Chapter 11

Students' Co-Ownership of Summative Assessment Marking Criteria Towards a More Democratic Assessment in Higher Education.

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the second iteration of a longitudinal action research project that culminates in students acting as partners in the assessment process by co-creating their summative assessment marking criteria. The research argues that the co-ownership of marking criteria increases assessment literacy and helps students to understand how their assignment will be marked. The research limitations are presented, and future research pathways are defined. The findings are analyzed from a social-constructivist and critical pedagogy window. The research concludes that actively engaging students in their assessment leads to an enhanced learning experience and creates space for a more democratic assessment in the classroom.

INTRODUCTION

As an outcome of the marketization of the UK higher education, student populations become more significant, and students adopt a more passive role in their learning where higher education is viewed as a commodity and students become 'consumers'. At the same time, academia does not perceive contemporary higher education teaching anymore as an act of depositing information where lecturers are unquestioned experts, and students are novices. Therefore, lecturers are increasingly required to deliver higher levels of student engagement by creating innovative experiences for students. Students as Partners

(SaP) is a recent term that encompasses existing practices while making space for possibilities not yet imagined in this respect.

SaP is fundamentally about meaningful partnerships between students and staff members at a university. Such partnerships are considered one of the most critical factors in student learning, development, engagement, and satisfaction in higher education (Astin, 1993; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2005). Academics discuss the concept increasingly. Mercer-Mapstone, Dvorakova, Matthews, Abbot, Cheng, Felten, Knorr, Marquis, Shammas, and Swaim (2017: p.1) defines the term as "*Students as Partners (SaP) embraces students and staff (including academic/faculty and professional staff) working together on teaching and learning in higher education.*" In other words, SaP is any partnership in which students and lecturers work together to improve various areas of the more extensive student learning experience and engagement.

Definitions for SaP are many. This research adopts Cook-Sather, Bovill and Felten (2014; p. 6-7) definition which states that "*This partnership is a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualization, decision-making, implementation, investigation, or analysis.*" They further state that partnerships should follow the principles of respect and shared responsibility in teaching and learning. The reason for adopting this definition is because it emphasizes student and staff collaboration in activities that traditionally have involved 'only staff' such as designing learning activities, curriculum reform efforts, teaching, and researching the effectiveness of educational interventions; an emphasis that offers many possibilities for a more democratic assessment process.

This study argues that the SaP approach to assessment is consistent with both 'Assessment for Learning Approach' (William, 2011) and 'Assessment as Learning Approach' (Earl, 2003); where the learners take responsibility for their learning and progress. While SaP may encompass a broader range of practices and pedagogies to enhance teaching, learning, and assessment (Healey, Flint and Harrington, 2014); the common thread is a re-positioning of the roles of students and lecturers in the learning process grounded in a values-based ethos.

This study further recognizes that in these partnerships, students and staff possess different but comparable forms of expertise and SaP can help lecturers create experiential and more democratic spaces where such expertise can be fruitfully and unproblematically exchanged. The co-ownership of marking criteria is an excellent example of creating such experiential spaces towards more democratic assessment practices, and it can lead to more active engagement for students in their assessment and learning. The next section will present some of the most common benefits of SaP for both students and staff within a higher education context and justify why this research has emphasized the assessment side of SaP and introduce the problem statement.

BACKGROUND

Beneficial Outcomes of SaP

During the last decade, academics identified a range of beneficial outcomes for both students and staff from emerging research. Felten, Bagg, Bumbry, Hill, Hornsby, Pratt, and Weller (2013) suggest that partnerships tend to produce similar outcomes for both students and academic staff and they further summarized benefits derived from SaP clustering them into three categories.

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