

# Optimising the student experience: Building student agency, learning communities and understanding of assessment

## **Jackie Eagers**

James Cook University, Townsville, Australia  
jackie.eagers@jcu.edu.au

## **Colleen Kaesehagen**

James Cook University, Townsville, Australia  
colleen.kaesehagen@jcu.edu.au

## **Michelle Lasen**

James Cook University, Cairns, Australia  
michelle.lasen@jcu.edu.au

## **Nicole Brown**

James Cook University, Townsville, Australia  
nicole.brown2@jcu.edu.au

## **Marianne Bonassi**

James Cook University, Townsville, Australia  
marianne.bonassi@jcu.edu.au

## **Rebecca Sealey**

James Cook University, Townsville, Australia  
rebecca.sealey@jcu.edu.au

Engaging students in pre-assessment activities designed to promote social construction of knowledge of assessment requirements and standards significantly improves student performance (Rust, Price, & O'Donovan, 2003). The aim was to actively engage students in workshops, wherein they collaborated with peers, to construct understanding of requirements and standards pertaining to complex, authentic assessment tasks. Disciplinary academics collaborated with learning support staff to integrate peer learning activities into first and second year workshops, involving students in the co-creation of assessment handy hints. To generate the handy hints, first year students reviewed exemplars, while second year students responded to frequently asked questions. Assessment task descriptions and rubrics were used as resources. The student experience was evaluated through surveys and analysed as proportional Likert-scale data and open-ended responses. The majority of students agreed that: 1) the purpose of handy hints co-creation was clear; 2) they felt comfortable participating; 3) the handy hints clarified assessment expectations; 4) they used the handy hints when completing the assignment; 5) exemplars helped to understand assessment standards; and 6) they felt more enabled to independently understand future assessment requirements. Perceived benefits and negative aspects of the project identified year-level differences: the first year student responses reflected a focus on the process of understanding assessment expectations, while the second year student responses reflected a focus on the use of additional assessment resources and participation in group discussions. Three types of preferences emerged from first and second year student responses regarding engagement in the co-creation of assessment handy hints. Students can be seen to be: 1) active agents for

learning; 2) passive receivers of information; or 3) non engagers. These themes will be further explored in the presentation.