 2 teachers, noted how students played an active role in the learning process by seeking help in addressing their learning learning goals:

Q: ... Did [your students] seem aware of what they needed to work on?

Maria: Yeah, Yeah. Uhm... And I think that's why they often came up to me to check, because they know that's something... it's an area that they need to work on.

Maria went on to describe how students' help seeking in turn prompted her to initiate conferences with small groups of students. She found that the conference format helped her provide feedback to the individual student, tailored around where they were at in the learning process. Emma, another of the Year 2 teachers, also appeared to note an increase in help seeking among her students. As she described it in a follow-up email:

During the project the students were approaching me more for help and feedback, as it was a new concept of writing. The responsibility was placed on them, so they were asking for confirmation that what they were doing was correct.

In the teacher interviews, particularly the Year 2 and Year 6 teachers noted that their students actively had sought their input during the writing process. The teachers had interpreted this as a sign of their students' engagement in their learning and used the help seeking as an opportunity for *point-of-need* teaching.

Point-of-need teaching

Findings from the present study highlighted the teachers' practice in respect to providing students with individual feedback within the students' zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978). The teachers' use of learning dialogues and targeted, small-group conferences to provide students with formative feedback emerged as a feature of the AaL process:

I did small groups to start off with, to get an overview and then... yeah... a couple of sessions going through each part [of the planning template]. Some of them, I still... some of the kids still didn't quite understand, and more the fact that... it was just new to them. I'd go through each part again... especially with the bottom part, the strategy they used. Some of them found that bit hard to grasp. And did not realise that they are doing these things [applying strategies to solve a task] anyway... [...] I was conferencing with them, with their writing pieces, saying: okay, so what did you do? Did you look through your work before you came to me? So I had to talk them through it. But then we wrote down things they did.

Follow-up interview with Maria, Year 2 teacher

From a social cognitive perspective, Maria's description above illustrates how AaL is a process that facilitates point-of-need teaching as both a situational and behavioural factor. The students' help seeking appear to have prompted Maria to have

a dialogue with her students about learning strategies, clearly aimed at informing future learning. Her reference to the “couple of sessions going over each part”, conveys how she guided students as they endeavoured to address the proximal learning goals and the overall learning outcome from the syllabus.

A different aspect of point-of-need teaching, is proffered in the account below from one of the Year 6 teachers. Here, Sam’s description the reciprocal nature of the AaL process, in which the planning template entailed students to undertake particular learning actions. In turn, these actions and the planning template appear to have prompted two significant intrapersonal factors: students’ cognitive engagement and agency as learners. The term cognitive engagement refers to how strategic a student is in their application of appropriate learning strategies and how they self-regulate their learning actively in respect of monitoring their understanding (Reeve 2012).

Sam: ... It probably help[ed] them, writing it down: ‘what is required of me in this task’, and writing it down, having it clear, looking back to it all the time. Rather than me just going: ‘this is a procedure’; ‘this is what is required on [sic] a procedure’; ‘here’s an example, now it’s your turn to write one’.

Q: So, less spoonfeeding?

Sam: Yes! Much less spoonfeeding. Although it did require spoonfeeding in helping them fill in [the planning template], then it was... yeah. You could see the cogs turning a bit more.

Sam’s perspective suggests that the planning template served as a tool to scaffold students’ cognitive engagement by requiring them to identify and list the strategies they intended to employ in pursuit of the overall learning goals. The notion of cognitive engagement also draws on the idea of investment, in the form of

thoughtfulness and willingness to exert the effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas and master difficult skills. In respect of scaffolding for cognitive engagement, the quote above also illuminates how the learning process in AaL, as it applied in the present study, is characterized by the idea of reciprocal interplay among behaviour, cognition and social influences (Bandura, 2006). In this case, a social influence of the teacher helping the individual student develop a check list of learning strategies and partial goals, appears to have reciprocated with intrapersonal influences by stimulating students to cognitively engage with the task.

Earl (2006) described point-of-need teaching in the assessment process as an integral part of the feedback loop for learning “with the emphasis in many assessment events shifting from making judgments that categorize students, to using them as windows into learning” (Earl 2006, 12). In line with Earl’s position, teachers in this study were presented with opportune, student-initiated times to provide feedback and point-of-need teaching. By its very nature, this appears to have helped make feedback contextualized, specific, meaningful and timely for students. In turn, this may have facilitated the development of students’ SRL skills.

Forethought to prompt cognitive engagement, agency and help seeking

From a social cognitive perspective, the AaL process illustrates the highly reciprocal relationship between intrapersonal, situational and behavioural factors. The interviews revealed how the teachers helped their students become aware of content specific task requirements, such text structure and features associated with the particular text type, which the student had chosen:

They needed me to go through it quite a bit. But... I think it all came down to what writing piece they chose. [...] With the narratives, most of them were okay because they knew the format. Whereas if they were doing something different: poems or letter writing, which we

haven't touched on as much, that's when they needed a lot of help to fill in the sheet.

Follow-up interview with Maria, Year 2 teacher

In referring to key components of the writing process —such as identifying elements of various text types, which prompted Maria to scaffold the students to employ higher-order thinking skills— the reciprocal nature of AaL, as a dialogic process between the student and the teacher is illuminated. In this case, Maria describes how a student's choice —an intrapersonal influence— of text type, reciprocated with situational factors in respect to presenting the need for the student to align with text conventions and curriculum demands. Depending on the student's confidence and competence —a return to the intrapersonal domain— in respect to being able to craft the particular text of their choice, the student was prompted to seek help from the teacher —thereby interacting with the behavioural domain— in seeking support from the teacher within the situational context. The teacher's behavioural response to the student's help seeking is to teach at the point of situational need.

Interestingly, interviews with some of the less experienced teachers who participated in the project, such as Alex, presented a different aspect of cognitive engagement. Alex described how the students (and Alex as their teacher) had found the planning process challenging. In particular, several students had found it difficult to understand that the planning template was intended to help them develop a checklist of what to keep in mind in the writing assessment, rather than a template to construct writing drafts on.

Students' help seeking appears to have fluctuated during the learning process. Elle, a year 6 teacher, provided a description that illustrates the importance of help seeking as students engage in task analysis, strategic planning and SRL. When asked

whether she had noted any changes in how students had sought feedback, she reflected:

Elle: Some did, some didn't. Some – you know those ones that were always looking for the recognition and: *Is it okay, am I on the right track?* But uhm... I... Yeah, more so than just the usual. [...] They... Wanted to just check that they were, you know, doing the right thing.

Q: What do you see that as a sign of?

Elle: Just... again... taking it on board. And wanting to do their best with it. [...] But once they knew that they were on the right track, then they were very independent. [...] I barely had to help them in the last couple of weeks, they were just [flat out?] They just looked at their sheet, talked about it with each other a little bit. Loved it.

Elle's description of the help seeking behaviours her students displayed during the forethought phase mirrors understandings from research into help seeking. For example, Karabenick, one of the dominant researchers in the field, defines help seeking as a "process of seeking assistance from other individuals or other sources that facilitate accomplishing desired goals" (Karabenick and Berger 2013, 238).

Reciprocity among agency, scaffolding and learning actions

The social cognitive notion that human functioning is framed the reciprocity among intrapersonal factors, behaviour and social contexts (Bandura 2001), was repeatedly illuminated in the study. Below, a reflection from Monica, another of the Year 6 teachers, provides a noteworthy illustration of the complex and dynamic interaction between students' intrapersonal factors and how learning and teaching unfolds. Monica's remarks imply a connection between students as individuals and their determination to persist, and to demonstrate agency as an active learner in the

assessment process. These intrapersonal factors, combined with social factors in the form of the scaffolding Monica provided by prompting students to refer back to their checklist of goals and strategies on the planning template, appear to have impacted on students demonstrating greater self-efficacy and more committed learning behaviours than she had come to expect of her students. In a follow-up email written to the researcher during the project, Monica noted:

Students really surprised me and worked well on their writing activity. [Jack] said that this was the first time he had written such a long story. Students like [Charlie], who are normally weak in writing skills, did well and never complained about having to write a recount. It really helped to have the assessment criteria (outcomes) that they had written themselves to refer back to.

I regularly check that the students have referred back to their outcomes. I said at the beginning that we would work on the project for three weeks, but I have found that in two weeks the majority of the kids have only done their planning and their written copy. I am not sure at this stage if the students will be able to complete the project in three weeks as originally planned.

With respect to teaching, Monica's comments above raise an important intrapersonal point, in regard to a teacher's sense of own sense of confidence and self-efficacy in their professional role. While her comments reflect her doubts about completing the project with her class in three weeks as she originally had planned, Monica clearly used the AaL project in a formative manner, to inform her teaching. She extended the period of time dedicated to the project because her professional judgement was that students were deeply engaged in the learning process and that it therefore would benefit their learning. This is another example of how our (or in this case, Monica's) intrapersonal factors such as cognition, emotion and motivation reciprocate with social and situational factors, which in turn reciprocate with behaviours, manifested by teaching and learning actions.

When the notion of AaL was introduced as a reinforcement and extension of the role of formative assessment, Earl (2003) sought to emphasise the role of the

student. She envisaged students as critical connectors between the assessment and learning process in a role “as active, engaged, and critical assessors [who] can make sense of information, relate it to prior knowledge, and master the skills involved” (Earl 2003, 25). What Monica, along with several other teachers quoted in this paper, describe, is students taking on precisely this critical role of engaged learning that Earl delineates as students being *connectors* between assessment and learning, who make active choices and exercise agency in steering their learning towards the targeted learning goals from the syllabus.

Conclusion

This paper seeks to offer a recalibrated perspective of formative, student-initiated feedback as a key component of AaL. With its focus on help seeking, the paper proposes that social cognitive theory lends a helpful conceptual and practical framework for AaL to scaffold students’ agentic engagement and development of SRL skills. In this study, the AaL process was scaffolded by the teachers and framed by a planning template designed to support students throughout the forethought phase of the learning cycle . Findings suggest that this approach aided students’ engagement in metacognitive processes such as monitoring understanding, organising ideas and checking for consistency. By requiring students to make individual choices, the AaL approach prompted students to engage cognitively in the learning process. This entailed students making strategic choices, with the support of the teachers, as the students filled in their planning template. It required students to interpret and clarify the aim and learning criteria. As such, the process was characterized by a strong emphasis on the forethought step in the SRL cycle (Zimmerman 2011).

While limited to one setting, the findings from this study point to the

importance of a dynamic, reciprocal relationship between the individual student and support from the teacher in respect of scaffolding students' cognitive engagement through task analysis and strategic planning. In turn, such a reciprocal relationship between the student and teacher facilitates point-of-need teaching within the students' zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978). Additionally, the study findings indicate that a scaffolded AaL approach such as the one in the present study, stimulates students to initiate feedback through help seeking (Karabenick and Berger 2013, Butler 2006). By connecting the success criteria with the assessment task and placing the student in the centre as an agentially engaged co-developer in the assessment process, the AaL process in the present study appears to have echoed Earl's emphasis on the student as a "critical connector" between the assessment and learning process. While additional studies are needed to investigate the relationships further, it is hoped that the findings in this paper contribute by offering a contextualised analysis of a situation where AaL was used to build students' sense of agency and ability to actively seek feedback to inform their learning.

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1. *What will I show that I can do?*

Learning outcomes: What am I trying to do?

	Band 3	Extension
Text & audience	Write different types of texts using my own knowledge, experience, thoughts and feelings in my writing. Write for the purpose to inform, argue, persuade, move and entertain readers.	Write creative texts with a clear sequence, consistent plot and developed characters. Persuade the reader with convincing arguments and well-presented information in factual texts.
Structure	Write developed texts which are easy for the reader to understand. Use imagination, information and arguments in my writing.	Control the necessary spelling, grammar, punctuation and text structure to clearly communicate ideas and information in text.
Strategies	Use correct grammar and check that my writing is clear and effective.	Use a range of strategies to research, plan, compose, review and edit written texts to make sure that they are clear to the reader.

2. *Suggestions to think about before you start...*

Text and Audience	Structure	Strategies				
<i>How can I make my text interesting and engaging for the reader?</i>	<i>How will I organise my writing to make it clear?</i>	<i>What planning will help improve my writing?</i>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Which text type will I choose for my writing? How is it structured? What descriptions will I use to make my reader understand what I am trying to say? How can I engage the reader? Should I use fantasy, humour, suspense, convincing arguments...? How will my choice of words affect my reader? How can I make my text convincing? Do I need to refer to other texts or show how I found my information? How can I be creative and present my work so my reader understands and becomes engaged in the text? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How should the text type be structured? Do I need to set out an orientation, complication and resolution...? What content should I choose to include? What is important? Does my writing make sense? Have I used clear sentences, correct spelling and punctuation? Have I started my sentences in different ways? Do I need to use a range of punctuation (. ! ? , ") ? Is it clear who is speaking in my text? What sounds better –dialogue or a narrator? Should I use quotes? Is time clear in my writing? Have I used verbs in the correct time form? (<i>I walked, he asked...</i>) Have I organised the text into paragraphs? Have I used graphics to improve meaning? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could I brainstorm ideas? Would a sense chart help to plan for how to involve the audience? <table border="1" style="margin: 5px auto; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Thoughts</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Feelings</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Sights</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Sounds</td> </tr> </table> Is there a style of writing I can imitate to improve my writing? How can I make sure my draft is proofread and checked for spelling, punctuation etc.? Should I make a checklist for myself, work with a friend or use another strategy? What tools can I access to improve my writing? Dictionaries? Thesauruses? Computers? Have I written down the sources where I found my information? Could I use a template as an exemplar to check my writing against? 	Thoughts	Feelings	Sights	Sounds
Thoughts	Feelings					
Sights	Sounds					



3. Think about this as you start planning your work

Text type: *What sort of text will I write?*

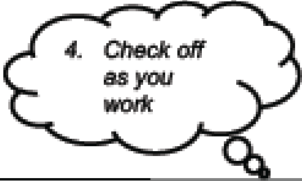
Narrative	Explanation	Recount	Report
Poetry	Procedure	Other: _____	

Audience: *Who is the text meant to engage?*

Children	Teenagers	Parents	Teachers
People in Darwin	People in power	Other: _____	

Assessment checklist: *These are the things I will focus on*

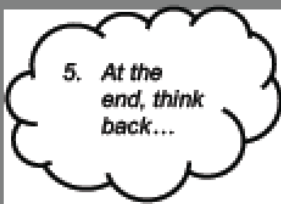
	My progress
Text and Audience:	
Structure:	
Strategies:	



4. Check off as you work

Reflection: *Why have I chosen to show my work in this way?*

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Self-assessment:

How did I improve my writing skills? ☆☆☆☆☆
How would I rate my finished work? ☆☆☆☆☆

What did I do the best?

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What can I improve?

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Teacher's feedback:

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Appendix 2: Analytical categories and codes from the data

Main themes	Thematic categories	Preliminary codes
Individual/intrapersonal factors	(1) Emotions/Motivation	engagement
	(2) Self/Autonomy: preferences & choices	enjoyment pride
	(3) Cognitive considerations	purposeful learning
	(4) Self-efficacy	pressure
	(5) Persistence	learning preferences own interest using own ideas imagination challenging oneself/ trying one's best furthering learning using strategies reflective learning organising thoughts prediction getting started showing one's strength
Social factors	(6) Social considerations	audience
	(7) Value judgements	collaboration peer- work- assessment responsibility following instructions 'real' learning/authenticity
Practices (behaviour/actions)	(8) Descriptive references to teaching and learning practices in project	feedback / help-seeking template / writing project result / summative assessment learning outcomes (syllabus) writing skills genres poetry structure strategy examples marking time