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From the classroom to Kajulu and beyond: Authentic assessment within an industry-professional context.

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Abstract
Teaching and learning strategies are changing as the contemporary view of effective education is to prepare students for assimilation into professional practice. Within the School of Communication at Charles Sturt University the distance between the classroom and the professional community is closing. At Kajulu Communications, the on-campus student advertising agency of Charles Sturt University, students must apply best industry practice to a range of authentic situations. This paper examines the 360 degree or ‘Orbital’ model of authentic assessment tasks within Kajulu; peer, lecturer and client assessment, and draws on an actual case study to support the notion of authentic assessment within an industry-professional teaching and learning environment.

1. Introduction
Universities are under increasing pressure from both employers and students to equip their graduates with real-world skills and capabilities. As Morris [1] indicates, it is becoming apparent that employers are seeking qualifications beyond simply the framed degree. They want hands-on skills, employees who are good communicators, team players and are dedicated to life-long learning. Executive Director of the Australian Association of Graduate Employers Ben Reeves [2] sites industry experience undertaken by students during their final university year as being worth more on a resume than top-ranking academic results. Joanne Tyler [3] from the National Association of Careers Advisors concurs stating that today most undergraduate courses include a mandatory internship period to ‘chalk up some experience’ while they are studying, integrating industry experience into a university course. But, is the concept of industry internship or ‘chalking up some experience’ simply paying lip-service to the perceived needs of employers or is it a valuable augmentation to university student learning?

In line with the evolving model of the university graduate, teaching and learning strategies are changing as the contemporary view of education is to prepare students for assimilation into professional practice. Today the buzz-words in education are careers in curriculum, vocational focus, cognitive apprenticeship and importantly authentic assessment – assessment within the learning environment, predicated on acknowledged professional industry criteria, needs and expectations.

Much has been written in the literature concerning vocational teaching and, in particular authentic assessment. But what is ‘authentic assessment’, how may it be effectively assimilated into teaching and learning, and importantly how does it relate to values require in the workplace? To what degree does the notion of authentic assessment better prepare students for the real world?

This paper examines the teaching and learning strategies employed at Charles Sturt University. It discusses the situated cognition theory and specifically the cognitive model as a basis for learning and assessment. Using the experiences of the last 3 years within Kajulu Communications, the on-campus student advertising agency of Charles Sturt University, the paper analyses the effectiveness of pedagogical practices that naturally connect learning to authentic assessment, context and culture. The paper examines the 360 degree, or ‘orbital’ view of assessment tasks in Kajulu; peer assessment, lecturer assessment and client assessment, based on the notion that in situated approaches students collaborate with one another (as teams) and their instructor (master) toward a shared understanding. It does so by drawing on actual case studies to support the notion of authentic assessment within the industry-professional teaching and learning environment of Kajulu Communications. In doing so the paper acknowledges the stated commitment of Charles Sturt University [4] to the discovery and advancement of knowledge and the development of mechanisms for transferring knowledge via its position as a university for the professions, as enunciated in its statement of strategic direction:

Charles Sturt University graduates will be highly employable and recognised for their capacity for, and commitment to, service to the economic, social and cultural life of their communities, ethical conduct and continued personal and professional development.
2. Defining authentic assessment

Van Merrienboer [5] suggests that authentic assessment requires that students integrate knowledge, skills and attributes as professionals do, thereby implying that the tasks they undertake are congruent with those in the workplace. Gulikers et al [6] maintain that an authentic task is a problem task that confronts students with activities that are also carried out in professional practice, claiming that an authentic task is therefore critical for authentic assessment. Newmann [7] claims that the true criteria for authenticity may be reflected in three ways: assessment tasks, instruction and student performance.

Savery and Duffy [8] add a crucial additional perspective, that of situation or environment. They introduce the aspects of the replication of real life situations in which teaching and learning take place, i.e. experiences that could confront students in future professional life. This then combines the concepts of the quality of teaching and the context in which it is taught, in terms of definable outcomes.

3. From the classroom to Kajulu

Regardless of individual points of view and definitions of the myriad terminology, most researchers seem to agree that teaching and learning strategies are changing. In the specific field of marketing communications and advertising, the requirement is for graduates with real-world skills who can ‘hit the ground running’.

Within the School of Communication at Charles Sturt University the distance between the classroom and the professional community is closing. The evolution of professional practice and vocational teaching and assessment began in 1999 with the establishment of the student agency Kajulu Communications. Kajulu replicates a real agency in every way; from systems, procedures and responsibilities to student roles and accountable outcomes. From briefs for real client organisations to the development and presentation of industry-standard integrated communication campaigns. In more and more instances these campaigns are going to market, thereby taking the process out of the realm of the traditional student assignment and exemplifying innovative approaches to learning and authentic assessment in terms of marketplace accountability.

Kajulu is a stand-alone entity on campus, responsible for its own premises and equipment. Final year advertising students leave traditional lecture halls and tutorial rooms behind as they work almost exclusively in the agency environment of Kajulu, in effect completing a full year’s internship whilst still at university. Everything about Kajulu is designed to meet professional industry standards and requirements, from the agency’s physical premises to the cultural and psychological approach students take to the development and presentation of client campaigns that go beyond student assignments.

The first thing one notices about Kajulu is that it actually looks and feels like an advertising agency, not simply a tutorial room paying lip service to the concept. Reception, meeting and presentation rooms, a production department equipped with the latest PC and Mac technologies, research and focus group rooms and mandatory ad campaigns and awards adorn the walls. Frenetic activity, often well beyond student campus hours confirms that this is a functioning advertising agency. Gulikers et al [9] refer to this, in discussing a five-dimensional framework for authentic assessment as ‘the physical context’, the location and surrounds where learning will happen and assessment will take place. Brown et al and Herrington and Oliver [10] state that the physical context of an authentic assessment should reflect the way knowledge, skills and attitudes will be used in professional practice.

Within Kajulu students operate and work in Agency teams. The total student cohort is self-selected into teams of on average 7 students and these teams decide the individual roles of team members, replicating actual agency roles and responsibilities. They maintain these roles during their time in Kajulu and represent these roles in relationships with and presentations to their clients. In addition to learning the latest theories and practices for communication, students are required to rigorously and professionally apply them to real-world situations for actual client companies and organisations.
The philosophy of Kajulu [11] reflects a culture of professional practice and the industry-orientated teaching and learning model employed, and states:

*When you leave CSU and Kajulu you are more than simply graduating. You are leaving one agency and moving on to another.*

4. Authentic assessment within the industry-professional Kajulu environment

Gulikers *et al* [12] argue that in order to meet the goals of education, there needs to be a constructive alignment between instruction, learning and assessment. Traditional front-of-class teaching, or what is referred to as ‘chalk and talk’, is an example of such an alignment characterised as instructional approach-knowledge transmission (also referred to as ‘rote’ learning) and is assessed purely on the basis of knowledge acquisition via traditional assignments and tests. They maintain that today’s educational goals should focus more on the development of competent students and future employees than on simple knowledge acquisition. Here they state that the goal of assessment is the development of higher-order thinking processes and competencies rather than simply factual knowledge and basic skills. This closely parallels the vision of a CSU graduate [13] in that they should have the ability to learn and to work both independently and collaboratively, exercise reflective and critical judgement and importantly, be able to apply this knowledge in the workplace.

Birenbaum and Dochy [14] characterise alternative assessments, noting that students have a responsibility for their own learning, requiring that they reflect, collaborate and conduct continuous dialogue with their teacher. Here they maintain that assessment involves real-world or authentic tasks and contexts as well as multiple assessment opportunities and methods to reach a profile score for the determination of student learning and development. Brown *et al* [15] introduce the concept of cognitive apprenticeship, the development of concepts through continuing authentic activity. Cognitive apprenticeship supports learning in a domain (environment) by enabling students to acquire, develop and use cognitive tools in an authentic domain activity… a real-world situation. In this environment, teachers (masters) make explicit their tactical knowledge by modelling strategies in an authentic activity then support students in their attempts at doing the tasks. Finally, they empower students to continue independently, thereby advancing the concept of continuous of self-learning.

4.1. Real-world situations and processes

Newmann [16] proposes an integrated conception of authentic intellectual achievement based on three criteria: the development of student knowledge through disciplined enquiry beyond the classroom; disciplined enquiry that replicates the skills and techniques of professionals; and reflection and simulation of problems, issues and situations encountered in the real world.

The concept of Kajulu is in many ways predicated on the Newman model. Students work on the development of marketing communication campaigns for real clients, regional, national and international. They do this within the operational ‘real agency’ context of Kajulu Communications by operating as teams, in effect ‘mini-agencies’. They work on real briefs delivered in a realistic face-to-face situation by their clients. The briefs seek marketing communications solutions, nominate marketing objectives, desired outcomes and provide actual working budgets.

Students reflect of knowledge gained in the first two years of their course and combine this with ongoing learning and instruction during their final year in the application of processes to identify consumer insights through applied research activities, formulate communication strategies and finally to present fully developed professional communication recommendations to their clients. Often, more than one team will be assigned to a client project, adding a realistic dimension of competition to the learning environment. This spirit of competition, combined with authentic industry time-frames for the development of campaigns, the knowledge that the client is in most instances paying for this work being undertaken, and the psychological reward of ‘winning the pitch’ is a critical motivator. The result is a standard of work that goes well beyond simply what would suffice to pass an assignment or even a subject. Additionally there is the pride and ‘ownership’ by students that comes from the realisation that in many cases these campaigns are actually going to market.
4.2 An Orbital model of assessment

Traditionally assessment methods are predicated on students answering set assessment tasks. In the main these tasks are theoretical and text book-driven. Hence answers tend to reflect readings from the texts without the need to reflect on learning or the desire to venture further in the assimilation of knowledge or the development of an argument. Ramsden [17] quotes one undergraduate as stating:

*I hate to say it, but what you have got to do is to have a list of ‘facts’; you write down the important points and memorize those, then you do all right in the test.*

Biggs [18] identifies the considerable variation in student-teacher perspectives on assessment noting that, whilst teachers traditionally see assessment as the end of the process and a measurement of a student’s accumulated learning, often the student’s starting point is the assessment item itself. They look at what needs to be learned to pass the subject without thinking about what is entailed in achieving the eventual outcome.

| Teacher perspective: Intended Outcomes------| **Teaching Activities**------| Assessment |
| Student perspective: | **Assessment**------| **Learning Activities**------| **Outcomes** |

Figure 1: Biggs’ Student/Teacher Perspectives

Within the industry-professional environment of Kajulu, student assessment is based on authentic tasks, a demonstration of student initiated reflective practice and progressive argument in line with intended outcomes, in this case client and industry expectations.

A 360 degree or ‘Orbital’ model of assessment is implemented and is undertaken in 3 phases:

(i) Team or Group Assessment: Client campaign projects undertaken by Kajulu teams form an integral component of the final year student curriculum. They are fully assessable. Individual assignments augment the team work so as to aid in the identification of individual student overall performance. The major client campaign development and presentation work is assessed utilizing the following industry-standard criteria:
- Team campaign presentation
- Report content - breadth and originality
- Practicality and persuasiveness of concepts
- Report documentation
- Evaluation and expected ROI

Individual Assessment is undertaken by way of:
- Progressive learning assessment: regular reviews and mini-quizzes to ensure that students comprehend strategies progressively delivered throughout the teaching, allowing them to reflect on these strategies;
- Content assessment: a specifically developed assessment matrix that highlights the various levels of student achievement through any or all assignments.

(ii) Peer Assessment: Success of an agency depends very much on a culture predicated on team performance. Kajulu team members complete a confidential Peer Assessment form asking students to rank team member performance out of 100%. It also asks that the student reflects on his or her own contributions, their strengths and weaknesses and where they see they benefited most or least from the exercise. Peer Assessment is valued at 10% of the overall subject grade.

Additionally, it is important to identify how the Kajulu team interacts with the client, from initial brief to final presentation. A Client Relationship assessment procedure identifies key areas for consideration including: quality of the brief and information supplied, accessibility of the client throughout the process and clarity of communication.
Each Kajulu team leader completes this survey on behalf of the team. Whilst this assessment carries no actual marks, it provides invaluable data to aid in the further development of effective agency/client procedures.

(iii) Agency Performance assessment: This is completed by the client at the conclusion of the project or assignment. It formally evaluates the way in which the agency related to themselves as the client in terms of day-to-day contact, the ability to translate the brief in terms of effective recommendations, overall professional performance and skills in the development of an ongoing relationship.

5. Foodbank – a case study

A major client for Kajulu teams in 2004 was the Sydney-based international, non-denominational, charity Foodbank Australia. Foodbank facilitates the collection of food and grocery donations from manufacturers and then distributes them to more than 1,500 community-based welfare agencies in Australia and in turn as an international organisation, to thousands of charities globally. In essence, they are the ‘charity behind the charities’.

Foodbank was also the client for the International Advertising Association’s national advertising competition “The Big Idea”. Two Kajulu teams were assigned to work on this client, competing against university agency teams from all over Australia. For geographic reasons, the brief was delivered electronically and agency teams were given just 5 weeks to complete the project for presentation to the client, in line with realistic industry expectations. Campaign recommendations were presented electronically in the first instance with the winning team presenting in person to the client company. Judging was facilitated by representatives of the client as well as by a panel of industry professionals.

Kajulu Red from CSU was judged the outright winner and National Champions. The Foodbank project was also considered to be the teams’ final year major project and as such was assessed internally as well as by the client. The Orbital model of evaluation was applied; campaign presentation and content and Agency performance assessment. Results were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation criteria</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Campaign presentation</td>
<td>34/40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report presentation and content</td>
<td>54/60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client evaluation</td>
<td>75/100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total score</td>
<td>81.5/100</td>
<td>Distinction (DI)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Kajulu Group evaluation results

The winning campaign by the CSU Kajulu team was received favourable feedback [19]:

A highly professional presentation. We are delighted with the innovative and creative ideas and are committed to implementing these in our 5 year campaign starting in 2005.

Whilst an overall team grade is awarded for the major project, it is recognised that individual team member grades must reflect individual contribution. Using the final element of the ‘orbital’ matrix, Kajulu Red group scores were overlayed with both individual assignment scores and peer evaluation scores to ascertain overall individual results. Final student grade distributions were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>HD</td>
<td>Mid range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>HD</td>
<td>Low range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>DI</td>
<td>Mid range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>DI</td>
<td>Low range</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Individual students’ results
6. Conclusion and ongoing activity

Invariably in any marketing communications campaign the final assessment is made by the market. In the case of Kajulu team members undertaking the final year of the Advertising degree at Charles Sturt University, it is the quality of thinking and applied knowledge as judged to industry criteria by academic staff, as well as the industry itself (the client) that is taken into account in the final grades.

Kajulu student agency teams have not only consistently produced excellent academic results they have competed successfully both nationally and globally. Teams have won the acclaimed International Advertising Association’s ‘InterAd’ global advertising competition 3 times in the last 6 years (in 1999, 2002 and 2005) and have been named Australian Champions in both 2003 and 2004 in the IAA ‘Big Idea’ Australian competition.

Beyond the awards and accolades, graduate employment for CSU and Kajulu students is almost 100% [20]. This would seem to support the notion that the full year’s ‘internship’ in Kajulu, combined with the rigour of the course is addressing the employer requirements of the industry it serves.

Action research is on-going. The author recognises the limitations in the current data qualitative collection process and identifies the potential value of more rigorously applied systematic methodology to collate student-centred data to inform assessment practice. Currently students are required to assess each other’s performance (confidentially) in all team-work projects. They are also asked to identify where they contributed most or least and what they learned. These questions, whilst providing insights, do not deliver quantifiable data. It is intended to re-design the Peer Evaluation form as a KEE – Kajulu Experience Evaluation. The objectives will be to:
- Develop a quantifiable method of tracking undergraduate continuous assessment for final year Advertising/Advertising major students;
- Collect individual student-centred data from both the teams and the client companies;
- Evaluate a range of aspects related to assessment and time management of assignments;

Data will be used to inform ongoing research and development of student learning practices, evaluation and assessment.

References


