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The multidimensional framework for embedded academic skills development

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Students in Australian higher education are increasingly diverse, entering university with varying preparedness for academia (Dillon, 2007). Established ways of thinking and creating knowledge, and associated definitions of academic skills are contextual and discipline specific (Lea, 2004). Without understanding the academic skills required students may struggle to succeed. This presentation showcases a Multidimensional Framework for Embedded Academic Skills Development designed to support teaching teams to clarify and explicitly map academic skill progressions throughout their courses to embed academic skills into the curriculum. Developed from a mixed methods project conducted within a social work context, the resulting Framework includes a series of questions for teams to consider, which will be presented with an illustrative exemplar from social work.

The literature, consultation with academics, and project findings support the effectiveness of the Framework’s approach. Key aspects include the importance of making tacit knowledge (Devlin, 2011), and the basis for underpinning course epistemologies (Sellar & Gale, 2011), explicit. Acknowledging students’ diverse worldviews, and ways of thinking and creating knowledge (Mason et al., 1996; Sefa Dei, 2008; Sellar & Gale, 2011), is equally important. Student and academic participants agreed on the need for academic skill expectations to be explicit and the value of scaffolded support. Academics attested to the need for a unified approach to teaching academic skills but noted the current lack of enabling resources and institutional support. Therefore, the Framework’s effectiveness depends on institutional mandate, resourcing and support, and time for teaching teams to collaborate.


