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Paper Title: Encouraging appropriate learning behaviours: Aligned assessment practices within a pre-service music teacher education course.

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### Title

Encouraging appropriate learning behaviours: Aligned assessment practices within a pre-service music teacher education course.

### Abstract

This paper explores the ways in which the principles of constructive alignment between learning outcomes and assessment tasks were applied to the redevelopment of a unit in a pre-service teacher education course for music educators. The unit presented in this paper focused on the skills and understandings required to teach instrumental music in individual, small group and large ensemble settings in schools. The aim of encouraging appropriate learning behaviours from participating students and hence supporting deep learning underpinned the design process reported herein. The practices that informed the design process included: aligned assessment, student engagement through self assessment and peer feedback, and the development of authentic and professionally-relevant assessment tasks. In this paper the use of these practices is articulated with reference to the featured units and the relevant literature, and the changes undertaken are presented and discussed with reference to the relevant literature.

## Introduction

In *A new era in assessing student learning* the Australian Universities Teaching Committee (2007) states that 'renewal of assessment practices lies at the forefront of efforts to improve teaching and learning in Australian higher education'. This statement reflects a renewed interest in the role of assessment within the teaching and learning practices of the higher education sector in Australia. Central to this paper is the notion that aligned outcomes and assessment activities are a powerful means by which appropriate learning behaviours may be encouraged. This paper explores the ways in which an early career academic applied the principles of constructive alignment between learning outcomes and assessment tasks to the redevelopment of a unit in a pre-service teacher course for music educators.

### The pre-service music teacher education course and units

The Bachelor of Teaching (B. Teach) degree is a two year postgraduate degree in teaching, encompassing specialisations in early childhood/primary and secondary teaching. Those B. Teach students training to be music teachers complete six music education units over the first eighteen months of the degree: three classroom method units, two instrumental method units (the focus of this paper) and one composition, improvisation and music technology method unit. Within the entire degree six units (36 hours each - a total of 216 hours) are allocated to curriculum and method studies specific to music education. The somewhat limited amount of time allocated to the specialist methods in this degree is consistent with declining attention to music specialisations in many Australian tertiary institutions as reported in the *National Review of School Music Education: Augmenting the diminished*, (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005). The review reported that 'the amount of funding allocated to teacher training in tertiary institutions has impacted upon the amount of time allocated within teacher training courses to music education' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005, p. 60).

This paper reflects upon the development of two of the instrumental music education units, focusing upon the changes made to the 2005 iteration that were implemented in 2006. It is important to note that 2006 was the first year of semesterisation in the B. Teach degree. Consequently the two featured units evolved from a single year-long unit (ESA118 Curriculum and Method Studies Performing Arts: Music) in the 2005 course into the two units presented for review in this paper (ESA180 & ESA181 Curriculum and Method Studies Performing Arts: Music).

The units in question focused upon the skills and understandings required to teach instrumental music in individual, small and large group settings in schools. The learning activities related to elementary conducting skills, rehearsal strategies, score preparation and ensemble management, individual instrumental and vocal lesson teaching and pedagogy, and small group music teaching, curriculum and pedagogy. The units had an inherently practical focus and the skills and understandings featured therein are essential to the professional context for most music educators in Australia.

### The principles that informed the teaching and learning design process

This paper reports on the process of reviewing two units in music education in order to reflect a specific approach to learning that prioritised carefully constructed assessment practices. The characteristics of this approach included:

1. The explicit alignment of learning outcomes and assessment activities;
2. Student engagement in the assessment process through self-assessment and peer feedback; and

### 3. The development of authentic, professionally-relevant assessment tasks in music education.

Each of these assessment practices is now articulated with specific reference to the relevant literature.

#### Explicit alignment of learning outcomes and assessment activities

Assessment is a significant component of the teaching and learning process, and is one of the most important variables in the equation that is student learning. Ramsden (1992) highlights the importance of the means of assessment selected stating that 'the methods we use to assess students are one of the most critical of all influences on their learning' (p. 67). Boud, Cohen & Sampson (1999) highlight the centrality of assessment stating that 'assessment is the single most powerful influence on learning in formal courses and, if not designed well, can easily undermine the positive features of an important strategy in the repertoire of teaching and learning approaches (p. 413).

Aside from critical measurement and monitoring functions assessment can also play an important role in the development of appropriate learning behaviours and attitudes. Assessment is important in the teaching and learning process because it sends 'messages' to students, according to Ramsden (1992) 'assessment sends messages about the standard and amount of work required, and what aspects of the syllabus are important' (pp. 187-188). Assessment communicates what is "valued" in the teaching and learning process both explicitly, through the relative weightings placed on assessment tasks, but also by what is selected for assessment and the methods employed to assess. The importance of assessment is highlighted by Boud & Falchikov (2006) who state that 'assessment communicates intent to students and is an indicator to students of what is regarded as most important' (p. 405).

This understanding of the centrality of assessment is echoed by James, McInnes & Devlin (2002) who maintain that 'carefully designed assessment contributes directly to the way students approach their study and therefore contributes indirectly, but powerfully, to the quality of their learning' (p. 1). For students therefore, according to James, McInnes & Devlin, what is assessed is what is valued. Biggs (2003) also asserts the importance of assessment in the development of appropriate learning behaviours, stating that 'assessment practices must send the right signals to students about what they should be learning and how they should be learning it' (p. 140).

The term 'constructive alignment' (Biggs, 2003, p. 11) highlights the importance of assessment design within the teaching and learning process and refers to the construction of assessment tasks that are carefully related to learning outcomes in a manner designed to encourage deep learning. For Biggs (2003) constructive alignment is therefore one means by which appropriate learning behaviours (those that reflect deep rather than surface learning) may be encouraged. Boud & Falchikov (2006) refer to constructive alignment as 'the components in the teaching system, particularly the methods used and the assessment task are closely aligned to the learning activities assumed in the intended outcomes' (p. 400).

For Biggs (2003) constructive alignment contains an element of positive compulsion through which students may be encouraged to engage in the most appropriate learning behaviours. Biggs states 'all components in the system address the same agenda and support each other. The students are "entrapped" in this web of consistency, optimising the likelihood that they will engage the appropriate learning activities' (p. 27). The

metaphor of the supportive spider web is useful in highlighting the importance of constructive alignment in the development of appropriate learning behaviours.

### Student engagement in the assessment process through self-assessment and peer feedback

Another principle that informed the teaching and learning design process featured in this paper was the use of self-assessment and peer feedback strategies as a means of engaging students in the assessment process. Both self-assessment and peer feedback were critical components of the redesigned units and the assessment of the group conducting practices of each student was informed by written feedback provided by their peers (see 'Transforming the unit design'). The distinction made here between assessment and feedback is an important one as written peer feedback did not seek to grade student work; rather it was used along with a video recording that was reviewed in the context of a student/tutor conference to determine a grade. I refer to this as a form of 'guided self assessment' where the ultimate grade awarded is 'agreed' by the student and the lecturer as an outcome of the conference.

This form of assessment is referred to by Tan (2004) in an article focusing on three different approaches to student self-assessment and their relationship to the power relationships that underpin such practices. He refers to the notions of 'sovereign', 'epistemological' and 'disciplinary' power and maintains that within an epistemological power framework self-assessment can allow 'staff and students to collaborate in the assessment process by allowing both parties to assess the same piece of student's work and by allowing both parties to negotiate the assessment outcome' (pp. 656-657). Boud, Cohen & Sampson (1999) also make reference to this collaborative approach to assessment stating that:

The input of peers into assessment decisions is valuable and ways of using data of this kind must be found. A useful way of doing this is through an emphasis on self-assessment informed by peers. Peers provide rich information which is then used by individuals to make their own assessments (p. 421).

This approach to assessment is underpinned by the notion that the skills of self-criticism and the assessment of learning (in this context peer learning) are critical to prepare pre-service teachers for their professional workplace. Biggs (2003) writes that 'making judgements about whether a performance or product meets the given criteria is vital for effective professional action in any field' (p. 162). According to Boud & Falchikov (2006) the skills of self criticism are essential to life and to active participation in the workplace, they state that 'one of the items typically omitted from lists of key skills required by graduates, but implicit in the notion of learning-how-to-learn and becoming a lifelong learner, is that of developing the capacity to be an assessor of learning' (p. 402). According to Boud, Cohen & Sampson (1999) 'assessment should leave students better equipped to engage in their own self-assessments. Unless assessment fosters this, it acts to undermine an important goal of lifelong learning (p. 419).

### The development of authentic, professionally-relevant assessment tasks in music education

The final principle that informed the teaching and learning design process featured in this paper was the development of authentic, professionally-relevant assessment tasks. Engagement in authentic assessment activities within highly contextualised situations has particular relevance for pre-service teachers for whom such skills are a central component of professional readiness. Groundwater-Smith, Ewing & Le Cornu (2007) state that:

Teachers need to be prepared to openly account for and justify their judgements, to negotiate them with learners and be ready to amend them if they are incorrect...analysing learning in the classroom is one of the most difficult and demanding tasks that teachers, particularly beginning teachers face...it is essential that they are skilled in identifying evidence of learning and interpreting its meanings and that they develop and exercise these skills in the context of meaningful and relevant curriculum practices (p.271).

Ensuring that learning outcomes and assessment tasks are professionally relevant, and perhaps more importantly that students are aware of their relevance, is immensely important in the quest for authentic learning. James, McInnes & Devlin (2002) articulate this point well, stating that:

Students value assessment tasks they perceive to be “real”: assessment tasks that present challenges to be taken seriously, not only for the grades at stake, but also for the nature of the knowledge or skills they are expected to demonstrate. Students value assessment tasks they believe to mirror the skills needed in the workplace (p. 3).

### Transforming the unit design

The motivation for the review and subsequent changes to the existing unit was twofold: firstly it reflected a desire to incorporate my own recent experience in the professional teaching context; and, secondly it reflected my own interest in designing learning activities that prioritised aligned assessment. Having spent the previous 17 years as a music educator in a variety of school contexts I was keen to ensure that the units reflected the requirements of the current professional context.

The existing unit (ESA118) contained six learning outcomes and four assessment tasks (see Figures 1 and 2). As was required by the course-wide change to a semester framework the existing unit was articulated into a new structure (ESA180 and ESA181) in 2006. In the new units the focus on the skills and understandings required to teach instrumental music in individual, small group and large ensemble settings remained unchanged, but the ways in which these skills and understandings were framed and assessed evolved substantially. In the new units the focus was on individual lesson teaching in semester 1 and small group teaching in semester 2. The skills and understandings to teach in large ensemble settings, including conducting and ensemble management were a focus of both units. The six learning outcomes of the former unit were thus incorporated into two learning outcomes that articulated over the two units (see Figure 1).

<b>ESA118</b>	<b>ESA180 (Semester 1) and ESA181 (Semester 2)</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To demonstrate an understanding of a range of approaches to instrumental pedagogy (individual, small and large group).</li> <li>2. To demonstrate techniques and skills needed to teach beginning instrumentalists and vocalists in a music education setting.</li> <li>3. To demonstrate techniques, skills and understandings in the development of an instrumental music program with links to school, state and national curriculum frameworks.</li> <li>4. To demonstrate a knowledge of recognised rehearsal techniques through oral and visual communication that enable effective teaching within a small or large music education ensemble.</li> <li>5. To demonstrate techniques and skills needed in the developmentally appropriate selection, study and preparation of musical pedagogical texts that advance musical understanding.</li> <li>6. To identify the tasks and responsibilities required for the musical director of a large music education ensemble.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teach instrumental and/or vocal music in an individual learning context, including: lesson planning and delivery, learning and the cognitive, psychometric and affective domains, preferred learning style types, student motivation, and the development of a co-operative learning environment.</li> <li>2. Lead and manage large musical ensembles including: fundamental conducting skills, techniques and gestures, rehearsal procedures and techniques, and developing a co-operative learning environment.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gain an understanding of the requirements of teaching music in a group lesson environment.</li> <li>2. Lead and manage large musical ensembles including: fundamental conducting skills, techniques and gestures, rehearsal procedures and techniques, and developing a co-operative learning environment.</li> </ol>

Figure 1  
Learning outcomes

Learning outcome 1 in ESA118, relating to approaches to instrumental pedagogy, was incorporated into restated learning outcomes 1 and 2 in ESA180 and ESA181. Learning outcome 2 relating to the skills of teaching beginning instrumentalists and vocalists and learning outcome 3, relating to links to curricula, were incorporated into the restated learning outcome 1 in ESA180 and ESA181. Learning outcome 4, relating to rehearsal techniques, and learning outcome 6, relating to the tasks and responsibilities of the musical director were incorporated into the restated learning outcome 2 in ESA180 and ESA181. Learning outcome 5 relating to the selection of music (a feature of individual, small group and large ensemble work) was incorporated into restated learning outcomes 1 and 2 in ESA180 and ESA181.

The most significant developments in the unit design however related to the assessment of the learning outcomes as shown in Figure 2:

<b>ESA118</b>	<b>ESA180</b>	<b>ESA181</b>
<p>1. A Seminar Presentation (15%). Focusing on the 'teaching fundamentals' of the students' main instrument.</p> <p>2. An Assessment Report (25%). Focusing on different forms of assessment in music curriculum.</p>	<p>1. Lesson Presentation (25%) &amp; Supporting Documentation (25%). In class students teach a 20 minute individual lesson on their principal instrument aimed at a beginner student. Included in this task is the opportunity for the lecturer and peers to provide oral and written feedback on the lesson. Before the presentation students submit documentation to support the lesson.</p>	<p>1. Group Teaching Unit &amp; Teaching Plan (50%). Students develop an outline of a unit of work for a group-teaching course in the family of their principal instrument. The unit length will be 18 one hour lessons over nine weeks. Students complete the initial design and planning for the unit as a member of a "design team". Once the initial design and planning for the unit is complete students develop and write the completed unit individually.</p>
<p>3. Conducting Self Study (40%). Being a critical analysis of video-recorded sessions.</p> <p>4. A Written Score Analysis (20%). Being an analysis of the structure and instrumentation of a piece of ensemble music.</p>	<p>2. Conducting Workshops (50%). Students complete three 10 minute conducting workshops where they select the repertoire to be rehearsed, conduct the ensemble and manage the rehearsal. Guided self-assessment consists of an individual conference with the lecturer after each conducting session. During the conference the video recording is reviewed, peer feedback discussed and the level of achievement is agreed upon.</p>	<p>2. Conducting Workshops (50%). Students participate in two 30 minute individual conducting sessions, where they take full responsibility for the management and direction of the class ensemble. Guided self-assessment consists of an individual conference with the lecturer after each conducting session. During the conference the video recording is reviewed, peer feedback discussed and the level of achievement is agreed upon. The level of skills demonstrated and the pieces selected for workshop should be of a standard commensurate with a second semester of study.</p>

Figure 2  
Assessment tasks

The four assessment tasks in ESA118 consisting of a seminar presentation, an assessment report, a self-study, and a written score analysis were essentially inauthentic and appeared to have little relation to the activities of a music educator in the professional context. These tasks were not aligned to the type of learning they were actually intended to assess. For example the score analysis and conducting self-study, whilst valuable activities in which to engage, are perhaps better assessed through performative assessment. The ultimate purpose of both of these skills is to conduct, rehearse and perform a musical ensemble and the assessment of these skills is perhaps best done in that context. This observation is consistent with the literature regarding authentic and professionally relevant assessment activities, particularly James, McInnes & Devlin (2002, p. 3) and Groundwater-Smith, Ewing & Le Cornu (2007, p. 271).

This point is further illustrated with reference to assessment task 1 in ESA118 requiring students to undertake a seminar presentation on the teaching fundamentals of their main musical instrument. The intention of this task was perhaps to ensure that students had sufficient grasp of approaches to teaching their own instrument. However, once again, this activity does not occur in the actual professional context. What most graduates are required to demonstrate in the professional context is an ability to plan and deliver individual lessons on their own instrument. Of more value to students therefore would be an opportunity to plan and demonstrate an actual lesson on their instrument and to have that lesson critiqued by both their peers and the tutor. Thus the common currency of this task becomes not the fundamentals of the instrument but rather the ways in which that instrument is taught, the approach to teaching and learning and the statement of these in a formal lesson plan. This observation is also consistent with the literature regarding authentic and professionally relevant assessment activities as outlined above.

In ESA180 the first assessment task therefore required students to prepare, document and present a 20 minute individual lesson on their principal instrument aimed at a beginner pupil. The supporting documentation (25%) included a lesson plan and a number of values statements, whilst the presentation (25%) was intended to be an 'active demonstration' of 'functioning knowledge' (Biggs 2003, pp. 156-157). Furthermore, in order to provide professional modelling for pre-service teachers the lecturer provided an example of a model lesson for students, along with the presentation of a model lesson plan for the demonstration lesson.

Another concern regarding assessment task 1 in ESA118, was the omission of a common requirement for many graduates – planning and teaching their instrument in a small group context. Whilst it was not possible to undertake a performative assessment in this context, as the instrumental resources required for this were not available, it was possible to include a substantial planning component that accommodated the demonstration of the planning required for such learning. This task also incorporated the assessment report task that was assessment task 3 in ESA118, and included participation in student design teams, once again providing relevant and authentic professional context for the assessment that is consistent with the literature as outlined above.

The assessment of the conducting and ensemble management outcomes shifted from a self study and score analysis written assignments to what I refer to as 'guided self-assessment' using an assessment rubric, student conference and email. This new task featured individual students conducting a class ensemble that was video recorded and that, along with peer feedback, formed the foundation of a student/lecturer conference in which the video recording, feedback and the assessment criteria provided the basis for a

conversation about their learning. I refer to this as a form of 'guided self assessment' where the ultimate grade awarded is 'agreed' by the student and the lecturer as an outcome of the conversation. This change reflects the literature relating to self-assessment and peer feedback, particularly Tan (2004, p. 421), Boud, Cohen & Sampson (1999, p. 421) and Boud & Falchikov (2006, p. 402). This collaborative approach to assessment is similar to the approach used in a music teacher education course at the University of London, Institute of Education as reported by Johnston (1993) however the process of negotiating grades does not appear to be a feature of the unit described by Johnston.

### Conclusion

This paper explores the ways in which an early career academic applied the principles of constructive alignment between learning outcomes and assessment tasks to the redevelopment of a unit in a pre-service teacher education course for music educators. The importance of developing assessment practices in higher education that encourage the use of appropriate learning behaviours has been central to this paper. The role for aligned learning outcomes and assessment tasks has been stressed, and the importance of providing pre-service teachers with opportunities to engage in activities that are professionally contextualised and relevant has been presented. The importance of developing learning outcomes and assessment tasks that encourage students to actively engage in the assessment process through self-assessment and peer feedback activities has also been discussed.

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