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**Exceeding expectations: Scaffolding Agentic Engagement through
Assessment as Learning**

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Exceeding expectations: Scaffolding Agentic Engagement through Assessment as Learning

Background: The active involvement of learners as critical, reflective and capable agents in the learning process is a core aim in contemporary education policy in Australia, and is regarded as a significant factor to academic success. However, within the relevant literature, the issue of positioning students as agents in the learning process has not been fully examined and needs further exploration.

Purpose: This study aims to explore ways in which aspects of self-regulated learning theory may be integrated with the concept of agentic engagement into classroom practice. Specifically, the study seeks to scaffold students' self-assessment capabilities and self-efficacy by using a formative assessment-as-learning process. The research examines how scaffolded planning, as part of the forethought phase in the Assessment as Learning (AaL) process, influences self-regulation and student agency in the learning process.

Sample: 126 students from school years two four and six (student age groups 7, 9 and 11 years), and 7 teachers at an independent (co-educational, non-religious) primary school in the Northern Territory, Australia, participated in the study.

Design and methods: Conducted as a one-setting, cross-sectional practitioner research study, the data sources included students' planning templates, writing samples, interviews with students and teachers and email correspondence with teachers. The data was analyzed for emerging themes and interpreted from a framework of social cognitive theory.

Findings: In this study, students were given the opportunity and support to exercise agentic engagement. Findings suggested that, in particular, students who were identified by their teachers as low-achieving and/or with poor motivation, were perceived by the teachers as exceeding expectations by demonstrating relatively greater motivation, persistence, effort and pride in their work than would be the case usually.

Conclusions: The findings from this formative Assessment as Learning study suggest that Assessment as Learning has the potential to help scaffold primary students' development of assessment capabilities.

Keywords: Formative assessment; assessment as learning; agency; self-efficacy; self-regulated learning; motivation

Introduction

Contemporary learning in Australia requires that students develop their capacity to play an active role in their own learning (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, ACARA 2015). This is regarded as particularly important in the context of raising learning standards, which dominates the educational discourse in Australia (McKew, 2014) as well as internationally (Muijs et al. 2014; Scheerens 2014).

Research has suggested links between academic success and students' ability to self-regulate learning, which entails learners activating and sustaining thoughts, feelings and behaviours that are systematically oriented towards the attainment of personal goals (Bembenutty 2011; Dignath and Büttner 2008, Putwain, Nicholson and Edwards 2015; Zimmerman 2011). Furthermore, Bandura (1997) maintains that a learner's confidence in their ability to solve a task –self-efficacy– strongly influences how much effort they will expend on an activity, and how long they will persevere when faced with obstacles in the task (Schunk and Pajares 2005). However, high amounts of self-efficacy will not produce a competent performance if the requisite skills are lacking (Schunk 1995). Consequently, it is essential that teachers scaffold the development of students' self-efficacy and skill development in self-regulating their learning, as part of classroom instruction. A key challenge for teachers, therefore, is to

translate self-regulated learning theory into classroom practice which engages all learners, including the least confident and motivated.

Engaging students in a formative learning process

The concept and practice of formative assessment is defined variously in the literature (e.g. Black et al. 2003; Broadfoot 2007; Crooks 1988; Harlen and James 1997; Perrenoud 1998; Popham 2008). In this paper, it is viewed 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. It has a close relationship with the idea of integrating self-regulated learning approaches into classroom practice. Indeed, Crooks (1988), in a synthesis of relationships between classroom assessment practices and students' learning outcomes, made distinct links between formative assessment and self-regulated learning. Furthermore, Crooks argued that formative assessment has the potential to have a powerful, positive impact by guiding students' judgement of what it is that is important to learn.

More recent research attests that, when used to inform teaching and learning, formative assessment (or assessment for learning) contributes to students making significant learning gains (e. g. Bennett 2011; Black and Wiliam 1998; Harlen, 2009). Such gains depend on a number of components, including: the explicit clarification of success criteria (Hattie 2009, 2012; Wiliam 2011) and the provision of specific and timely feedback (Hattie and Timperley 2007), which helps learners know *how* to improve (Black et al. 2003). Students' proactive, intentional and constructive contribution to the flow of instruction has been conceptualized as *agentic engagement* (Reeve 2012, 2013; Reeve and Tseng 2011). This involves students actively adapting tasks to make them meaningful to themselves. Reeve (2012, 165) describes students'

agency in this form of engagement as manifested by “students asking questions, expressing opinions, and communicating interests”. Such engagement is at the core of *assessment as learning* (AaL), which has been defined as formative assessment that positions learners as critically reflective connectors between task requirements and the learning process (Dann 2014; Earl 2013; Earl and Katz 2008) and as co-owners of their learning process (Absolum et al. 2009).

The notion of AaL (see Dann 2002; Earl 2003) is a form of assessment grounded in constructivist learning principles and “most notably promoted through the process of self-assessment” (Dann 2002, 67). It is important to clarify that self-assessment in this context 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 (Broadfoot 2007). As such, self-assessment is a self-regulated learning competence (Brown and Harris 2013) which entails the skills of reflection, task analysis, goal setting and monitoring one’s learning progress. While self-assessment is widely acknowledged as one of several fundamental principles of formative assessment (e.g. Assessment Reform Group 2002; Carr 2008), AaL adopts a specific position in respect of the role of self-assessment, by viewing it as forming a central part of the process of learning (Dann 2002; Earl 2003), rather than conceptualizing self-assessment as a strategy to generate formative assessment evidence.

However, AaL remains variously defined in the literature. For example, Torrance (2007) in a widely cited paper, refers to the instrumentalist focus on criteria compliance in post-secondary education settings, in which assessment procedures and practices – formative as well as summative – have come to completely dominate learning and learning experiences. Sadler (2007, 388) –citing Torrance– characterizes

AaL as a compliance procedure without understanding, a form of assessment that masquerades as learning that “has a deservedly pejorative ring to it”. Similarly, Hume and Coll (2009, p. 270) refer to AaL as a concept of ‘procedural compliance’, warning that ‘learning’ has been displaced in teachers’ thinking about the purpose of formative assessment.

This paper conceptualizes AaL as a process of dynamic interplay between the teacher and student. It explicitly scaffolds the student’s self-regulated learning competences by tailoring their learning to address success criteria as part of the learning process.

Assessment as Learning remains a variously defined concept in part due to the lack of integration between formative assessment research and findings from educational psychology research into self-regulated learning, self-efficacy (Bandura 1997), and agentic engagement (Reeve 2012). Therefore, there is a need for the role of Assessment as Learning as a guided process for students to engage agentially in their learning, and develop competence and confidence as learners to be further researched. While self-efficacy has been found to be a predictor of students’ academic success (Alivernini and Lucidi 2011; Mattern and Shaw 2010; Niehaus, Rudasill and Adelson 2012), less focus has been placed on the question of how formative assessment, as a scaffolded, student-centred learning process, may influence students’ self-efficacy. This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of this important area.

Purpose of study

This study focuses on classroom practice aimed at supporting the development of students’ self-regulated learning skills and self-efficacy through Assessment as Learning. It is derived from a larger study (Fletcher 2015) exploring how primary students’ learning was shaped in a student-centred AaL process, which followed the self-regulated learning cycle phases of *forethought*, *performance* and *self-reflection* (Zimmerman 2011). In particular, the study sought to understand the influence of scaffolding students’ agentic engagement in the *forethought* stage of the Assessment as Learning process, with the aim of developing students’ ability to self-regulate their learning. A social cognitive theoretical framework (Bandura 1986, 2001) was adopted, conceptualizing learning as being shaped by a reciprocal, but fluctuating, relationship between three factors. These factors comprise: *intrapersonal* capabilities, such as a student’s understanding, knowledge, skills, self-efficacy, motivation and interest; *situational* factors, such as the classroom context and task requirements that are determined by the curriculum; and *behavioural* factors, such as actions taken by the student and teacher to facilitate learning.

A central aim was to enable students to have input into the learning process by using explicit goals from the curriculum and engaging in the learning process. This requires interpreting and integrating the curriculum goals with their intrapersonal capabilities: for example, by deciding what type of text to write, and determining a suitable audience. This study had a particular

interest in the observation that students who perceive that they have a degree of control over content and performance tend to initiate and sustain behaviours directed towards the relevant learning goals to a greater degree than students with a low sense of control (Schunk 1995; Schunk and Pajares 2005).

Research methodology

School context

Designed as a one-setting, cross-sectional form of practitioner research (Bryman 2012; Punch 2009), the study presented here involved 126 students (60 boys and 66 girls) in years 2, 4 and 6 (aged approximately 7, 9 and 11 years), together with seven teachers who taught the relevant classes, at a co-educational, independent (non-government, non-religious, fee-charging) school in the Northern Territory, in Australia.

Given that there is some evidence that students' academic performance is strongly influenced by their socio-economic status (Considine and Zappalà 2002), it is important to acknowledge that the study was conducted at a school which was ranked slightly above the Australian average on the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA). This index takes several variables into account, such as the school's location, parents' occupation and education levels, socio-economic characteristics of the locale, the proportion of students from a language background other than English, as well as the proportion of Indigenous students (ACARA 2011).

The school had a longstanding commitment to support, enrich and extend its students as part of the normal, ongoing lesson time. As in the case of most schools, some students were found to be more capable and easier to engage compared with other students who found learning more challenging.

Design and instruments

The study was designed to explore assessment as a scaffolded, three-phase learning process, in line with self-regulated learning theory. The three phases are known as *forethought, performance and self-reflection* (Zimmerman 2011). The *forethought phase* required students to split the learning outcomes stated in the curriculum to specific, task-related, partial goals that the students would address as part of the assessment as learning process. For this purpose, prior to commencing the project, the participating teachers collaborated in developing a planning template for each of the three participating year-levels, targeting the relevant syllabus outcomes in the *Writing* strand¹ of the English curriculum in the Northern Territory (Department of Education and Children's Services 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 *appendix*). The *forethought phase* was the most carefully

¹ At the time when the study was conducted English curriculum in the Northern Territory was split into three stands: (1) *Listening and Speaking*; (2) *Reading and Viewing*; (3) *Writing*. The nation-wide Australian Curriculum has since been introduced, replacing the former strands with: (1) *Language*; (2) *Literature*; (3) *Literacy*.

scaffolded of the three, with most sub-sections in the planning templates relating to forethought elements. This included a sub-section containing the overall success criteria, which consisted of the relevant curriculum learning outcomes worded by the teachers in a manner that students in the particular year-level would understand. The forethought section also included 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, as it progressed during the performance phase of the self-regulated learning cycle. For example, the curriculum required that students show the ability to craft texts for a specific audience. Consequently, students needed to identify a specific audience for their writing. In addition, the templates required students to decide what type of text they would write, to show how their work addressed the learning outcomes.

The templates' middle section consisted of a checklist segment which was divided into three sub-headings, *text and audience*; *structure* and *strategies*. Each sub-heading was followed by three blank lines, in which the students wrote prompts to monitor their progress against during the performance phase.

The final section of the students' planning template was a self-reflection section, which the students filled out once they had finished the writing process, as part of the self-reflection phase of the self-regulated learning cycle.

The students' planning templates and their subsequent work that they produced as writing samples constituted key sources of data to inform the study. Additionally, the investigator regularly emailed the teachers throughout the writing project with structured open-ended questions to prompt reflection. The data collection also included two interviews with each of the seven teachers. The length of each interview ranged between thirty minutes and an hour. The teacher interviews were complemented with student interviews. The students were interviewed as a pair, twice from each participating class, giving a total of fourteen student interviews. The first round of interviews was conducted during the performance phase, while the writing project was underway, and the second round was conducted after it had finished, which gave both the students and teachers time to reflect on the experience. The participants and the author, as a practitioner researcher, thus had the benefit of hindsight when the second round of interviews were conducted. All interviews were digitally recorded, and transcribed with voice-recognition software during the time of data collection (Fletcher and Shaw 2011). By transcribing concurrently, themes in the data started emerging early in the process.

Ethical considerations

As mandated in the Australian National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (Australian Government 2007), approval to conduct the study was granted by the relevant Human Research Ethics Committee. All interviews were conducted by the author, who was familiar with all participants and well immersed in the setting, as a longstanding member of the staff. As a researcher investigating the professional practice of other teachers at the school, an obvious ethical consideration was not to coerce my colleagues, as I was in a position of trust. Informed written consent was gained from the school principal, parents/guardians of the participating students, as well as from the students and teachers themselves. All participants gave agreement for institutional identification and were assured in writing that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time, without prejudice. The collected data was kept secure and the anonymity of participants protected by all participants' names being replaced by pseudonyms before the data was coded and analysed. Care was taken to ensure that some teacher pseudonyms were gender neutral where necessary to ensure anonymization of the participating individuals.

Data analysis

When transcribing the interviews, a number of pertinent issues in respect of how students' learning was shaped by the Assessment as Learning process emerged. This resulted in identification of preliminary codes (Lankshear and Knobel 2004). Being a practitioner research study, the qualitative data was coded by the investigator, using an emerging approach to identify a broad scope of responses that preliminarily appeared to relate to the research question. Further preliminary codes emerged during the re-reading of the interview transcripts, email correspondence with teachers, and the self-reflection sections of the planning templates. This initial identification resulted in some thirty-five preliminary codes (Ary et al. 2014). These are illustrated in the table below. The repeated reading of transcripts generated identification of similar data themes that appeared significantly related to the central question and the social cognitive theoretical framework (Creswell 2014; Saldaña 2013). This process of synthesis ultimately narrowed the data to eight thematic categories (Saldaña 2013), which combined emerging and predetermined codes (Ary et al. 2014).

In line with social cognitive theory (Bandura 1986) the thematic categories reflected factors to do with teachers and students as individuals as well as the social context. They included a range of (1) *emotions*; (2) *own preferences and choices*; (3) *cognitive considerations* such as reflective learning, strategies and predictions; and expressions of (4) *self-efficacy* and (5) *persistence*. The eight themes also included (6) *social considerations* such as references to peers, teachers and audience; and (7)

value judgements such as the mentioning of ‘real learning’, authenticity and meaningfulness. Also, descriptive reference to (8) *teaching and learning practices* was identified as a theme.

<<INSERT TABLE>>

Findings

As a practitioner researcher with many years’ experience of working as a primary teacher, neither the author –nor the other participating teachers–anticipated that any particular group of students would stand out in respect of developing their ability to self-regulate their learning. However, an inductive stance was deliberately adopted in respect to the study’s qualitative components, to allow for rich, situated findings to emerge in the analysis.

As described below, the findings in this study suggest that students whom teachers perceived as generally being low-achieving and/or with poor motivation, were thought to have responded particularly well to the Assessment as Learning process. These students exceeded what their teacher had come to expect of them, based on previous classroom assessments of learning used by the teacher to **guage students’ achivement against the curriculum benchmarks. As illustrated in accounts from the study’s participants, teachers felt that the students exceeded their expectations by demonstrating greater motivation, persistence, effort and pride in their work, relative to the kinds of characteristics they might usually demonstrate in class.**

Learner Agency manifested as meaningful choices

The students’ planning templates along with writing samples, clearly indicated that students from all three year-levels were able to identify an intended audience and craft their writing to engage an explicit audience. While the notion of writing for an audience is at the core of much writing practice, **particularly the Year 2 teachers were surprised to see that their students were able to determine the audience as part of the forethought phase of planning, and then deliberately develop their text with this audience in mind during the performance phase of the assessment as learning cycle. Indeed, the students’ awareness and intention to write to a specific audience, which had been scaffolded by their planning in the forethought phase, appears to have led to the task being perceived by the students as meaningful and purposeful. As Elle, one of the Year 6 teachers, described it:**

I felt that they understood what they were writing it for. [...] They didn't just show me that they understood the structural 'how to do it'. It wasn't so mechanical. It was more... they just gripped on to it. It was like, Right, there is a meaning for this, I know whom I'm writing it to, and for; and why I'm writing it. So I'm going to do the best I can do.

This account gives an insight into how the teacher noticed that the Assessment as Learning process contributed to students' becoming intrinsically motivated to engage in learning and demonstrating their personal commitment to the task. Such intrinsic motivation stimulates high achievement and innovative, appropriate approaches to solving tasks (Hennessey and Amabile 2010).

The planning templates indicated that when selecting an audience for their work as part of the forethought phase, a large proportion of students (68 of a total of 126 students) across the three year-levels had chosen audiences of a age group similar to their own. This appeared to help them to relate to the audience, and in turn, this contributed to students being more motivated and persisting more with their learning during the performance phase of the AaL process, when they drafted and edited their work. The issue of becoming motivated as a writer because of the audience, as well as the audience becoming motivated to engage with the written text, was repeatedly raised in the student interviews. Jeremy, one of the Year 6 students whose planning template indicated that his intended audience were students similar to himself in Year 6, provided the following summary of what he perceived as the essence of being a good writer in his follow-up interview:

Well, if you're a good writer you can really engage the audience. You can really engage the people who are reading, and make them want to keep reading to find out what's happening. That's what I like.

Keeping the audience in mind may have increased the students' cognitive engagement as they strategically planned and developed their work, with respect to caring about how their work may be received by their audience. These factors, in turn, possibly prompted motivation and effort to persist with their work. From a social cognitive perspective, the students' choices of audience and subject matter illustrate the importance of these intrapersonal factors, when students exercise agentic engagement as part of their learning process.

Forethought Phase – developing students' perception of Control and Confidence

The forethought phase, with its explicit requirement for students to engage in strategic planning, came to underpin the entire learning process. The students' perception of control, when planning and subsequently monitoring their learning, was evident in

their planning documents, as well as in the verbal accounts. In her follow-up interview after the project had finished, Ruby, a Year 4 student, was asked to describe how she had used the planning template (see [example of planning template in appendix](#)). She explained how she had used the checklist on the planning template to allocate marks for the different components of her planning, as a strategy for prioritising, monitoring and evaluating her progress:

I gave the first [strategy a score of] 2, because it gave me most ideas for my poem [...] and the second was just to remind me what I should do. Like how to check it. The first part was how I should start my poem.

This segment illustrates Ruby's perception of control and confidence in applying metacognitive considerations and self-regulatory behaviour as part of the AaL process. She demonstrates analytical thinking in evaluating the importance of different strategies she used, by allocating scores according to "*most ideas for [the] poem*". Her ability to rank cognitive strategies can be seen to align with a higher-order thinking taxonomy (Krathwohl 2002). Ruby's distinguishing of different levels of cognitive considerations becomes further evident when she describes a lower-order thinking aspect, which she has included in her planning "*just to remind me what I should do*", as she took ownership of her learning in the AaL process.

The teachers found the scaffolded AaL approach to be effective in promoting self-regulated, confident and competent learners. Competence requires intrapersonal factors such as cognition and knowledge (Elliot and Dweck 2005). However, self-motivating beliefs are also an essential intrapersonal factor (Zimmerman 2011). Some research suggests that human motivation, wellbeing and accomplishment may be based more on what an individual believes to be true, than what is objectively true (Bandura 1997, 2012; Schunk and Pajares 2005). Furthermore, students' perception of capabilities to learn or perform at designated levels—their *perceived self-efficacy*—help determine what they do with the knowledge and skills they have, and the course of action they pursue (see, for example, Bandura, 2012).

In the interviews, several teachers described how the students had demonstrated a higher than expected degree of writing capability and independence as autonomous learners. Emma, one of the Year 2 teachers, explained in her follow-up interview: "I could tell they understood all the text types. [...] They did not just know what the word is, but they knew how to write one." She concluded: "*On the whole, I think they did really well. I was surprised reading [the students' writing samples], how well they did.*"

Similarly, Maria, who also taught Year 2, found that several of her students exceeded her expectations in respect of being capable, persistent writers: "*They were so involved with it. And they kept writing, and writing, and writing!*" Maria also provided

insightful comments, noting her young students' motivation, pride and sense of ownership of their learning. In her follow-up interview, she was asked whether any students in particular had demonstrated achievement that surprised her. She described how the lower achievers in her class had stood out by showing a new aspect of themselves as learners:

I'd actually have to say... Those that are often hard to motivate got really into this. Uhm... and it might have been that sense of... eh, a bit of ownership, freedom with what they were doing. [...] In their eyes... that... uhm... gave them that drive to... uhm... to do the best that they could. Like one of my students... he wanted [to] take his book home to show his mum his story. So, you know, that interest was there.

Maria's description of how several of her Year 2 students demonstrated that they felt motivated and that they sensed '*a bit of ownership, freedom with what they were doing*', as Maria put it, is notably similar to what Elle noted with the older students in Year 6, in the first interview segment of this paper. Elle and Maria both described students taking on the critical role, as *connectors* between assessment and learning (Earl 2013). As such, students became *directors* of the learning process, as they developed their assessment capabilities by making active choices and exercising agency in steering their learning towards the targeted learning goals from the syllabus. Students' choices were influenced by their chosen audience, their perception of their own competence as learners; their pursuit of goals was motivated by their interest in the topic they had chosen to write about.

Exceeding expectations: students broadening their writing repertoire

One of the surprising findings in respect of students' agency in the AaL process was the emergence of unexpected topics and genres. Neither the class teachers, nor I as the investigator, had anticipated before the project began the degree of poetry that the children would present. Several teachers commented in the follow-up interviews that they had studied poetry infrequently in their class.

Instead **time had mainly been dedicated to narratives, the text type used to assess students' writing in Australia's National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)**². Consequently, the teachers had not expected the students to choose a text type they were less familiar with, in an assessment directed by students to demonstrate that they could meet the curriculum learning outcomes. As such, it is an interesting example of how the Assessment as Learning process seemed to encourage students to exercise agentic engagement, by constructively contributing to the task (Reeve 2012).

² NAPLAN is conducted annually for all students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9. The NAPLAN is made up of tests in the four areas of: (1) reading; (2) writing; (3) language conventions (spelling, grammar and punctuation); (4) numeracy.

The underlying reason for this unexpected –but welcome– broadening of their writing repertoire appeared to derive from students considering how to engage a particular audience, which was one of the learning outcomes they needed to address. By reflecting on what they themselves would feel engaged by, the students demonstrated the sort of creative metacognition that Kaufman and Beghetto (2013) posit entails knowledge of one's own creative strengths and limitations and relating it to a context. Such creative metacognition involves mastery and knowledge of how, when and where to be creative, and why. The students' unconventional choices also reflected their level of confidence in their ability to complete the task (Bandura 1997, 2012).

The notion of a student choosing to broaden the writing repertoire by selecting an unexpected topic is illustrated by one Year 6 student's detailed report of the origins of 'Elvish language'. Exploring some of the languages developed by J. R. R. Tolkien, Lisa, one of several students at the school who was learning English as an additional language, introduced her choice of topic in the self-reflection section of her planning template:

I chose 'Elvish' as my topic after watching the movie, 'The Lord of the Rings'. In 'The Lord of the Rings', the Elves speak quite a lot of Elvish. I thought that I could listen carefully and try to understand what they were saying. [...]

My reason for choosing this topic was because I thought it would be interesting to research. I thought that this was my chance to talk about my favourite language. I enjoyed being able to choose my topic. I can't stop reading my own work because I think it's really interesting and I didn't think that I'll do really good and I didn't think that I'll be able to write this much because when I chose to do Elvish, I didn't know that much about it. Now I know quite a few things about Elvish language and J. R. R. Tolkien.

From the quotation above, it is evident that Lisa used the AaL project as an opportunity to learn about a topic she had a keen interest in. Writing about a topic that she found to be highly stimulating, Lisa expresses both pride in her work and a degree of surprise in respect of the quantity and quality of her report. This suggests a growing sense of self-efficacy and that Lisa surpassed her own outcome expectations with the task (Bandura 1997, 2012). Indeed, her report of six typed pages plus additional reference material is quite extensive for a Year 6 student writing in an additional language, and it demonstrates significant persistence, effort and enthusiasm for the task.

However, Lisa was not alone in exceeding her own and her teacher's expectations in respect of her writing, due to expressing interest in the subject matter. It appears that the AaL approach emboldened the students to feel more confident to make independent and frequently unconventional choices. Elle, one of the Year 6 teachers, suggested in her follow-up interview that the students' interest impacted on their choices and that making choices based on interest drove learning forward: "... *they were doing what they were interested in and learnt more about that genre by doing it...*"

Importantly, Elle also noted that the students took the initiative to self-regulate their learning by using exemplars and reference material as they monitored their understanding and progress. This suggests that Elle noticed another aspect of self-efficacy, namely that students' confidence in their ability to organise a task impacts on effort and motivation (Bandura 1997, 2012; Schunk and Mullen 2012). Despite this, Elle found herself surprised by some of the individual students' choices. In particular, in response to my questions (Q) during her interview, she remarked on how a group of boys showed a different aspect of themselves as learners:

Elle: I suppose now... suppose that some of the choices that the kids made – I didn't expect that. Some of the boys decided to do a play together. And then they wanted to act it out.

Just uhm...

Q: Was that in a good way or a bad way?

Elle: Yeah *good*, but just surprising that the boys would choose something challenging like that. So... but good!

Q: Ok, so did they come up with something that reflected their learning, then? Or did they sort of do it as a fun thing and didn't really...

Elle: [interjecting] *No*, they took it pretty seriously! And each of them had their own 'You're going to do this part of the story and I'll do this part, and I'll do this part...'

This particular group of boys clearly surprised the teacher by showing themselves more motivated and able to organise themselves than she had perceived. This resonates with the argument that self-efficacy can have a positive effect on learning, achievement, self-regulation and motivational outcomes such as individuals' choices of activities, effort, persistence and interests (Bandura 1997, 2012; Schunk and Pajares 2009).

Monica, another of the Year 6 teachers, also found that students exceeded her expectations during the AaL project. In a follow-up email sent to me during the project, she 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.

Monica's account is particularly interesting because she refers to the triadic reciprocity of (1) intrapersonal factors, (2) behaviour and (3) social contexts, which frame human functioning, according to social cognitive theory (Bandura 1986, 2006; Zimmerman 2011). Her description of individual factors associated with the two boys that she refers to implies self-efficacy by connecting the boys' determination to persist, and their demonstrated agency as active learners in the assessment process. In addition, social factors in the form of scaffolding –which Monica provided by prompting students to refer back to their checklist of goals and strategies on the planning template– probably contributed to these two students demonstrating more committed learning behaviours than she had expected.

The Assessment as Learning process provided students like Charlie greater opportunity to choose which text type they would write to demonstrate that they could meet the learning outcomes. Rather than adopting a unidirectional flow on instruction that Charlie would have little impact on –other than as the producer of a writing sample– the process enabled Charlie to take on the role as the director of the process, as he steered it towards the learning goals as expressed by the curriculum. As such, he appears to have adopted what Bandura (2006) refers to as an agentic perspective of personal influence, that saw Charlie contribute to his circumstances and accommodate his self-interests. Positioned in this role of scaffolded agency, Charlie surpassed his teacher's expectations by showing himself capable of playing an active role, as a critical, reflective agent in the learning process, which accords with contemporary curriculum demands (ACARA 2015).

This required Charlie to make strategic choices based on his perceived abilities and interests as he decided what type of text he would write to develop and demonstrate his meeting the learning outcomes. Charlie –as a director of the assessment process– showed himself to be more persistent and '*did not complain*' about having to write, although Monica's comments imply that he normally would.

Demonstrating pride in meaningful accomplishment

Elle noted that the boys in her Year 6 class took the AaL process '*seriously*', by applying effort that she thought demonstrated that they '*took a lot of pride in [their work]*'. Research into self-efficacy and academic achievement has found that achievement-oriented pride, or intrinsic motivation, impacts on students' perseverance in achieving long-term goals, despite short-term costs in the form of effort (Pintrich 2004). Similarly, Earl (2013, 53) asserts the importance of AaL in this regard by reasoning that it supports students' development of "sophisticated combinations of skills, attitudes, and dispositions" to persist with the challenging, hard work that constitutes productive learning. This requires support and modelling from the teacher and necessitates students investing themselves in a task which they see as meaningful and valuable, and perceiving themselves as capable of completion, despite the challenges it presents. Students who accomplish such tasks may take pride in their work simply because they perceive it as meaningful.

Pride has been conceptualized as a social emotion, under the premise that students feel motivated to pursue further action in a specific domain when feeling proud of recognised accomplishments (Williams and DeSteno 2008). The idea that pride is being generated by the appraisal of others again suggests the importance of an audience, which conforms with the idea of triadic reciprocity among individual, social and behavioural factors (Bandura 1986). However, contrary to Williams and DeSteno's measures-based study (2008), pride in this situated AaL project appeared to be generated by intrinsic motivation, which is associated with personal task interest and enjoyment (Isen and Reeve 2005). In the current study, there were two factors that seemed particularly pertinent as to why students felt proud of their accomplishments.

First, there was an articulated focus on clearly delineated learning outcomes. As such, the learning process was firmly underpinned by goal-setting, which is associated with achievement. This idea is supported by earlier research, which suggests that students who self-set goals experience high expectations for goal attainment (Schunk 1985). This is reinforced as students observe their progress and attainment of the goals (Schunk 1985, 1995).

Second, the agentic engagement students exercised as they decided how to target their learning, and demonstrate that they could achieve the specific goals, appears to have been enhanced by their competence perception. It is suggested that this freedom increased the students' sense of self-efficacy, which in turn stimulated them to apply themselves in the learning process and helped them persist with the challenges of learning. This, in turn, resulted in students feeling proud of their work and the outcome of their efforts.

Conclusion

In this study, the Assessment as Learning processes was scaffolded by the teachers and framed by the planning template, which aided the students in their metacognitive process of monitoring understanding, organising ideas and checking for consistency. 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

(Reeve 2013; Reeve and Tseng 2011), the process echoed Earl's emphasis on the student as a "critical connector" between the assessment and learning process (Earl 2013). The present study illustrates and contextualises five key arguments, which are summarised here.

First, students' self-efficacy and perception of control in the assessment process were facilitated because the AaL process required them to make individual choices in regard of how to demonstrate their learning. In line with the notion of triadic reciprocity (Bandura 1986), the teacher provided individual help and support as each student began to plan their Assessment as Learning journey. Overall, the teachers did not perceive that they gave more individual help than usual. However, several commented how their students particularly sought help in the planning phase and that the students were receptive to help and support, making it more effective. This social support helped clarify choices and build the students' understanding, confidence and motivation to complete the task.

Second, intrapersonal factors such as students' motivation and interest influenced their choices in respect of deciding what type of text to write, and to what audience. In turn this appears to have enhanced both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the students.

Third, with students' interests driving their task choices, the AaL process integrated students' agentic engagement (Reeve and Tseng 2011) as students made a constructive contribution to the learning process. This is supported by the teachers' description how students in the project had exceeded their expectations by demonstrating self-regulated learning behaviours such as persistence, organisation, monitoring of learning and achieving above expectation.

Fourth, 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 the student to interpret and clarify the aim and learning criteria. As such, the process connected with the forethought step in the SRL cycle (Zimmerman 2011).

Fifth, students' emotional engagement in the learning process was enhanced due to the fact the learning experience meaningful to them. Thus, students developed and demonstrated a sense of ownership in their learning and taking pride in their work and efforts.

The analyses presented in this study suggest that these positive effects on learning were underpinned and driven by the students' agentic engagement.

Previous research has established that self-efficacy is a highly significant factor in academic achievement (Bandura 1997; Lee, Lee and Bong 2014; Stankov, Morony and Lee 2013; Zimmerman 2011). While other studies have explored self-efficacy as a predictor of success (Alivernini and Lucidi 2011, Mattern and Shaw 2010; Niehaus, Rudasill and Adelson 2012), the present study took a different focus. The study presented here is necessarily limited in aims and scope, as it is based in one school setting. Clearly, further research is needed to investigate the relationships further. It is hoped that the findings in this paper contribute by offering careful description and analysis of a situation where Assessment as Learning was used to build students' self-efficacy and assessment capabilities.

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Planning template: Student-directed assessment project

Writing – Year 6 (NTCF Bands 3 and 4)

Student's name:

Class:

Term:

Dear Student,

This is a planning sheet to help you set out your work and create a checklist for your writing project.

On the top of the next page you will find the writing goals for students in Year 6. Please read the writing goals carefully. It is these goals you need to aim for when you plan and write your text, regardless of what text type you choose to write as your project. Use the checklist on page 3 to write down what you will need to do to reach these goals.

Use this template to plan and check your progress. Present your plan to your teacher or to a friend before you start on a draft for your writing project.

Good luck!

My holidays

Over the Christmas holidays I went to visit my family in Brisbane. Mum, Dad, my sister Lisa and I flew out on the first day of the break.

It was fun to ride on the big airplane. I got to sit by the window. When we flew out of Darwin, I could see our house

How to make pancakes

You need:

- 2 cups of milk
- 1 cup of self-raising flour
- 2 eggs
- a pinch of salt

Instructions:

1. Crack the eggs in a bowl and mix some of the flour...
2. Add a small amount of the milk

The Mystery at Moon Shadow Castle

It was a dark and stormy night. The wind was howling and the rain came pelting down like spikes from the sky. Robert couldn't sleep for all the rain. He got up and peered through the window into the dark, wet night.

A rugged figure in a dark coat came scurrying up the hill leading to Moon Shadow Castle. The figure stopped under a tall tree by the side of the castle. It looked like the figure was carrying something heavy.

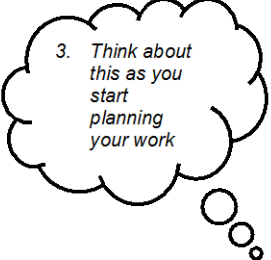
1. *What will I show that I can do?*

Learning outcomes: *What am I trying to do?*

	Band 3	Extension
Text & audience	Write different types of texts using your own knowledge, experience, thoughts and feelings in your 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 your 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 your 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 0; width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="padding: 2px;">Thoughts</th> <th style="padding: 2px;">Feelings</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Sights</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Sounds</td> </tr> </tbody> </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	Recount	Narrative	Report
Explanation	Procedure	Explanation	Poetry

Other: _____

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

Children	Teenagers	Parents	Teachers
People in Darwin	People in power		

Other: _____

 4. Check off as you work

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

	My progress
Text and Audience: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	
Structure: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	
Strategies: _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	

Main themes	Thematic categories	Preliminary codes
Individual/intrapersonal factors	(1) Emotions/Motivation	engagement
	(2) Self/Autonomy: preferences & choices	enjoyment
	(3) Cognitive considerations	pride
	(4) Self-efficacy	purposeful learning
	(5) Persistence	pressure
		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