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Learning-Teaching Autonomy in Accelerating  
Academic Literacy Development



Learning-Teaching Autonomy  
in  
Accelerating Academic Literacy Development  
AALD

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## Overview

- AIM: to discover conditions that promoted a STEM discipline lecturer's **autonomy** in adopting and sustaining integration of academic literacy development into her curriculum
- INNOVATION: **Accelerating Academic Literacy Development (AALD)** a student self-help tool
- METHOD: collaboration; case study; data analysis applying a MELT Academic Learning-Teaching Autonomy framework (ALTA)
- FINDINGS: discipline specialist's autonomy but none about student autonomy
- IMPLICATION: further research is needed on repeated iterations across students' study program

## Background: Academic literacy development (ALD)

- Global changes – technology – internet – plagiarism – increasing student mobility – internationalisation of education (McGowan 2008)
- Higher Education researchers have proposed that students' development of academic literacy be located within the curriculum (Arkoudis, 2014, Dunworth, 2010, Hunter & Tse 2013, Lea & Street 1998, Wingate 2006, 2015)
- Traditionally students' development of literacy has been assumed to be a natural by-product of *content* learning
- In Australia – and other Anglophone countries - students who needed help have had the option of seeking extra curricular support in writing centres, provided by Academic Language and Learning staff and (Chanock 2010)
- This means responsibility for academic literacy development have been left largely to learners themselves.

# 1. AALD – Accelerating Academic Literacy Development

- To support students at Adelaide University in taking that responsibility I devised the **AALD**, a ‘self-help tool’ for ‘accelerating (their own) academic literacy development’
- With this tool, students are shown how to *speed up* their learning of terminology, phrases, sentence structures and the conventions of citing and referencing their sources, by
  - taking a *mindful* approach to *academic reading*
  - learning a simple method for *genre analysis*
  - applying findings directly into their academic assignment writing
- I propose that the AALD approach has the potential for being adopted by discipline specialists in order to integrate literacy development into their curricula

# 1. AALD – Accelerating Academic Literacy Development

Two MELT frameworks that I constructed for this study:

1. **AALD Pentagon:** to promote students' engagement with the *AALD tool*
2. **ALTA Matrix:** to demonstrate *autonomy* development from *learner to teacher* (Willison, Sabir & Thomas 2017).

## 1.1 AALD Pentagon

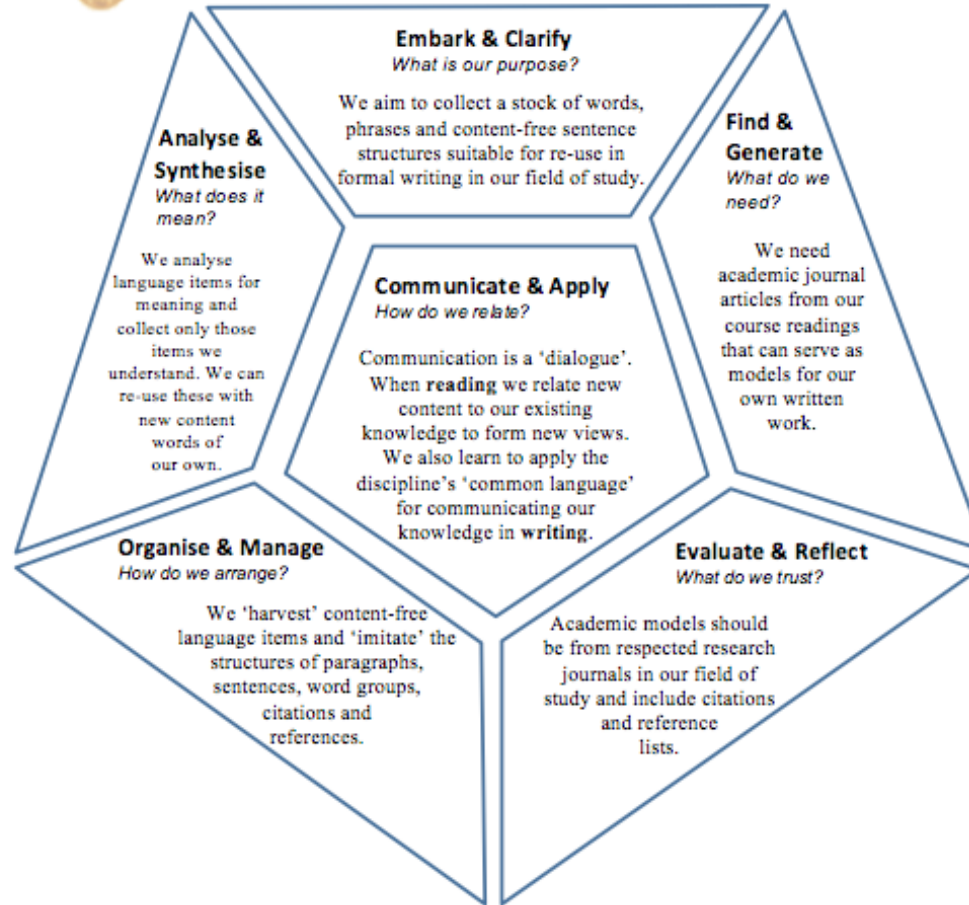
- describes the *AALD self-help tool* for promoting students' engagement with their own academic literacy development
- places MELT facet **Communicate & Apply** in central position to interpret the other five facets in terms of **academic communication** (reading and writing)
- outlines AALD purpose and activities for students to:
  - embark & clarify – build a stock of academic language & structures
  - find & generate – read academic journal articles as models
  - evaluate & reflect – discern whether articles academically appropriate
  - organise & manage – harvest content-free language for re-use
  - analyse & synthesise – analyse for understanding before re-using



## AALD pentagon

ACCELERATING ACADEMIC LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

'When in doubt, return to the centre'



AALD is an adaptation of the MELT (Models of Engaged Learning & Teaching ) pentagon, designed to capture the active learning of a process for Accelerating Academic Literacy Development by Ursula McGowan August 2017. It is based on the RSD *Optimising Problem Solving (OPS)* Framework [www.melt.edu.auFramework](http://www.melt.edu.auFramework). Contact [ursula.mcgowan@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:ursula.mcgowan@adelaide.edu.au) or [john.willison@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:john.willison@adelaide.edu.au)



## 1.2 ALTA – Academic Learning-Teaching Autonomy

(MELT Autonomy Matrix)

– demonstrates *autonomy* development from being a *learner* to being a *teacher*

– utilises autonomy stages 2, 3 and 4 of the RSD

bounded – FOLLOW

scaffolded – IMPROVISE

self-actuated – INITIATE

The ALTA framework demonstrates the stages of autonomy a learner attains by

FOLLOWING – teacher's / collaborator's prompts

IMPROVISING – learning through practice & receiving feedback

INITIATING – teaching self or others by transferring practice

# Academic Learning-Teaching Autonomy (ALTA): Student

MELT facets	FOLLOW bounded	IMPROVISE scaffolded	INITIATE self-actuated
<b>Embark &amp; Clarify</b> What is our purpose  <b>Find &amp; Generate</b> What do we need?	<b>In class:</b> learners <b>READ</b> academic article: identify role of structures & language	<b>At home:</b> learners individually identify structure & language in <b>OTHER</b> course readings	<b>In various courses:</b> learners find and read context based texts as models for writing in any new <b>CONTEXT</b>
<b>Evaluate &amp; Reflect</b> What do we trust?  <b>Organise &amp; Manage</b> How do we arrange?	Interactively learners analyse structures & identify re-usable language items for <b>HARVESTING</b>	Learners <b>PLAN</b> own assignment based on article structure. <b>SUBMIT</b> for formative feedback	Learners <b>EVALUATE</b> relevance of context- specific texts as models for writing in <b>any new context</b>
<b>Analyse &amp; synthesise</b> what does it mean?  <b>Communicate &amp; Apply</b> How do we relate?	Interactively learners imitate structures & practise <b>RE-USE</b> of harvested language with their own content	Learners ( <b>guided</b> by <b>rubric</b> ) apply academic structure and language in <b>ASSIGNMENT</b> for assessment grade & feedback	Learners initiate & autonomously adapt AALD pentagon steps of harvesting from readings for <b>WRITING in any new context</b>

## 2. AIM – mainstreaming the method for AALD

Therefore the focus of my study was a staff member

A case study to discover:

- *conditions that enabled* a discipline specialist to adopt an AALD learning-teaching method as an integral part of her curriculum
- *and the level of autonomy* she demonstrated in sustaining the academic literacy development within her course over a number of years

### 3. METHOD – for discipline specialist's induction

- Collaboration between language specialist and discipline specialist in applying the AALD tool to developing curriculum-integrated pedagogy (learning objective – activities – assessment)
  - timetabling, identifying suitable journal articles,
  - worksheets based on journal articles
  - setting & marking assignment, assessment criteria / rubric
- Co-teaching - scaffolded learning from learner to teacher
  - discipline specialist learns about literacy learning & teaching
  - language specialist learns about discipline context

## 3.1 DATA

Data consisted of

- interviews and
- course documents
- collected during collaboration and
- after autonomous teaching by lecturer

## 3.2 Data analysis

### The ALTA Matrix

#### Academic Learning-Teaching Autonomy (ALTA)

The ALTA framework applied not only to

- **students:** learning the *AALD tool*

but can also be re-stocked to apply to

- **discipline lecturer:** learning the *AALD pedagogy*, and
- **collaborator:** learning about the *discipline context*

# Academic Learning-Teaching Autonomy (ALTA): Teacher

MELT facets	FOLLOW bounded	IMPROVISE scaffolded	INITIATE self-actuated
<p><b>Embark &amp; Clarify</b> What is our purpose</p> <p><b>Find &amp; Generate</b> What do we need?</p>	<p><b>Literacy:</b> identified by discipline specialist as gap for students &amp; seeks language specialist's collaboration</p>	<p><b>Continuation:</b> Discipline specialist repeats AALD workshops – minimal request for further support</p>	<p><b>Transfer:</b> discipline specialist uses AALD pedagogy and handouts as models for similar courses In similar contexts</p>
<p><b>Evaluate &amp; Reflect</b> What do we trust?</p> <p><b>Organise &amp; Manage</b> How do we arrange?</p>	<p><b>Adoption</b> of AALD innovation: times for workshop, learning objectives &amp; assessment in alignment</p>	<p><b>Modification</b> of structural aspects of AALD pedagogy in light of constraints</p>	<p><b>Re-organisation</b> of AALD pedagogy by discipline specialist in continuing or different courses</p>
<p><b>Analyse &amp; synthesise</b> what does it mean?</p> <p><b>Communicate &amp; Apply</b> How do we relate?</p>	<p><b>Co-teaching:</b> between discipline &amp; language specialists; grades &amp; feedback for assignment</p>	<p><b>Adaptation</b> of workshops in light of students' engagement &amp; learning outcomes</p>	<p><b>Scalability:</b> Discipline specialist autonomously inducts colleagues into AALD pedagogy</p>

## 4. FINDINGS

Interim findings were that the discipline specialist

- demonstrated *autonomy* by *continuing* and *adapting* the original AALD concept
- was satisfied with improvements in student performance against her own stated learning outcomes
  - early engagement with content
  - performance in assignment – language *and* discipline content
  - minimal plagiarism
- However there was no explicit evidence of student autonomy



## 5. IMPLICATIONS

Further iterations of the the AALD pedagogy will be needed to determine

- whether, and how soon, students can learn to use the AALD tool to take charge of their literacy development in concurrent and future academic courses
- what constitutes sufficient evidence of the value of literacy in content learning to motivate a critical mass of staff to integrate a literacy development into their curricula

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