Integrating Student Voice in Higher Education Assessment Practice: Negotiating the Dialogic Vacuum

Jennifer Bain & Lili Golmohammadi

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Research Context

In setting up an aligned system there are 4 major steps:

1. Defining the Desired Learning Outcomes (DLOs)

2. Choosing the teaching/learning activities likely to lead to the DLOs

   Assessment Vacuum

3. Assessing students' actual learning outcomes to see how well they match what was intended

   Assessment Vacuum

4. Arriving at a final grade

Based on Biggs (2003)

The Dialogic Vacuum of Assessment

Research Context

• Student's opinions on assessment are given space, epistemological, practical and ontological modes of voice, audience and influence
• There are opportunities for students to negotiate what, when and how learning is assessed
• Feedback from assessment is collaborative and reflexive
• Students are active subjects, with assessment language that of the student. There is possibility for praxis
• The approach to assessment includes lecturer-led, peer and self-assessment
• Sustainable assessment practice is developed

Pertinent Features of Assessment for Becoming (Bain, 2010)

Research Methodology and Themes

This paper is drawn from a larger research study running from 2012 to 2015/16:

- Examining whether the consequence of current assessment practice was in keeping with the desired consequence of Assessment for Becoming

- Exploring if this contributed to the creation of a dialogic vacuum around assessment

- Exploring assessment partnerships

- Using assessment criteria to empower students

- Particular interest in the student perspective and student as co-researcher

- Central themes:

    ➢ Develop dialogic assessment practice (Bain, 2010)
    ➢ Create transformative learning spaces (Mezirow, 2000)
    ➢ Support communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1999)

- Developing guiding principles for assessment practice

Uncovering Disjunction and
Revealing a Pedagogy of Possibility

Learner to Teacher Discourse

Teacher

So, you talk about one of the key issues in your learning as having to guess what was "right"

Learner

Yes, I just found it frustrating...

Teacher

What do you mean, what particularly did you find frustrating?

Learner

Well, I suppose tutor driven practice.

Teacher

But, isn't that a tutor's role, to 'drive' practice and give you direction?

Learner

Yeah, but I mean where the design philosophies and values of the tutors take priority over the students', a sort of design orthodoxy, but it's not acknowledged or stated...

Teacher

So, this frustration you describe and the imposition of a design orthodoxy, how did it impact your learning? In a sense, playing devil's advocate, why not just go along with it?

Learner

Well essentially it felt like conforming to a 'mould' but it's a mould that doesn't fit with your own design philosophies and practices, and in the end all our work looked the same, felt the same; there are so many possibilities but they're massively reduced to just a few by the imposition of a house style.

Teacher

So how was your work assessed? What was the process and how were your marks awarded?

Learner

Well, there may have been stuff written down, but I don't remember any of it being used or referred to. I mean the major perception was that it was a bit of an arbitrary mystery...

Learner

You knew you were going to be judged but you didn't quite know how. You could guess, but you didn't know if that would change for each project. The rhetoric was you could do whatever you liked but the actuality was that you couldn't.

Teacher

So, in terms of your learning, how did the 'arbitrary mystery' of assessment impact?

Learner

It created a lot of anxiety and unhappiness, it constrained my practice, feedback was judgemental, but in quite a personal way.

Teacher

So would you say that your learning experiences were characterised by words like dialogue, wonder, joy, possibility, freedom, critical thinking...

Disjunction **Paradox** Exposure **Deconstruct** **Dialogue** **Social-Reality** **Reconstruct** **Hope** Practice **Power** Model Possibility

Phase 1 Findings

• Lack of opportunity for student voice in assessment
• Generic 'meaningless' nature of assessment criteria, which were rarely used to focus learning
• Feedback predominantly focused on grades rather than learning
• Overly complex language which made feedback difficult to accesss and apply
• The approach to assessment exclusively lecturer-led
• Students remain dependent on trying to 'please' lecturers as a means to succeed

Issues Contributing to Low Consequential Validity

What is assessment for ?

Who is assessment for ?
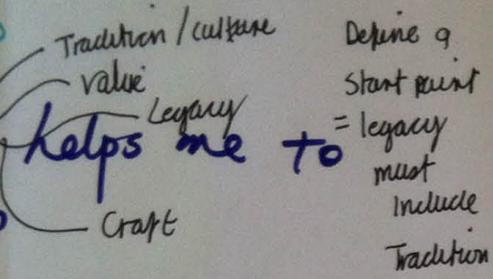
What does assessment look like ?

Methods and Processes for Research and Practice: Assessment Criteria:

Questions you should ask of your work;

- Do you identify a context for your project, making clear how it contributes in innovative and new ways to existing practices in the field of your MA?
- Do you select, analyse and synthesise relevant knowledge and use this to develop and complete your project?
- Do you demonstrate that you are able to plan a project, developing a proposal appropriate to the independent enquiry you intend to carry out?
- Do you justify your design decisions including the selection of methods?
- Do you identify specific questions to be addressed by your project?
- Do you reflect on your project proposal as it develops justifying any changes you make?
- Do you conduct your project in a critical, detailed and thorough way?
- Do you come to justifiable and clear conclusions, identifying how your independent enquiry makes a significant contribution to your own and others' practice in the field of your MA?
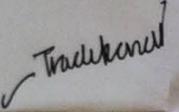
self - knowledge

How my (knowledge) helps me to
shape my ideas?

— Tradition / culture
— value
— Legacy
— Craft

Define 9
Start point
= legacy
must
Include
Tradition

personal curiosity management why?

How learning help me get more
understanding? What am I curious about

Co-operative learning ↙

Sustainablity — Traditional
how does my idea
link to others / who can
I work with

professional development

How the dissertation helps me to reach
the level that I want to be in the future
and become more professional in my career?

Reader - sympathy

How my readers' ideas inspire me and
help me to get more understanding about
my own ideas? exchange my ideas with
reader

creative (re) search

How reasearch help me get more new
perspective? What do I want to find out? Why? Who will
tell me? What will I ask them?
How the research help me more confident
about what I am doing?

communication

How can I express my ideas to the public
and get information or feedback from them?

Ethical co. sustainment

Will my ideas change the way people
thinking and impact on people?

INWARD CRITERIA

*WORK ON AN ASSESSMENT DIARY TO BECOME AN APPENDIX IN MY WORK.

SELF-KNOWLEDGE

WHAT ARE MY SKILLS?

HOW CAN I USE THE KNOWLEDGE I'VE ACQUIRED FROM MY PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND?

HOW CAN I USE THE KNOWLEDGE/EXPERIENCES I'VE ACQUIRED THROUGH-OUT THE COURSE?

IN ORDER TO BE CONFIDENT WITH WHAT I AM WRITING/PRESENTING (FOCUS ON THE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE THAT ARE SPECIFIC TO DEVELOP THIS WORK).

CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING

HOW CAN I BENEFIT FROM COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS OR DIFFERENT SUBJECTS FROM LECTURES AND SUPPORT MY WORK?

HOW CAN I EXPAND MY VIEW OVER DESIGN PRACTICE TO CROSS BOUNDARIES?

PERSONAL CURIOSITY MANAGEMENT

Start point

HOW CAN I FIND A TRULY INTERESTING SUBJECT?

TO LET MYSELF BE LEAD BY SOMETHING THAT I CAN DEEPLY ENGAGE WITH.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

HOW CAN I USE THIS WORK AS MY PORTFOLIO?

HOW CAN I USE IT TO REPRESENT WHO I AM AS A PROFESSIONAL? (VISUALLY, THEORETICALLY AND PRACTICALLY).

PROFESSION / CLARITY

OUTWARD CRITERIA

READER-SYMPATHY

HOW CAN I DEEPLY ENGAGE MY READER?

WHAT'S THE RIGHT LANGUAGE TO ENGAGE MY READER?

WHAT SUBJECTS ARE RELEVANT/INTERESTING ENOUGH TO ENGAGE MY READER'S CURIOSITY?

CREATIVE (RE)SEARCH

AM I CLEAR ENOUGH WITH MY IDEAS/WRITING?

HOW CAN I AROUSE CURIOSITY AND ENGAGE MY READER WITH MY PROPOSAL?

COMMUNICATION

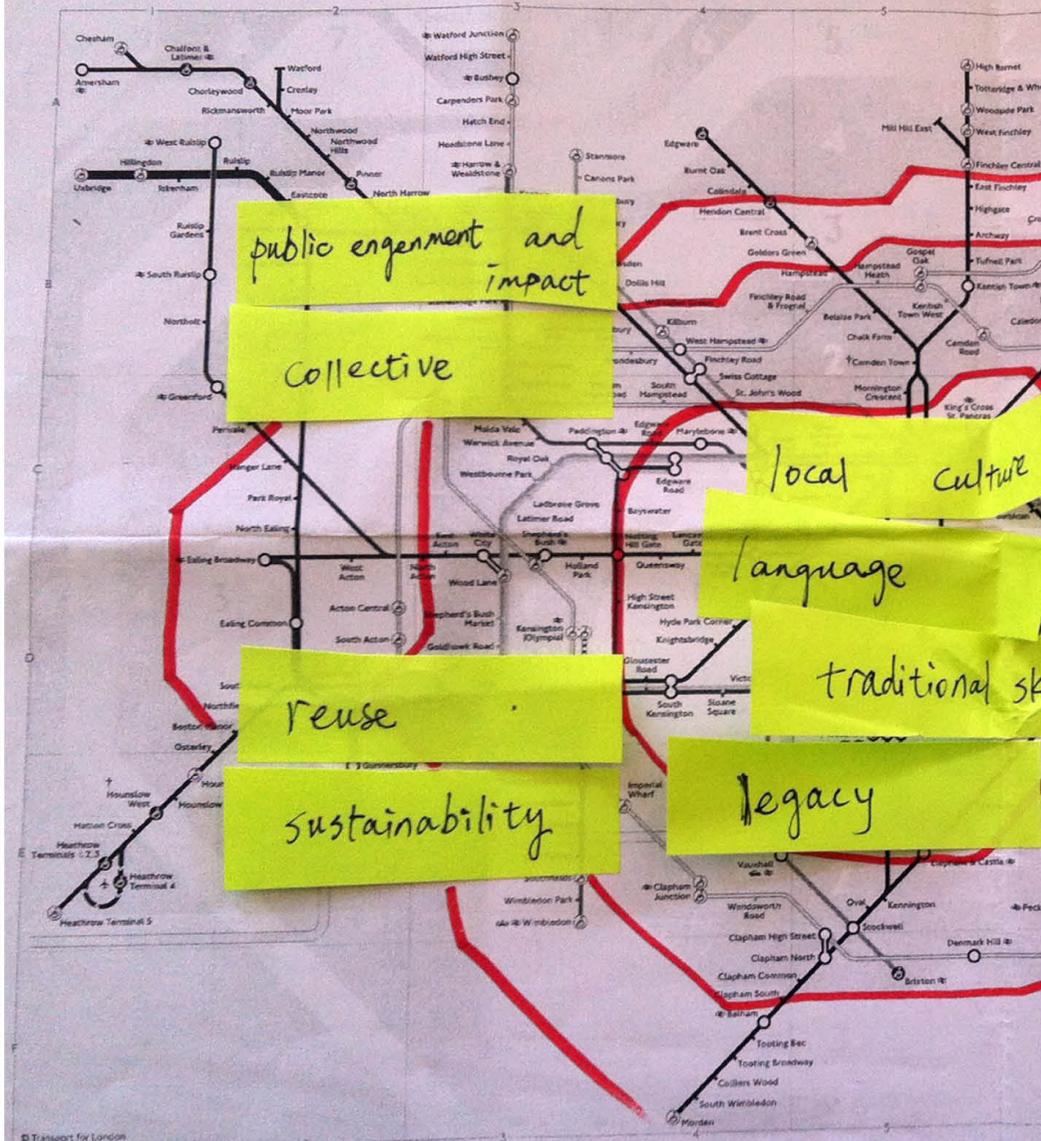WHAT TOOLS/MEANS SHOULD I USE TO PRESENT MY IDEAS IN ORDER TO BE CLEAR AND EMBRACE ALL THE AREAS I WISH TO DISCUSS?

ETHICAL CO-SUSTAINMENT

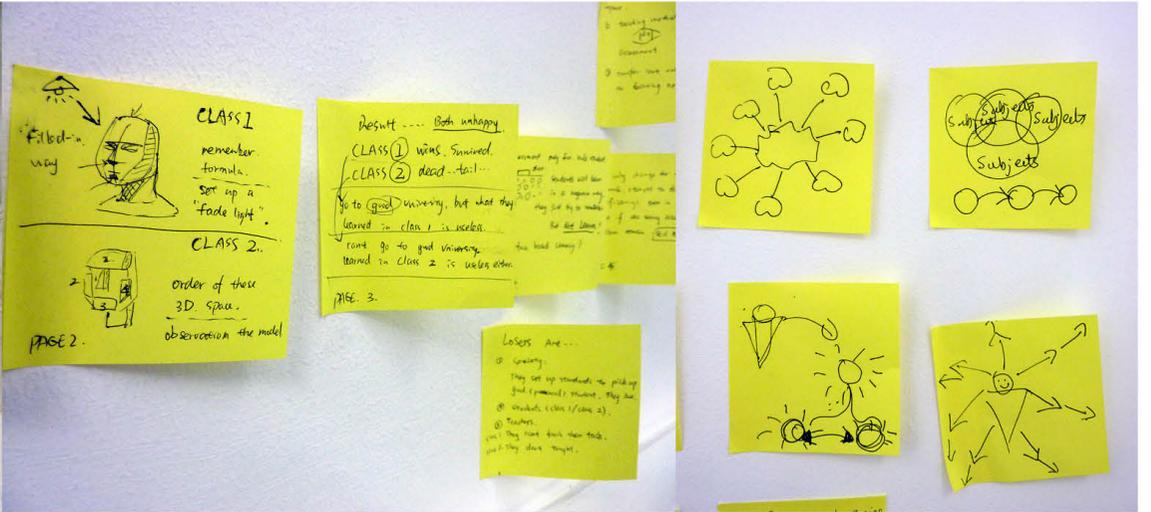HOW CAN MY WORK BE USEFUL IN A AND CONCIOUSLY ENGAGING PROFESSIONAL REALM? (TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE FUTURES)

MA Design Futures Dissertation Scoping

public engagment and impact

collective

local culture

language

traditional sk[ills]

reuse

sustainability

legacy

WORKING TITLE

ELECTRONICS AS POETRY
POETICS OF ELECTRONICS

What is the CONTEXT of the project

WHO ARE YOUR KEY GROUP OF LEARNERS?

Do you identify and rationalise a personal, ethical and ideological stance on learning and use this to define what a pedagogy of possibility means for your own creative education practice?

RESEARCH

Current state of learning

CONSTRAINTS

CONSUMPTION OF ED TECH
Education technology as business

MATERIALITY

Michel Foucault
— technologies of self

HACKER culture

VISUAL culture

HERZIAN tales

PETER WEIBEL

RESEARCH

John Dewey

Do you critique and develop creative learning practices that draw on critical pedagogies to empower learners?

Do you identify a personal, ethical and ideological stance on creative learning?

learning how to learn

learning TRANSFORMATIVE

Pedagogy table
Behaviourism → critical humanism

What do you want to find out?

WRITE YOUR FINDINGS + ANALYSIS FROM YOUR INTERVIEWS + QUESTIONNAIRES ETC.....

Community dialogue
Communicate within Design Dept → Network
Next steps.

When?   Why?   WHO?   how?   What?

KAGAN collaborative learning

WHO FOR?

Interim Findings Suggest:

- Over time students' attitudes to assessment became more positive

- Engagement with the dialogic approach to assessment appears to increase students understanding of the connection between learning and assessment

- Student and Lecturer judgements on quality of work became more consistent

- Students described being more in control of their attainment and became pro-active in developing assessment 'communities of practice'

- The dialogic assessment activities appeared to increase authentic 'constructive alignment'

- The process provokes critique/evaluation of the DLOs and appears to compensates for broad or vague DLOs

- There is a need for carefully constructed 'modelling', scaffolding and fading activities

- Concerns around a sense of disjunction that a new assessment approach might bring, need to be acknowledged and worked through

Emerging Assessment Principles

Student Voice around Assessment Criteria
• Is development of assessment criteria seen as an integrated part of pedagogy (Watkins and Mortimer, 1999; Boud and Hawke, 2003) that promotes sustainable assessment (Boud, 2007) ? • Do academics work in partnership with students to develop and refine assessment criteria (Tan, 2007), thus encouraging meta-cognition (Harvey and Burrows, 1992)? • Is student voice at the core of developing and appling assessment criteria? • Does assessment practice help develop spaces and practices that nurture dialogue as integral practices of human learning and daily encounter (Griffiths, 2003 and 2004; Leitch *et al*, 2005)? • Is student/ academic partnership rooted in dialogic interactions so that the roles of teacher and learner are shared and student voices are validated (Freire, 1973; Keesling-Styles, 2003)? • Are student's views on assessment given space, voice, audience and influence (Leitch *et al*, 2005) with opportunities for different modes of voice (Batchelor, 2006)? • Is careful consideration given to the kind of language used in the dialogue of assessment? • Does feedback engage students and lecturers in 'reflexive and collaborative dialogue' (Hounsell, 2007: 106) resulting in action, such as adjustments to teaching (Black and Wiliam, 1998)? • Is feedback driven by student needs (Mallett, 2004) and the impact of dialogue, language and feedback on student autonomy considered? • Are there opportunities for interactive learning conversations about assessment criteria, feedback, self-assessment and critical reflection (Robinson and Udall, 2006)? • Is consideration given to a sustainable system of feedback, where 'students are encouraged to develop a greater sense of ownership of, and thus greater autonomy in, their learning (Hounsell, 2007: 108)?
Assessment Methods
• Is the range of assessment methods diverse enough to ensure that all students have the opportunity to demonstrate their potential (Race, 1999: 68)?
Assessment Approaches
• Are student-led assessment approaches considered integral to assessment practice? • Does assessment practice around assessment criteria provide opportunities for modelling, scaffolding and fading (Falchikov, 2007)? • Is assessment future driven allowing students to reflect more critically on assessment practice, and presenting them with an effective opportunity to enhance their learning (Tan, 2007)? • Are students involved in the awarding of marks (Falchikov, 2005)?