**Using genre analysis to design formative assessment in higher education**

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Formative assessment is key to supporting student learning and success in higher education (HE). However, there is little evidence-based, practical guidance on effective approaches to formative assessment (FA) or on FA design. In response to this lack of practical advice, we designed a series of professional development activities which drew on the concepts of genre knowledge (Tardy, 2009) to raise HE teachers’ genre awareness and support them in designing FA tasks. Our research participants (HE teachers) completed a number of tasks to identify the four facets of genre knowledge their students need to accomplish a particular summative assessment (Tardy, 2009): subject matter knowledge; process knowledge (the stages the author needs to go through to complete the genre, e.g. composition/research processes); rhetorical knowledge (awareness of audience expectations, authorial purpose and positionality, the relationship between the author and audience, argument and evidence required) and formal knowledge (structure and linguistic form e.g. vocabulary choice. Participants then used this analysis to design one or more FA tasks that scaffolded a facet of the summative assessment. To evaluate this process, we asked the following questions:

1. Does genre analysis increase teachers’ awareness of the knowledge and skills required for their module summative assessment(s)?
2. Does genre analysis help teachers design FA tasks that scaffold summative assessments? If so, how?

Data from a pre-workshop questionnaire, workshop genre analyses and formative tasks, and semi structured interviews were analysed. Analysis showed that genre analysis increased teachers’ awareness of the knowledge and skills required for their module summative assessment and helped teachers to design formative tasks. The realisation that students require more than subject knowledge to be successful in their assessment was surprising for teachers and many of them chose to scaffold other aspects of genre knowledge (e.g. formal or rhetorical knowledge) in their formative tasks. They saw opportunities to use genre knowledge and analysis beyond formative assessment, for example, using it to understand and prepare feedback or to write assessment briefs. Unexpected applications such as this underscores the power of genre knowledge as a heuristic in analysis and planning.

The researchers have developed a toolkit of professional development activities designed to support HE teachers in designing formative assessment tasks.