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(Re)imagining the classroom culture to enable authentic student self-assessment in Higher Education

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AHE Conference

Manchester, UK



Aim

- Share my **experience** of using an approach (ISSA), to encourage student self-assessment
- To reflect upon the ethical **challenges** to re-imagining the classroom culture to enable student self-assessment to happen.

‘Designing something that’s new or different is relatively easy. Designing something that is genuinely better is really hard’ (Jony Ive, former Chief Design Officer, Apple).

(Cited in AHE programme document by Prof Paul Kleiman)

Context & Background

- Trend data for 3 years showed that **student valued our feedback and assessment** and felt that it was fair and clear (NSS, 2019, 2020; 2021).
- Students reported that **staff were good at explaining things** and the subject was intellectually stimulating but noted that they **did not always feel challenged** to do their best work
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- Anecdotally, students told us that when they received their grade they would/could not look at the feedback for a while.

Participatory Action Research - UKRI

- How to support students to **use their summative feedback** that they felt was valuable and fair, **in a formative way**?
- In a semester-based curriculum, how to enable students to respond to their feedback in a timely manner that **genuinely impacts upon their scholarly practice**?
- How to develop students understanding of the assessment criteria so they can be more aware of what they need to do and **what they can improve upon**.
- *Previous support mechanisms were not working*

Ethical Dilemmas in Assessment

- Pedagogies of **social constructivism** were embedded within curricula – stopped short at assessment
- The role of the teacher is to write formative feedback – **what makes it formative?** (Sadler, 1989)
- **Trust** in assessment is assumed through authority and creates dependency (the grading criteria is ‘owned’ by the teacher)

Integrated Student Self-Assessment (Taras, 2015)

- Places assessment at the centre of pedagogy – feedback is a part of learning
- Involves students in the process at every step
- Students must have a shared understanding of the judgment
- Trusts the student's judgment

Integrated Student Self-Assessment (Taras, 2015)

- Student judgment is informed by their self-assessment, peer assessment and tutor assessment
- ISSA values the ‘beauty of hindsight’ to make improvements – students formatively assess using their summative work rather than partial or interim drafts
- Formative assessment is the role of the student
- Is not ‘apologetic’ about the ‘summative grade’
- All feedback and assessment is viewed as learning

What happened...

Steps	Themes in Student responses
Negotiate criteria	Increase in confidence regarding structure and grades (processes) No mention of presenting arguments/ideas
8 weeks later, submit the assessment	Felt that their research and structure went well Not as confident in the arguments and ideas Wanted to 'read more' next time
2 weeks later – ISSA workshop	Feedback was helpful; matched my own judgment Refreshing to have the opportunity to improve Made me want to improve and push myself
4 weeks later – resubmit	2 of the 17 students resubmitted and made their suggested improvements

What ACTUALLY happened ...

Steps	Reflection
Negotiate criteria	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• More a task of ‘demystifying the language’ of the standardised criteria rather than co – construction• Power remained with the teacher “yes, that’s what it means”• Not shooting in dark... At least. Has this increased their agency in some aspects of their work? They still need to work out what they will do specifically.
ISSA workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 10% of their grade was awarded for attending the session and developing their formative feedback• Attendance was 100%
Resubmission	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 4 weeks for resubmission – too long• I was still assigning the summative grade judgment

Next cycle...

Steps	Reflection
Collaboratively interpreting the criteria	Students worked in small groups to interpret each banding and criteria
Students submit their summative work	All submitted
4 weeks later – ISSA workshop	100% attendance; Students were given 2 printed copies to share All shared, choice of who to share it with (student's shared with closest peers) Tutor feedback released (without grade) after they self-assess and receive peer feedback form 2 peers Student's issue grade

Re (Imagining)

- Shifting the **power (authority)** for assessment from teacher to teacher-student is challenging – why should we worry?
- When students can tap into the teacher's **world of 'knowing'** about the assessment it can create a sense of **independence and agency**
- The teacher cannot **'give away'** autonomy that they don't have (Biesta, Priestley & Robinson, 2015; Winch, 2017)

Re (Imagining)

- Students are not always **ready, or willing** to take on the role of assessor – competing pressures for their time
- Grades are counterproductive to formative assessment (Sadler, 1989)
- To have assessment *AS* learning requires wider curricula consideration

References

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