

Engaging Speech Pathology Students with an Authentic Task



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The Alternative Assessment Challenge

In the new Bachelor of Speech Pathology course academic staff decided to make authentic assessment an important aspect of curriculum design. The first year unit 'Communication and Mealtime Foundations' provides an orientation to foundational Speech Pathology professional concepts and skills. This is where the students begin to develop a professional identity. An important aim for assessment is to give the students an opportunity to explore the role of Speech Pathologists and to apply their learning to a professional context at an early stage in the course. The authentic task was to design a poster, with a well-balanced text and visual presentation, to educate and advocate for speech pathology assessment and management of communication issues. The poster was required to provide accessible information to meet the needs of a diverse community audience.

The assessment task is aligned with unit learning outcomes that relate to discussing the role of the Speech Pathologist in evidence-based assessment and treatment, and translating evidence-based messages to suit a lay audience. The poster activity is 30% of the assessment for the unit. Submission is through Turnitin to ensure academic integrity.

Student Engagement with Assessment

The assessment task is designed to engage students in an activity that promotes high-level learning. The students may choose from a range of topics relevant to speech pathology practice with children and/ or adults. The aim is to increase motivation for the task and level of interest at the post-assessment presentation and review stage. To complete the task, students need to:

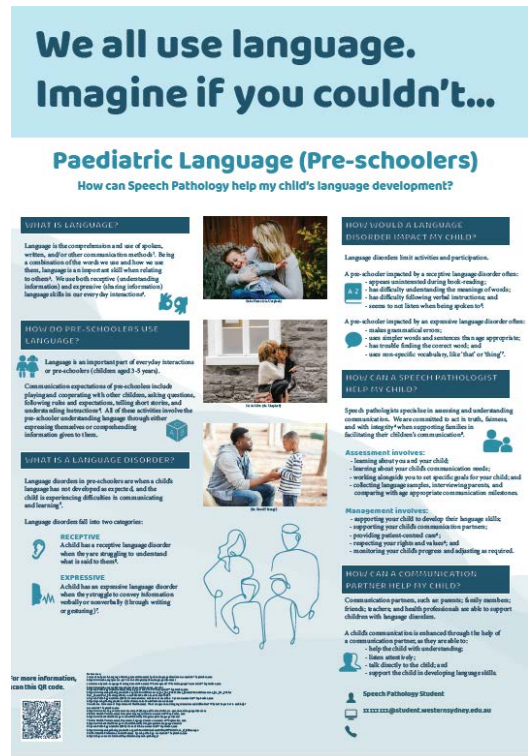
- ▶ Investigate the roles of the profession and consider their own professional identity
- ▶ Focus on ethical and professional practice
- ▶ Thoroughly investigate and research their topic
- ▶ Apply clinical reasoning to their poster presentation
- ▶ Use communication skills to ensure the messaging and layout of the poster will suit the intended audience.

All of these represent challenges that may not exist in other traditional assessment task formats. All, however, are key professional skills for Speech Pathologists. Introducing a task in first year to begin developing these skills and competencies is part of the value of this form of authentic assessment.

To complete the assessment task, students are encouraged to:

- ▶ Review materials from their tutorial sessions during the semester
- ▶ Participate in instructor and student-led discussion forums
- ▶ Grade and discuss a completed exemplar of the assessment task
- ▶ Participate in an assessment information session, offered in HyFlex mode
- ▶ Consider the nature of scientific/professional discourse and how they can contribute to this with a topic from their profession
- ▶ Learn how to prepare a poster presentation for a professional audience

The learning activities are integrated into the unit design, to align with the learning outcomes and the assessment task.



An example of a student poster

Effectiveness of the assessment task

To ensure the effectiveness of the task, a range of aspects of good assessment practice were applied:

1. This is assessment for learning. The assessment task motivates learning that develops key skills that are required for the unit and the discipline.
2. Alignment of learning outcomes and assessment. The assessment task validates student attainment of the learning outcomes.
3. Guidance through feedback. A detailed qualitative rubric was used, and comments were provided to students via QuickMarks. Marker moderation was conducted to ensure consistency of application of the rubric. In a subsequent tutorial, feedback trends were discussed to encourage the students to learn from and be guided by feedback, and to reflect on their own performance and how this could be improved.
4. Academic Integrity. Turnitin was used for submission of the posters and similarity scores were calculated to ensure academic integrity.
5. Authentic assessment. Students were presented with a scenario in which their role was a community-based Speech Pathologist who is asked to prepare a poster for an event on the theme of 'Connecting Communities'. As this is a realistic scenario for working professionals, this creates a level of authenticity for the task.

Most students appreciated the opportunity to be creative and perceived the assessment gave them an opportunity to explore an area they didn't know. Students reported that they performed better on this task than they would in an assessment format such as an exam. A few, however, found creating a poster using a template to be technically challenging.

Further Development

For future offerings of the unit additional authenticity and engagement with assessment feedback are planned. Students will have the opportunity to present their posters at an educational event, either virtual or in a real community environment. This will be accompanied by peer feedback on posters and engagement in critical review and reflection. Authenticity and feedback will be enhanced by introducing an element of the professional discourse that happens in scientific and community forums.

Technical Considerations

Turnitin and Quickmarks can be accessed through vUWS

Useful links

[WSU Assessment Guide](#) has additional information/resources on Authentic Assessment

[Authentic Assessment Matters](#) website