

ASk for student teachers: An online support site for ECE student teachers to develop their academic literacy

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ASk101 is an online academic literacy development site for early childhood teacher education students at New Zealand Tertiary College, a specialist early childhood teacher education provider. The site provides equitable access to information and support staff for all students, the vast majority of whom are online distance learners. The Poster demonstrates the personalised and interactive features of this site, which meets the challenge of sustainable online support for an ever increasingly diverse student population.

Keywords: Academic Literacy. Early Childhood Teacher Education. Online Learning. Interactive. In-person Support.

Introduction

ASk101 (or, **Academic Skills 101**) is an online academic literacy development site. The users of this site are early childhood education (ECE) student teachers, enrolled in initial teacher education programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. It is crucial for these students to develop and master academic reading and writing skills within the content of their study programmes. Weaving academic literacy development with discipline specific content is effective, with text based contextualised online writing support having already been piloted with positive outcomes for Education students (Straus, Goodfellow & Puxley, 2009) and Pharmacy students (Wingate & Dreiss, 2009). Working with Commerce students, Percy, Yanamandram and Humphrey (2007) audio streamed a lecture on referencing, which was linked to related online quizzes. ASk101 blends text based information with audio, videos of tutorials and animations, along with enabling access to support staff. The site has been developed as a cross-departmental project between the Academic Skills (ASk) support team (comprised of lecturers with expertise in academic skills tutoring) and IT developers at New Zealand Tertiary College (NZTC). A key goal of the site is to offer sustainable and equitable support to all students.

Academic literacy development in distance learning

The vast majority of the College's students are online distance learners, studying throughout New Zealand and also in other countries, including Australia, Germany, India, the Philippines, the UAE and the UK. Many of the students speak English as an additional language or come from non-traditional backgrounds. To meet such diverse needs and to maintain equitable access to learning materials and staff, the College has created *NZTC Online*, a purpose built LMS for high touch low tech users. This acts as the students' one stop shop for their academic studies, which they are introduced to during a free orientation course prior to commencing their study programmes. ASk101 has recently been added to that system.

ASk101

The ASk101 site within *NZTC Online* harnesses a number of digital technologies to support students in the development of their academic literacy. Content, which is grounded in ECE literature, is provided in: videos, animations with accompanying audio tracks, and traditional textual form which can be downloaded and printed as handouts. Students also have access to interactive quizzes for self-review, practice tasks and guidance about how to arrange face-to-face or phone meetings with the ASk team. The main goals of the resource are to enable easy student access to information and support with academic skills, regardless of geographical location, and for that information to be relevant, understandable and easy to navigate for those students who access it.

The resource was made available to students in August, 2012, with the initial content being:

- An introduction to the ASk team and the services it offers students;
- Guidance on effective academic reading strategies;
- Advice on how to analyse assessment tasks;
- Detailed information on essay writing;

- Guidelines for APA referencing.

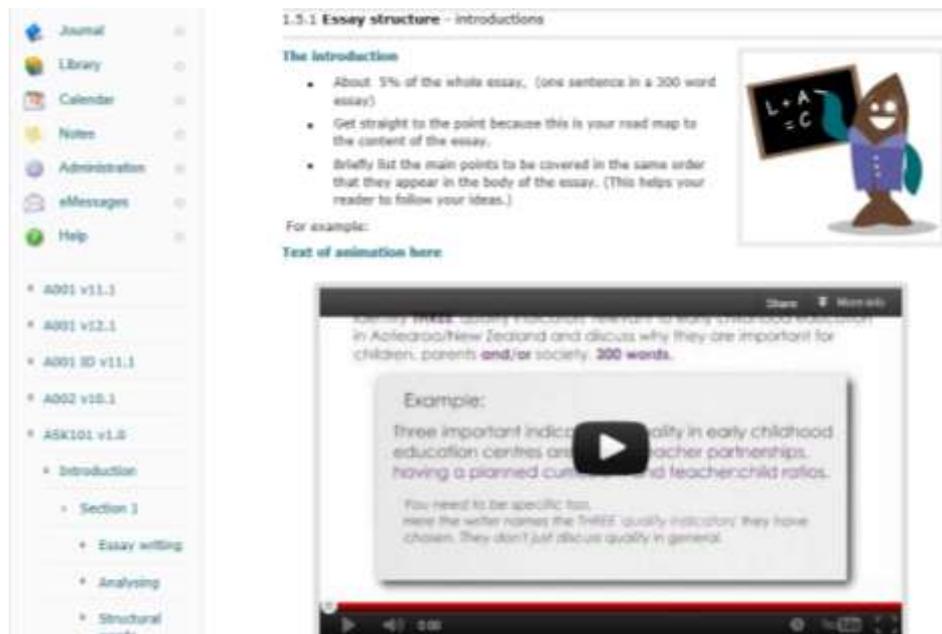


Figure 1: A sample page from the ASK101 essay writing guide

Student response

The response from both staff and students has been positive. Students are able to easily access essential information about how to study and write effectively and have become less anxious about academic work. The ECE student teachers say it is easy to engage with the information because it is ECE contextualised and presented in bite-sized pieces, in both visual and audio formats. Easy access to ASk support and formative feedback on their work has also been a major benefit. And, lecturers are able to direct students, who they have identified as requiring support, to specific aspects of online information and to support staff if needed.

Future directions

Following the initial success of the ASK101 resource, a number of new developments are underway:

- The addition of a “chat” feature, enabling synchronous communication between students and staff;
- Information and advice about plagiarism and practice of how to write with academic honesty;
- Information and advice on literature reviews and developing critical thinking capacities;
- ASk102 – a resource specifically designed for post-graduate ECE students

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