The Reflective and Reflexive Learner:
A critical investigation of the formative assessment expectations, experiences and engagement of undergraduates at a UK University

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Project Aim

• To review the current ‘Assessment for Learning’ (AfL) strategies from the student perspective, within the School of Sport @ LeedsBeckett University.
H.E. UK Context

• NeoLiberal Approach to Education
• Marketisation
  – Stakeholders
  – Student-Centred
  – Students as consumers
  – Higher Education as a Business
• Accountability
  – National Student Survey (NSS)
  – Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)
Tensions ...

• “There are many who would argue that the best university teaching involves making students feel challenged and even uncomfortable; something that cannot always be associated with satisfaction, as measured by the National Student Survey. Likewise, many are concerned that assessing universities on graduate employment, via the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey, ignores so much of the personal development that is central to higher education.”

Havergal (2016)
Q. What is Assessment for Learning (AfL)?

AfL = high quality information … collected … during a session … that is used by the students and the … teacher to adjust their teaching to … better meet their students learning needs i.e. how we engineer and co-produce more effective learning experiences.
What influenced the research approach?

Student Perceptions/experiences of their lived reality is important when rationalising approaches to learning

Entwistle (1991)

Assessment defines what students regard as important, how they spend their time and how they come to see themselves as students and graduates

Brown & Knight (1994, p. 12)
Methodology

- **Student Perspective** (11 focus groups over 2 months)
- Course Reps/Student Ambassadors
- E.g. Audit of previous assessment experiences (role of formative/summative)
- E.g. How and in what manner is feedback used
- N = 54

- **Qualitative Analysis**
- Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).
The Student Voice

Total Participants (n = 54)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-21 yrs. old</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>52%</td>
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<tr>
<td>22-30 yrs. old</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>46%</td>
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<td>31 + yrs. old</td>
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<td>2%</td>
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Gender

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<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
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<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>52%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>48%</td>
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Year of Study

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Level 4 (1st)</td>
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<td>37%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 5 (2nd)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>39%</td>
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<td>Level 6 (3rd)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24%</td>
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Thinking back to when you applied to your current university, has the reality of your academic experience matched your expectations?

- 49%: It’s been better
- 28%: It’s been better in some ways and worse in others
- 12%: It’s been exactly what I expected
- 9%: It’s been worse
- 2%: Other/don’t know
Reasons for expectations not being met

- I haven't put in enough effort myself: 36%
- The course was poorly organised: 32%
- I received fewer contact hours than I was expecting: 30%
- I didn't feel supported in my independent study: 29%
- The teaching quality was worse than I expected: 29%
- There was too little interaction with staff: 26%
- The feedback was poor: 26%
- There was too little interaction with other students: 20%
- The teaching groups were too large: 18%
- The course was too challenging: 13%
- Teaching staff were inaccessible: 12%
- The course wasn't challenging enough: 11%
Emergent Themes: The Student Voice

Clarification of Learning Intentions
“Everything is made clear from the start … logical … it’s why I encourage others to choose her modules. You know that from the start you’ll get all the support you need to do well. If you don’t then you can’t grumble … it’s your fault”.

Instrumentality of Strategic Student Learners
“I’m here to get a job at the end of it. Mum says that when she was at uni it was more about reading around the subject. I don’t feel as though I have the time to do that. I have to manage working in the pub most nights … so my time needs to focus on the assessments and get the highest grade I can get”.

Regular Progress Checks
“We (in the module group) get feedback at the end of each week. We also get to e-mail him (lecturer) suggestions as to what we would like to have repeated or re-explained the following week. That way you don’t get embarrassed putting your hand-up”.

Standardisation vs Personalisation
“‘It feels as though we can input our own ideas rather than feeling that we are all doing the same thing. I was able to present a proposal of what I had in mind and discuss whether it was feasible. That made me really think about what I was doing. ’”
Emergent Themes: The Student Voice

Transition into Higher Education
“I have never read a journal article before I started here (at university) and to be honest I found the various readers and articles we had to read almost impossible to understand, it really doesn’t sink in most of the time. It makes me feel that maybe I shouldn’t be at uni”.

Assessment & Feedback
“I sometimes haven’t collected my feedback sheet from office. I know that’s the case with some of my friends also. The mark is the most important bit. I’ll collect if I fail the work and then I need some help on the reassessment … but other than that I don’t use the feedback … that’s bad I suppose?”

Students as stakeholders in a ‘Community of Practice’
“We do load of debates in our class … we start off by discussing with our friends on the table and this then builds out into larger discussions or debates with other students and then we present our ideas”.

Key Messages/Recommendations

- Students perception vary through time and by both institution and course.
- HE should seek to better support and engage students in ‘transitional’ learning experiences such as with inductions and employability preparations.
- Students are strategic in their learning choices.
- The ability to offer learning and assessment choices promotes student motivation and learning … One size does not fit all!
- Assessment feedback practices must seek to better promote a more integrated and purposeful student learning experience.
- Quality of relationships are important for perceptions of quality education.
- Quality of learning contingent upon co-creation of development opportunities that are perceived to be supportive and forward looking.
- Positive course experiences and assessment strategies are central to student engagement and both internal and external perceptions of institutional quality.
Final Thoughts

• H.E. should seek to facilitate the ability of students to be critically reflective and reflexive of both themselves and their environment.
• In this way, students are empowered to develop both intellectually and emotionally.
• This has clear economic and social value by promoting personal well-being, citizenship and employability.
References

  https://radar.brookes.ac.uk/radar/items/5e0c00ca-7795-41fc-9937-fe517db8d15e/1/
• Lee, E., Hannafin, M.J.(2016) A design framework for enhancing engagement in student-centered learning: own it, learn it, and share it, Education Tech Research Dev, 64,707-734