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Towards a More Cogent Curriculum for Experimental Writing: A Case Study

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TOWARDS A MORE COGENT CURRICULUM FOR EXPERIMENTAL WRITING

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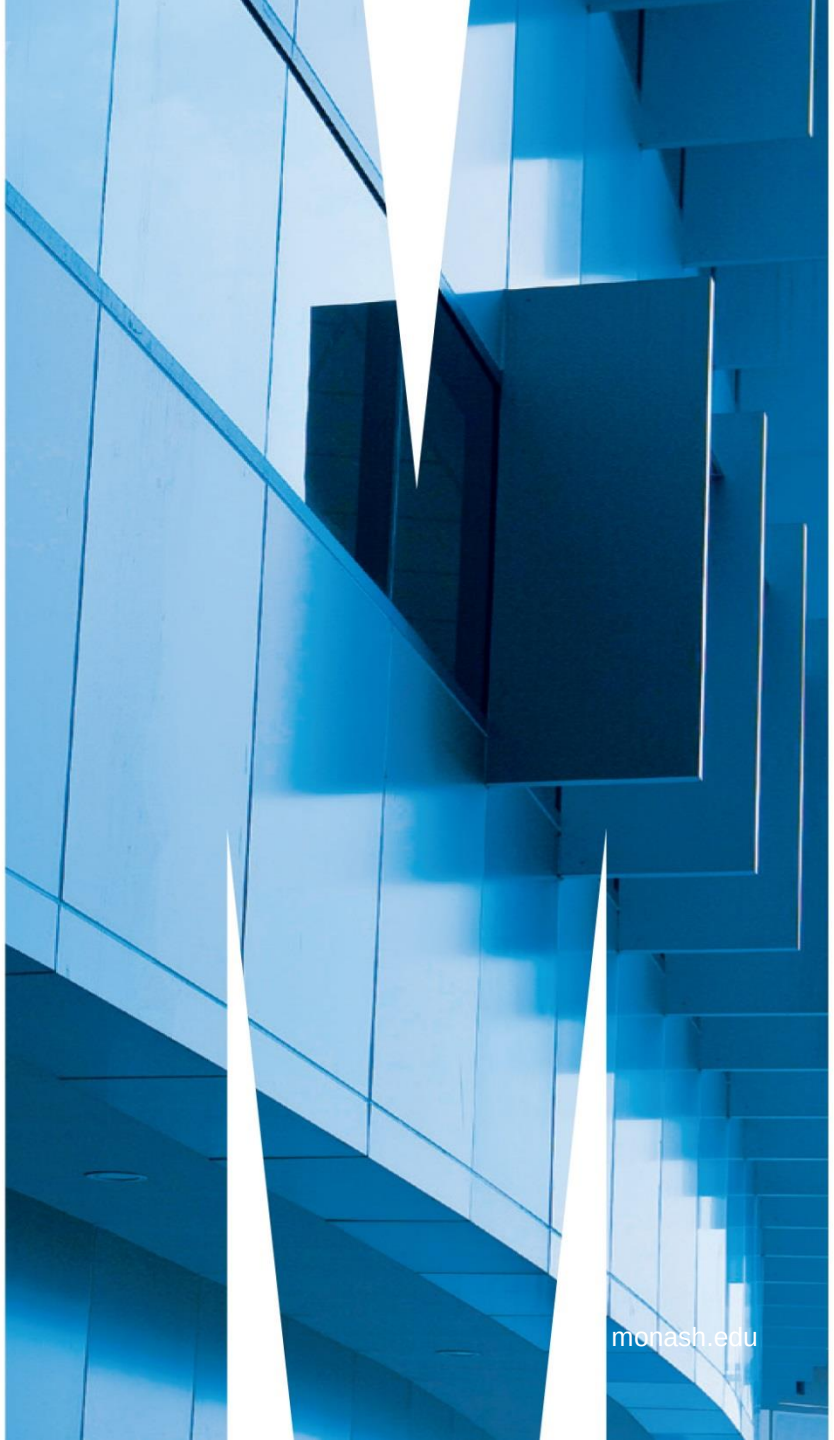

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BACKGROUND

- AMU 3585 (Writing Experiments) had been taught for a decade
- Outdated Unit Guide
  - 2 formative assessments
  - 1 summative assessment
- Barely indicating learning processes in weekly lesson plans

- Upon taking over the unit,
  - Cut down the requirements for formative assessments
  - Tweaked the rubrics
    - Lighter
    - More manageable
  - Added multiple-choice questions (MCQ) quizzes
  - Revised lesson plans to reflect rubrics

- Modifications stood on untested grounds
- Consulted the learning skills adviser
  - Teasing out the facets of curriculum using the RSD framework

ASSESSING STUDENT CREATIVE SKILLS

Original
Mini Assignment 1 – Soundscapes (5%)
Moodle Quiz 1: Poetic Devices & Close Reading (5%)
Moodle Quiz 2: Using the Experimental Exercise Rubric (5%)
Mini Assignment 2 – Writing a Surrealistic Text (5%)
Moodle Quiz 3: Essay Structure and Theme (5%)
Assignment 1: Preliminary Research (15%)
Moodle Quiz 4: Experimental Draft (5%)
Assignment 2: Experimental Draft (10%)
Moodle Quiz 5: Strategies Revision (5%)
Assignment 3: Major Composition and Exegesis (40%)

Research Skill Development Framework

For educators to facilitate the explicit, coherent, incremental and cyclic development of the skills associated with researching, problem solving, critical thinking and clinical reasoning.

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Students' Autonomy when Researching

Facets of Research	Prescribed Researching Highly structured directions and modelling from educator prompt researching, in which…	Bounded Researching Boundaries set by and limited directions from educator channel researching, in which…	Scaffolded Researching Scaffolds placed by educator shape independent researching, in which…	Open-ended Researching Students initiate research and this is guided by the educator…	Unbounded Researching Students determined guidelines for researching that are in accord with discipline or context…
Curious **Embark & Clarify** *What is our purpose?* Students respond to or initiate research & clarify what knowledge is required, considering ECST issues.	Students respond to questions/ tasks arising explicitly from a closed inquiry. Use a provided structured approach to clarify questions, terms, requirements, expectations & ECST issues.	Students respond to questions/t asks required by & implicit in a closed inquiry. Choose from several provided structures to clarify questions, terms, requirements, expectations & ECST issues.	Students respond to questions/ tasks generated from a closed inquiry. Choose from a range of provided structures or approaches to clarify questions, requirements, expectations & ECST issues.	*Students generate questions /aims/ hypotheses framed within structured guidelines*.* Anticipate & prepare for ECST issues.	**Students generate questions/aims/ hypotheses based on experience, expertise and literature*.* Delve into and prepare for ECST issues.
Determined **Find & Generate** *What do we need?* Students find & generate needed information/data using appropriate methodology.	Students collect & record required information/data using a prescribed methodology from a prescribed source in which the information/data is evident.	Students collect & record appropriate information/data using given methodology from pre-determined source/s where information/ data is not obvious.	Students collect & record appropriate information/data from self-selected sources using one of several provided methodologies.	Students collect & record self-determined information/ data choosing an appropriate methodology based on parameters set.	Students collect and record information/ data from self-selected sources, choosing or devising an appropriate methodology with self-structured guidelines.
Discerning **Evaluate & Reflect** *What do we trust?* Students determine the credibility of sources, information & data, & make own research processes visible.	Students evaluate sources/ information/ data using simple prescribed criteria to specify credibility & to reflect on the research process.	Students evaluate sources/ information/ data using a choice of provided criteria to specify credibility & to reflect on the research process.	Students evaluate sources/ information/data & inquiry process using criteria related to the aims of the inquiry. Reflect insightfully to improve own processes used.	Students evaluate information/data & the inquiry process using self-determined criteria developed within parameters given. Reflects to refine others' processes.	Students evaluate information/data and inquiry process rigorously using self-generated criteria based on experience, expertise and the literature. Reflect insightfully to renew others' processes.
Harmonising **Organise & Manage** *How do we arrange?* Students organise information & data to reveal patterns/themes, managing teams & processes.	Students organise information/ data using prescribed structure. Manage linear process provided (with pre-specified team roles).	Students organise information/data using a choice of given structures. Manage a process which has alternative possible pathways (& specify team roles).	Students organise information/data using recommended structures. Manage self-determined processes (including teams) with multiple possible pathways.	Students organise information/data using self-determined structures, & manage the processes (including team function) within the parameters set.	Students organise information/data using self-determined structures and management of processes (including team function).
Creative **Analyse & Synthesise** *What does it mean?* Students analyse information/ data critically & synthesise new knowledge to produce coherent individual/team understandings.	Students interpret given information/data & synthesize knowledge into prescribed formats. Sees patterns. **Ask emergent questions of clarification/curiosity*.*	Students interpret several sources of information/ data & synthesise to integrate knowledge into standard formats. **Ask emergent, relevant & researchable questions.** *	Students analyse trends in information/data & synthesise to fully integrate component parts in structures appropriate to task. **Ask rigorous, researchable questions based on new understandings*.*	Students analyses information/data & synthesizes to fully integrate components, consistent with parameters set. Fill knowledge gaps that are stated by others.	Students analyse and synthesise information/data to generalise or abstract knowledge that addresses self-or-group-identified gaps in understanding.
Constructive **Communicate & Apply** *How will we relate?* Students discuss, listen, write, respond to feedback & perform the processes, understandings & applications of the research, heeding ECST issues and needs of audiences.	Students communicate with each other and relate their understanding throughout set task. Use prescribed genre to develop and demonstrate understanding to a prescribed audience. Apply to a similar context the knowledge developed. Follow prompts on ECST issues.	Students use prescribed genre to develop & demonstrate understanding to a pre-specified audience. Apply the knowledge developed to a similar context & follow prompts on ECST issues.	Students use some discipline-specific language & prescribed genre to demonstrate understanding from a stated perspective & for a specified audience. Apply to several similar contexts the knowledge developed & specify ECST issues.	Students use discipline-specific language & genres to demonstrate scholarly understanding for a specified audience. They apply the knowledge developed to diverse contexts and specify ECST issues in initiating, conducting & communicating.	Students use appropriate language and genre to extend the knowledge of a range of audiences. Apply innovatively the knowledge developed to multiple contexts. Probe and specify ECST issues that emerge broadly.

What characterises the move from 'search' to 'research'? Gathering more information and generating more data is merely a 'bigasearch'! Research is when students engage in all the above facets, time and again.

Research Skill Development (RSD), a conceptual framework for Primary School to PhD, developed by John Willison and Kerry O'Regan, with much trialling by Eleanor Peirce and Mario Ricci. October 2006, revised March 2016. Facets based on: ANZIIL (2004) Standards & Bloom's et al. (1956) Taxonomy. Extent of Synthesis informed by SOLO taxonomy (Biggs & Collis, 1982). * Framing researchable questions often requires a high degree of guidance and modelling for students, resulting from their synthesis (Red, Orange, Yellow) then initiating their research (Green and Blue). The six facets are often used directly with students as a 'learning routine' (Ritchhart & Perkins 2008). **The perpendicular font reflects dispositions towards research.** Framework, resources and references available at www.rsd.edu.au. Information: john.willison@adelaide.edu.au

METHODOLOGY

- Identified that skills of experimental writing were not explicit
- Creative skills derived from Writing Experiments Learning Outcomes.
- Using Nvivo, mapped the 3 major assignments and 7 mini-assignments to the RSD facets and creative skills

Table 1: List of Creative Skills

1. Explore alternate, divergent, or contradictory creative strategies
2. Determine the right creative strategies to use
3. Generate the creative strategies
4. Articulate reasons for choosing alternate, divergent, or contradictory creative strategies
5. Distinguish similar or contradictory creative strategies
6. Evaluate and reflect on the creative strategies
7. Integrate alternate, divergent, or contradictory creative strategies
8. Connect the creative strategies in new ways
9. Extend the creative strategies to create new knowledge
10. Re-formulate the creative strategies towards novelty
11. Transform the creative strategies into entirely new forms
12. Reproduce the creative strategies in different forms
13. Synthesise the creative strategies in a coherent whole

FINDINGS

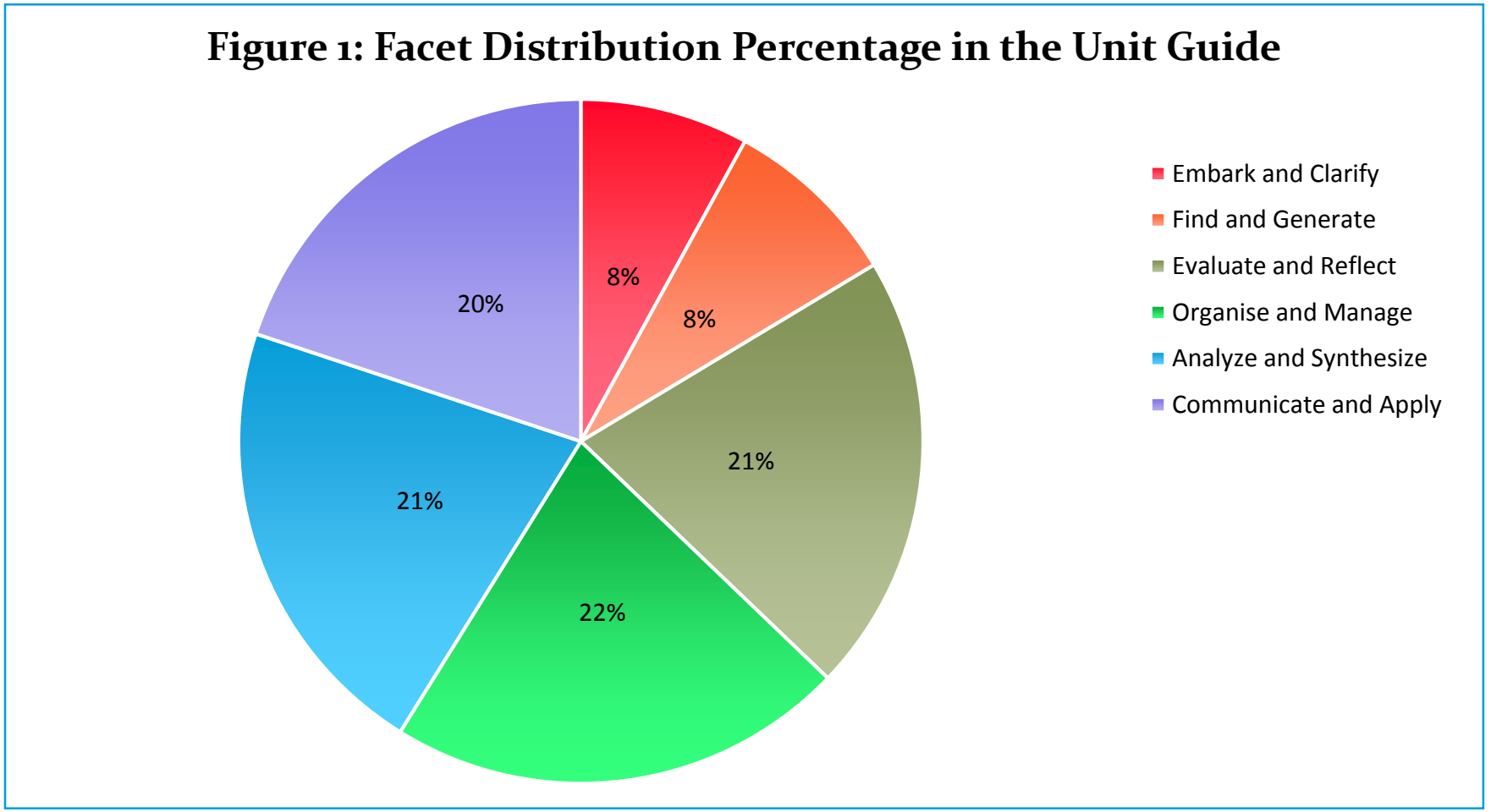


Figure 1: Facet Distribution Percentage in the Unit Guide
8%
8%
21%
22%
21%
20%
Embark and Clarify
Find and Generate
Evaluate and Reflect
Organise and Manage
Analyze and Synthesize
Communicate and Apply

Figure 2: Creative Skill Distribution Percentage in the Unit Guide

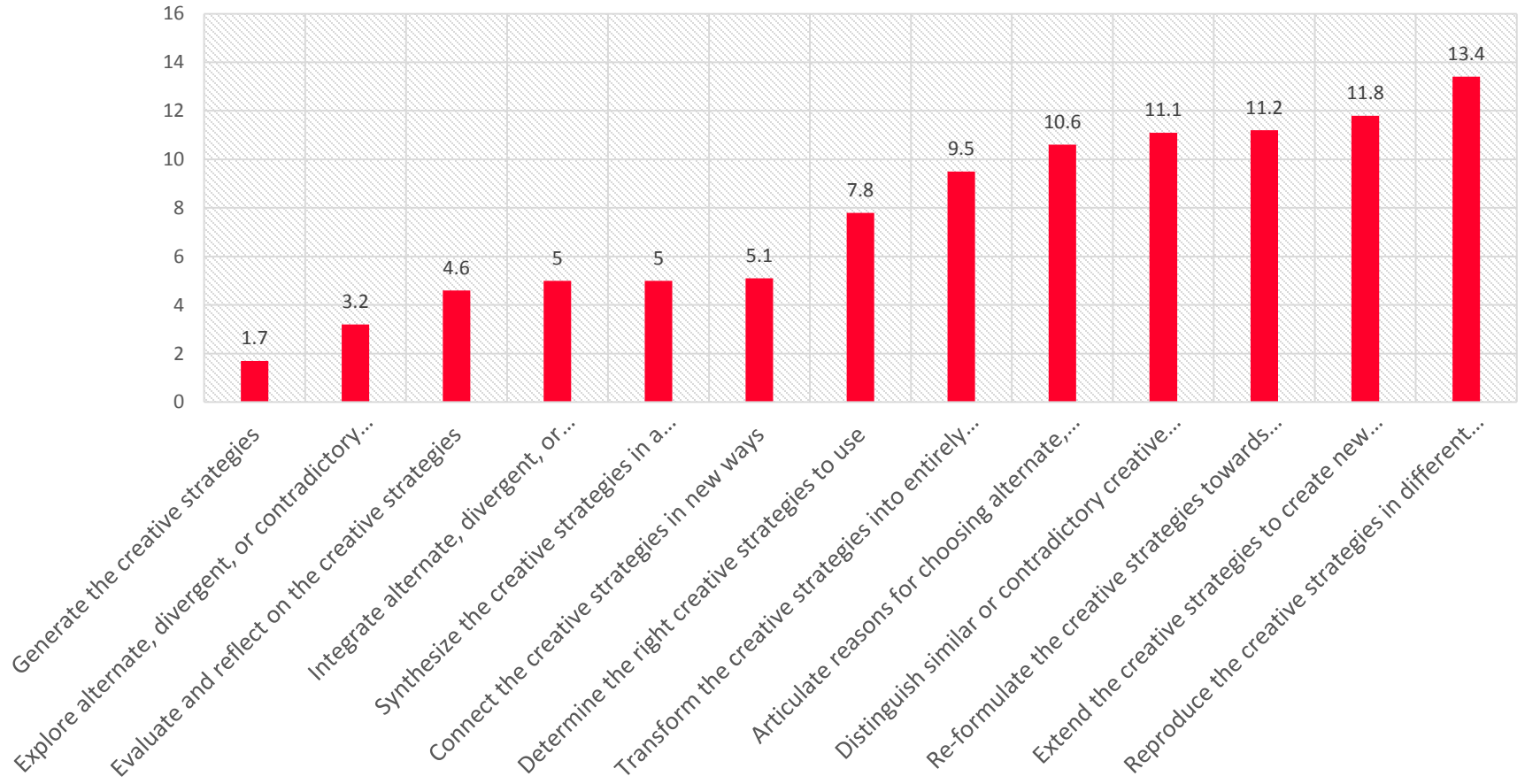
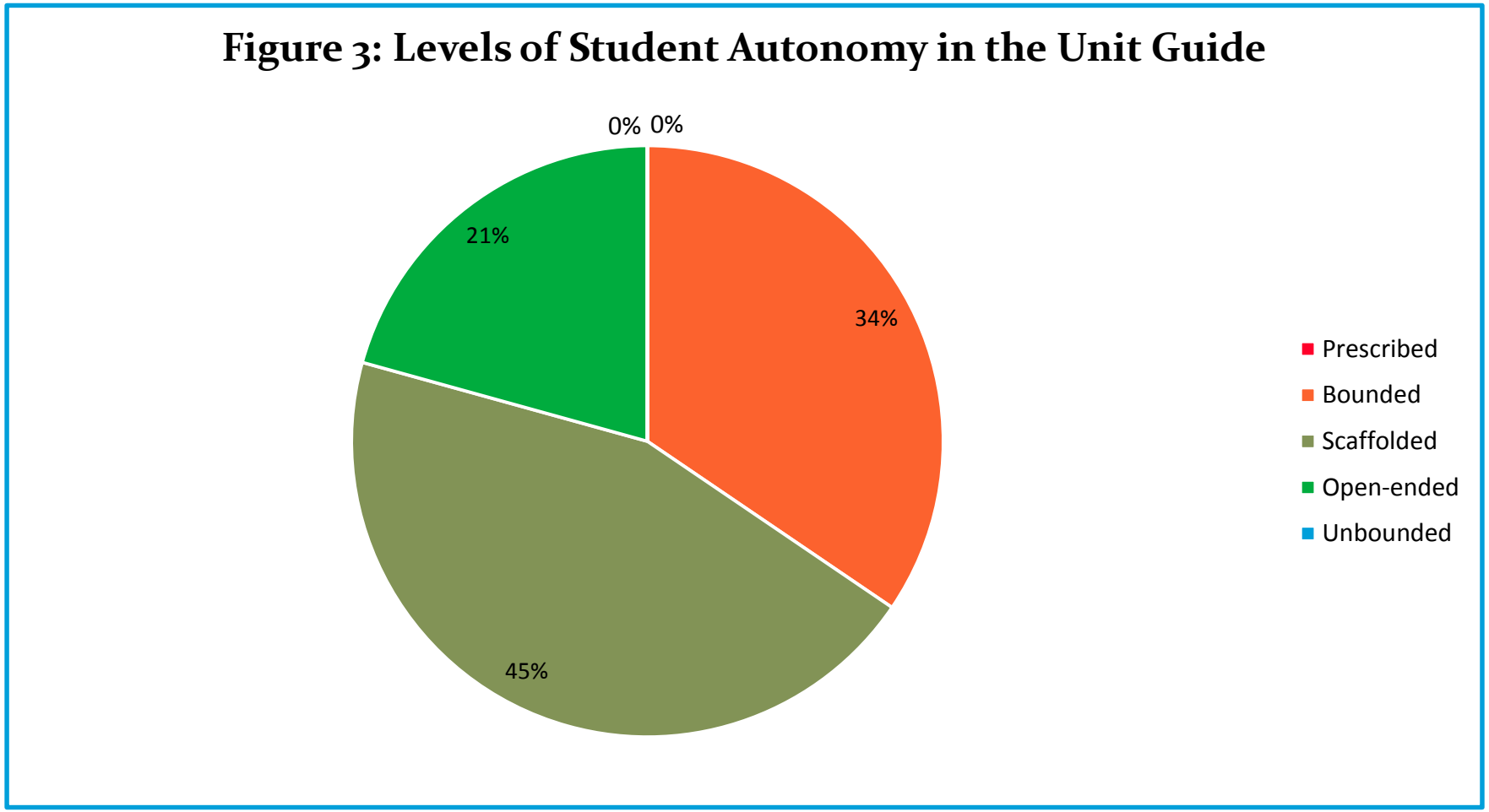


Figure 3: Levels of Student Autonomy in the Unit Guide



DISCUSSION

- Mapping shows that the unit emphasizes on more academic and cognitive skills
- Hamper experimentation
- The unit downplays a key ingredient of experimental writing: PLAYFULNESS

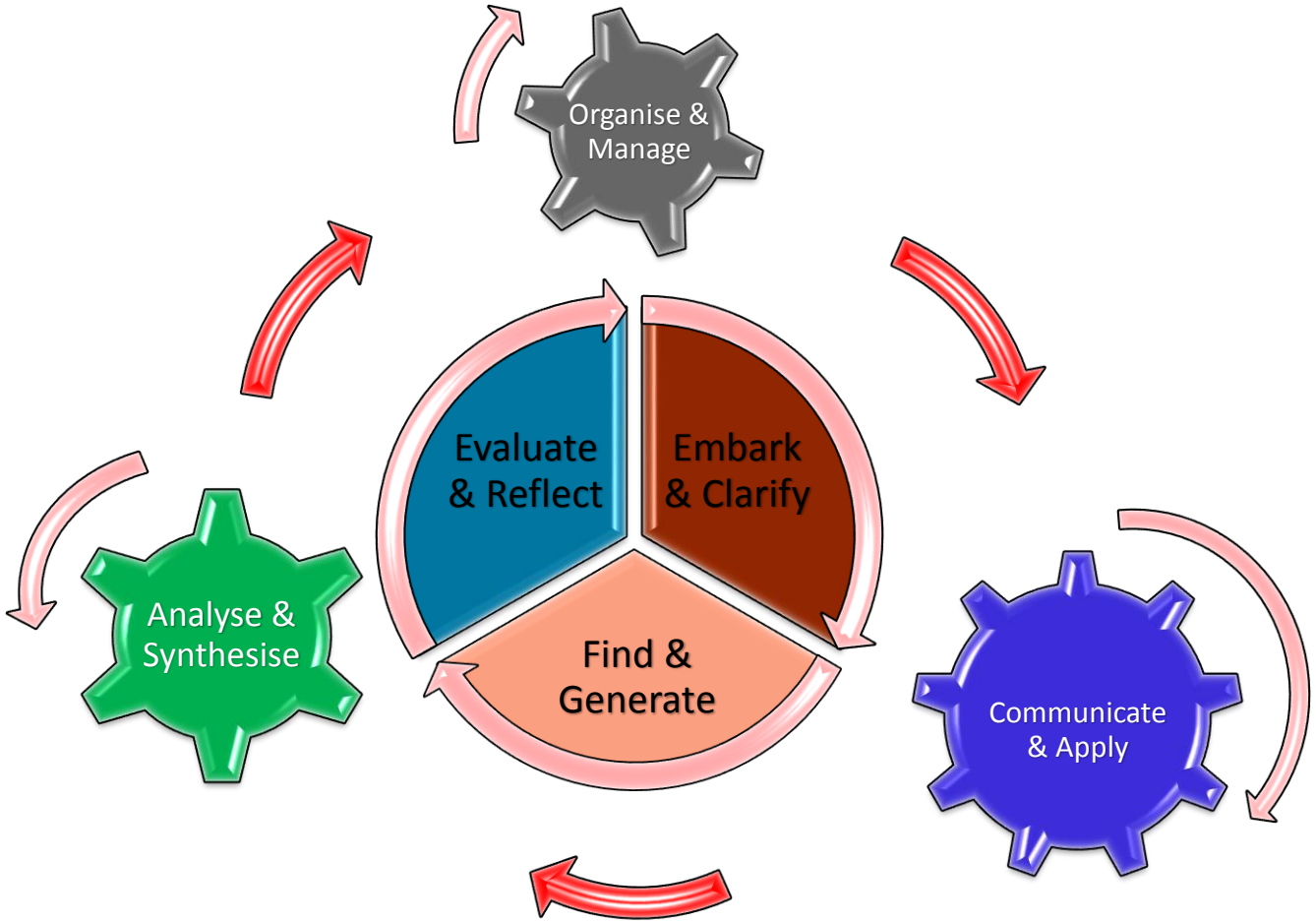
- To address the findings, changes were made to the unit guide
  - Reduction of assessment tasks
  - Remodeling the remaining assessment tasks
  - Re-wording/phrasing some of the rubric description to reflect the creative skills

ASSESSMENT

Original	Re-worked
Mini Assignment 1 – Soundscapes (5%)	**Mini Assignment – Podcast (10%)**
Moodle Quiz 1: Poetic Devices & Close Reading (5%)	**Assignment 1: Preliminary Research (25%)**
Moodle Quiz 2: Using the Experimental Exercise Rubric (5%)	**Assignment 2: Experimental Draft (15%)**
Mini Assignment 2 – Writing a Surrealistic Text (5%)	**Assignment 3: Major Composition and Exegesis (50%)**
Moodle Quiz 3: Essay Structure and Theme (5%)	
Assignment 1: Preliminary Research (15%)	
Moodle Quiz 4: Experimental Draft (5%)	
Assignment 2: Experimental Draft (10%)	
Moodle Quiz 5: Strategies Revision (5%)	
Assignment 3: Major Composition and Exegesis (40%)	

Original	Re-worded
The proposed theme is strongly developed with evidence of original thought.	The proposed theme is strongly generated and articulated with evidence of original thought.
The broad range of strategies is strongly understood and applied.	The broad range of strategies is well-connected and synthesised.
The complementarity of the proposed theme and the broad range of strategies is excellent.	The proposed theme complements and integrates excellently with the broad range of strategies.
The experimental writing as a whole is strongly expressed and developed.	All the writing fragments integrate as a seamless whole, with evidence of experimentation, and thoughtful exploration.

Figure 4:
A New Model for Teaching and Learning for Experimental Writing



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