



Student Partnership in Assessment Design

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In this case study, a teacher describes beginning the journey of introducing elements of student partnership in to the process of assessment, while a student taking the class reflects on how new found freedoms in assessment were at first daunting, but soon became an exciting new challenge in their learning.

Introduction and Context

AY2021-2022 was the second roll out of the module Positive Ageing as part of the 2nd semester, 4th year of a BA Honours in Social Care. As the module was being rolled out last year, Ireland was in the 'lockdown' phase of the pandemic. Lecturers and students were acutely aware of how many day services for older people in communities were closed. Coupled with travel restrictions, this was particularly isolating many of the older people in our community who in normal circumstances were very community active. In response to this isolation a collaborative project was created with students working in partnership with the lecturer, external agencies and older people in the community. During this academic year, services were back open and the lecturer was able to reflect on how to enhance a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework (AHEAD, 2017) approach and draw on student positive partnership experiences to inform the present student cohort experiences, while increasing their understanding of positive ageing and their role as social care practitioners as part of a movement of inclusive practices across the life span. Content delivery was planned through online formats, didactic information giving sessions, guest speaker workshops, discussion groups, 1:1 appointments with students, student-led discussions and planned reflective spaces. As a result, opportunities to introduce co-creation into assessment for students was identified (Doyle, Buckley and Whelan, 2018).

Project Rationale—Lecturer's Perspective

Under the UDL framework I have been exploring over the last couple of years, I was keen to examine how to ensure our teaching and assessment processes are meeting student needs, while maintaining QQI and programme requirements and standards. Allowing myself to explore various means of representation and expression in assessment and feedback design led to a deeper look at module delivery and raised the question on how can we challenge the imbalance of power between the lecturer and students. All learning requires an active learner, however, empowering students to feel psychologically safe to be active learners and risk takers in the learning process is the challenge. I feel we as educators can best meet this challenge by addressing some of the power imbalance issues in the learning context. The student must feel safe to make the individual choice to be active and take ownership of learning. The lecturer must create that safe space and some of that requires risk taking from both parties.

My experience is that student engagement is a subjective fluid concept which Covid has further diversified. Students are clearer on their preferred levels and points of engagement in their college experience. They have complex lives in which they must balance the desire to further acquire education while keeping all other balls in the air. Student voice is presented to us in many different ways both in their words and actions. We as educators must be open to hearing those representations and reflective in how we can best utilise those messages to implement change in our practices.

By co-creating an assignment with busy 4th year students I felt would give them an opportunity to take ownership of how they engaged in the module and how they could best represent that engagement to evidence their acquisition and development of Positive Ageing Knowledge. Throughout module delivery students were facilitated to be active partners in the learning and development of content for further sharing. A flipped class approach was used to create opportunities for students to read content in their own time that they then could use to inform their interactions in the class setting. The classes were guided by the lecturer to create vibrant discussions which embedded debates within relevant theory, legislation and policy contexts. Students brought their experiences from working, personal life and independent reading to co-create content and debates for the sessions while all the time teasing out how this would feed forward to meeting assessment requirements. Guest speakers delivered interactive workshops to stimulate and inform student voice. I delivered content themed discussions and facilitation of co-creating assessment and marking grids. I also tried to create ongoing opportunities for group and one-to-one's with students to engage in partnership with me in the development of their own informed position on Positive Ageing.

Project Actions

Action	Brief Description
Action A Setting the Tone	In the first two weeks of semester the lecturer introduced the concept of the module, the learning outcomes, UDL Framework, the National Framework of Qualifications for Level 8 and the concept of co-creation of assessment. Together the assessment plan was created and documented.
Action B Weekly Partnership Action	<p>On a weekly basis as part of the assessment, as a partnership action the lecturer created prompt sheets to support student's independent self-identification of knowledge development, facilitating them to create their individual informed voice with confidence for class debate, assessment and practice after graduation.</p> <p>I attempted to sit in the student's shoes to identify prompts that would support them getting the most out of the specific theme that week without feeling information overload.</p> <p>The idea behind this process was that 4th years are often very focussed on the double credit dissertation module that semester so can find it hard to 'research' in unrelated themes. I designed the prompt sheets to try to focus their attention to the needs of learning for knowledge formation in the module in bite size pieces that they could draw from in their end assessment choice.</p>

<p>Action C Choice of Knowledge Representation</p>	<p>During Co-creation of assessment it became clear that there were two different strong views of how the assessment should be completed a) academic essay and b) presentation. Both groups tried to convince the other while a small group were unclear which they preferred. At this point it occurred to the lecturer that true student partnership and recognition of voice would accept this difference. Both means of expression remained as options. Marking grids and rubrics were explored, developed and agreed by all. Students were able to develop their own journey through their individual decision making on a method of self-representation in assessment, with many ultimately choosing an alternative to their original position.</p>
<p>Action D Shared Thought Development Spaces</p>	<p>Students were invited to share their thoughts and plans for how they would approach the assessment. Peers and lecturer gave constructive feedback. The lecturer captured the discussions and shared back with students via Blackboard.</p>

Reflections

Margaret Finch Reflection

A colleague from student learning support services said to me this year that in her work it is often the fear of the unknown end point that overwhelms students. I realised, that I too, in the assessment process experienced this feeling until all submissions were in and I could breathe a sigh of relief that the process worked and no student got lost along the way. However, I had moments of concern over the course of the module that maybe facilitating a choice in assessment would create unnecessary confusion/ distress for students. I realised I actually just needed time myself carefully, recognising that I had adjusted the power dynamic away from the traditional student response of 'what do you want me to do?' This supported a constant reflection back to what the students had set as the task and marking criteria. It was also interesting to reflect on my own building anxieties of managing the timeline of corrections in this specific module when there would be mixed submissions. Overall as the lecturer I felt co-creating is a very interesting and worthwhile approach and in truth I would like to think that I always work in partnership with students to create a safe space to learn where individual students feel appropriately challenged and supported.

Saffron Williams Reflection

Before beginning the process, on reflection, I had mixed reactions to playing a role in the assessment selection process ranging from apprehension to excitement. Based on previous use of learning outcomes and requirements, I soon accepted this as an opportunity to possibly integrate aspects of learning that do not feature in essay writing for example, visual and auditory elements. The idea of this was energising during a time that involved completing several essay style assessments.

During the process, the main challenge was to engage with the group confidently and consistently. However, being a part of and having an open forum to discuss the assessment was received as empowering and supportive for improving my understanding of the elements and design of assessments. The chosen assessment style facilitated the exploration of some of the concepts and theories of age and ageing in a creative and meaningful way that subsequently informed my perspective and practice. While being unfamiliar with the process was daunting at times as an unexpected outcome from partaking in this experience, I made connections with knowledge and skills that may assist a transition from a student to potentially setting assessments in the future.

After participating in this style of learning I hope to incorporate this in the future, specifically, working collaboratively.

Further resources related to the co-created assessment approaches used in this module are available on request.

