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You may cite this version as: Bain, Jenny. 2010. Integrating student voice: assessment for empowerment. *Practitioner Research in Higher Education*, 4(1), pp. 14-29. ISSN 1755-1382 [Article] : Goldsmiths Research Online.

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Integrating student voice: assessment for empowerment

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Abstract

This paper charts the development of a conceptual model for student involvement in assessment practice. This development seeks, through an exploration of literature in the field, to locate pedagogy that:

- supports partnerships in assessment that lead to empowered autonomous learners.
- provides opportunities for student voice that support the students' growing ability to think critically about – and take responsibility for – their own assessment.

Accordingly, this paper uncovers a conceptual model located in critical pedagogy that might be argued to move away from a dominant discourse of assessment that illuminates the role of students as passive recipients, toward a discourse that supports the development of student autonomy and more effective student/academic partnerships. It puts forward a critical pedagogy of assessment that might involve an entirely new orientation, one that embraces a number of principles that may not be familiar in generic higher education assessment practice. These principles are rooted in dialogic interactions so that the roles of teacher and learner are shared and teacher and, particularly, student voices are validated. The paper goes on to suggest that by closely examining what is meant by the term student voice, it is possible to begin to envisage a conceptual model for integrating student voice into higher education assessment practice. Through this model, we might juxtapose the transformative goals of critical pedagogy with the transformative possibilities of student voice.

Keywords

Assessment; student voice; sustainable; democratic; critical pedagogy; becoming.

Introduction

This paper charts the development of a conceptual model for student involvement in higher education assessment practice. Through an examination of literature in the field, the paper seeks to develop both a theoretical and practical perspective for assessment through focusing on two broad areas:

- Exploration of the potential of assessment as a means of directing student learning and a discussion around how students might be empowered by a dialogic approach to assessment practice rooted in critical pedagogy; and
- Developing an understanding of how the experience of the student, or learner, might be improved through the inclusion of an authentic student voice in higher education assessment.

Consideration is given to those features of assessment that might be consistent with supporting student voice. As such, the paper is grounded by the Berlin Communiqué (2003), in which Ministers from a host of European countries, including the United Kingdom, reaffirmed the need to balance the increased competitiveness in higher education. Their objective was to strengthen social cohesion, empowering students to take control of their own learning and reducing social inequalities at national and European level (Zgaga, 2005).

The potential of assessment to impact on learning

Researchers engaged in the study of student learning during the 1970s were surprised to find that most aspects of students' study were dominated by the way they perceived the demands of assessment (Snyder, 1971; Miller and Parlett, 1974). Snyder's work uncovered the presence of the hidden curriculum of assessment, to which students paid attention if they wanted to gain higher grades. A review of later literature seems to place beyond doubt the power of assessment as a means of directing student learning (Boud, 1988; Knight, 1995; Black and Wiliam, 1998b; Falchikov, 2005). Specifically, Boud (1988, cited in Brown, 1999:4) is forceful in his assertion that:

'... assessment methods and requirements probably have a greater influence on how and what students learn than any other single factor.'

Dearing (1997:137) also highlights:

'...the importance of assessment ... to the quality of a student's learning and to the maintenance of standards.'

In keeping with the findings of Snyder (1971) and Miller and Parlett (1974), Brown, Bull and Pendlebury (1997:6) succinctly outline what matters to students in a learning context:

'Assessment defines for students what is important, it identifies for them what counts, it has a big influence on how they will spend their time and how they will see themselves as learners. Thus, if you want to change student learning, then change the methods of assessment.'

Boud (1995:43) offers an additional perspective for exploring current practice, entirely consistent with the context of this study. He states:

'If students are to become autonomous and interdependent learners as argued in statements of aims of higher education, then the relationship between student and assessor must be critically examined and the limiting influences of such an exercise of power explored. The new agenda for assessment research needs to place this as a high priority...'

So although the role of assessment in driving and empowering learners may be clear, the difficulty of changing assessment practice to focus on learning should not be underestimated (Ecclestone, 2002; Boud and Hawke, 2003). For example, Dearing (1997:137) reported that:

'Given the importance of assessment ...we have been concerned to hear that the process of designing programmes is often divorced from anything but the most general consideration of the assessment process.'

Ecclestone's (2002:155) study of assessment in post-compulsory education revealed that:

'...none of the teachers saw assessment explicitly shaping or affecting learning.'

The focus of this paper now turns to briefly examine how current higher education assessment practice directs learning and how this examination might inform features of a conceptual model for student involvement in assessment practice.

Higher education assessment located in critical pedagogy

In seeking to illustrate the dominant discourse of assessment in higher education, Boud (2007) looked at a range of United Kingdom and Australian higher education institution assessment policies available in 2006. Boud concluded that the dominant discourse of assessment constructs learners as passive subjects. He illuminates the role of students in assessment as one where they conform to the rules and procedures of others. Here, students:

'...have no role other than to subject themselves to the assessment acts of others, to be measured and classified.' (Boud, 2007:17)

This view of the dominant discourse in assessment is in keeping with a broader view supported by many educational thinkers. It is especially prevalent in what some might term the 'dissenting or libertarian traditions in education' which question the predominant power of educators to control knowledge and intellectual freedom (Spring, 1999:33).

This echoes the view of Freire (1970:53), who sees mainstream education as a 'process of prescription' and describes this, the 'banking concept of education', as:

'... an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize and repeat. This is the 'banking' concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing and storing the deposits.'

The emerging theme is of an approach to pedagogy dominated by teacher-centred, or didactic, learning, where students are passive receptors of knowledge.

Therefore, the central question of this paper now focuses on how a conceptual model to integrate student voice into current assessment practice might move away from the dominant discourse of higher education assessment described above, towards a discourse more in keeping with assessments that supports the student's growing ability to think critically about and take responsibility for their own learning. The critical education paradigm offers some direction on how to develop this discourse with the theoretical-philosophical work of Jurgen Habermas occupying a significant position (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2003). For Habermas (1981) freedom, justice and rationality are not just theoretical issues to be explored but rather practical tasks that demand commitment to change. However, it is Giroux (1994:30), who highlights how looking to critical pedagogy might best frame an exploration of student and academic partnerships:

'[Critical] pedagogy ... signals how questions of audience, voice, power, and evaluation actively work to construct particular relations between teachers and students, institutions and society, and classrooms and communities ... Pedagogy in the critical sense illuminates the relationship among knowledge, authority, and power.'

Leistyna and Woodrum (1996) continue Giroux's theme, describing how critical pedagogy might encourage students and teachers to understand relationships of ideology, power and culture in order to transform structures and practices that sustain inequalities.

The influence of critical theory can be seen in the emancipatory works of Paulo Freire, considered by many to be 'the inaugural philosopher of critical pedagogy' (McLaren, 2000:1). Freire's work is considered particularly pertinent here as, unlike others in the field of critical education, for example, Habermas, who writes from a sociological perspective, Freire's work, although political in nature, is written primarily from the standpoint of an educationalist (Mayo, 1999). Freire's pedagogy is of specific interest when considering student voice. It focuses on a dialogical and interactive approach to learning and examines issues of relational power for students (McLaren, 2000), such as those revealed by the dominant discourse of assessment.

Freire (1970:53) is particularly concerned with reconstructing the traditional student/teacher relationship, the 'banking concept of education', described above. In common with pedagogy focused on autonomous and interdependent learners, for Freire (1970), the classroom should be seen as a place where meaningful dialogue, grounded in the experiences of students and teachers, results in new knowledge.

However, critical pedagogy is not without its critics. Youngman (1986), in his critique of critical pedagogy, argued that Freire did not acknowledge the need for educators, who have superior theoretical understanding, to support the growth of the learner. Freire responds to this criticism by stating:

'Authority is necessary to the freedom of students ... The teacher is absolutely necessary. What is bad, what is not necessary, is authoritarianism rather than authority.' (Horton and Freire, 1990:181, cited in Mayo, 1999:67)

Further criticisms of Freire's critical pedagogy have been levelled by post-modern educators, particularly those writing from a feminist perspective, because, they assert, of its reliance on dialogues that perpetuate racism, sexism and homophobia (Keesing-Styles, 2003). However, it is interesting to note that Freire's later work did include recognition of his commitment to educational reform characterised by unity in diversity (Mayo, 1999).

It is possible to see how, especially in considering Freire's later work, a conceptual model located in critical pedagogy might be argued to move away from a dominant discourse of assessment that illuminates the role of students as one where they 'conform to the rules and procedures of others' (Boud, 2007:17), toward a discourse that supports the development of student autonomy and more effective student/academic partnerships. For Freire (1970), education is a praxis for the transformation of oppressive relations. Here, praxis is defined as critical reflection resulting in action (Mayo, 1999). Thus, Freire's idea of praxis, which might be also be considered as a 'pedagogy of question' (Bruss and Macedo, 1985:9), rather than a pedagogy of prescription, requires the implementation of a range of educational practices and processes that aim to create a better environment for learning (Keesing-Styles, 2003).

This means a critical pedagogy of assessment might involve an entirely new orientation, one that embraces a number of principles that may not be familiar in generic higher education assessment practice. Thus this paper moves to look at specific features of assessment that might be consistent with the principles of critical pedagogy. As Freire (1973; 1986) suggests, these principles must be rooted in dialogic interactions so that the roles of teacher and learner are shared; and teacher and, particularly, student voices are validated.

Student voice in higher education assessment practice

Student voice covers a range of activities that encourage reflection, discussion, dialogue and action on matters that primarily concern students, and also, by implication, concern teachers and the communities they serve (Fielding, 2004). Opportunities for students to have a pastoral or evaluative voice are provided by most higher education institutions (Floud, 2005). However, bringing together students and staff to discuss the process of teaching, learning and assessment rather than the content of the curriculum is

considered as rare as it is valuable (Asmar, 1999). In the dominant discourses of education and assessment there appears to be little place for student voice. As Soo Hoo (1993:390) states:

'Somehow educators have forgotten the important connection between teachers and students. We listen to outside experts to inform us and, consequently, we overlook the treasure in our own back yards: our students.'

Dialogue, as conceptualised through an examination of critical pedagogy, should be a fundamentally democratic activity which gives everyone a voice (Burbules 1993; Brookfield and Preskill, 1999). This notion of dialogue, or opportunity for voice, finds itself in harmony with an agenda for social inclusion and empowerment for all. Despite some limitations (Burbules, 2000), it might be argued that a dialogic approach provides the most promising ground for approaches to student voice in assessment. Here a dialogic mode of student voice is about students and teachers working and learning together in partnership. Its processes and procedures are emergent, rather than fixed, and they are shaped by the dialogic values that underpin its aspirations and dispositions (Fielding, 2004). This is consistent with Freire's (1976:115) notion of student voice located in critical pedagogy as dialogue that transforms the 'object of student into the subject of student' and is the fundamental gesture of a transformative education. It is argued that such a dialogue might:

'...initiate dramatic social, cognitive, practical and pedagogical changes.'
(Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1998:15)

However, the development of student voice should not be viewed as a 'quick fix'. Rather, it should be about moving from a model of practice concerned with:

'...efficiency and hierarchical modes of accountability' [to one that is] 'characterised by metaphors of wholeness ... reflection and enquiry and collaboration and congeniality.'
(Rudduck and Flutter, 2004:139)

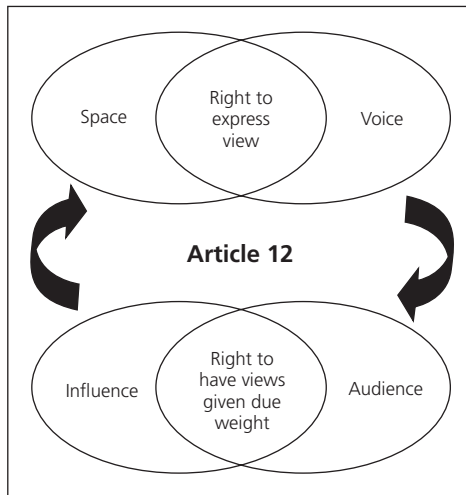
Frameworks for student voice

A number of writers suggest frameworks that might provide guidance in the fostering of student voice (Barnes et al., 1987; John, 1996; Shier, 2001; Fielding, 2001; Lodge and Reed, 2003). However, it is the work of Leitch et al. (2005:2) in the 'under-researched area of student participation in assessment' that is perhaps of most relevance to this paper. They assert that 'voice' is necessary, but concur with Lundy (2005:3) that a tokenistic voice is 'not sufficient, voice is not enough'. This is in keeping with the views of Zgaga (2005:110) who highlights a paradox which is characteristic of not only higher education, but of society at large:

'As formal possibilities for people (students) to engage and participate in society and (higher education) institutions are broader, so fewer people are taking them up.'

In seeking to make student voice in assessment more meaningful, Lundy, L. (2007) propose a model, see Figure 1. Here, four elements of their approach to student voice in assessment have a rational chronological order:

- **Space:** Students must be given the opportunity to express a view
- **Voice:** Students must be facilitated to express their views
- **Audience:** The view must be listened to
- **Influence:** The view must be acted upon, as appropriate (Lundy, L. (2007))

Figure 1. Conceptualising the role of student voice in assessment.

Adapted from Lundy, L. (2007).

Although specifically related to children, this model might be considered pertinent to higher education. It grounds a concept of dialogue that at once informs understanding of the student voice in assessment and:

'... points to a way of auditing existing assessment practice' (Leitch et al., 2005:5).

Batchelor (2006) argues that we should consider different modes of student voice and asserts that these may be viewed as three constituent elements:

- an **epistemological** voice, or a voice for knowing;
- a **practical** voice, or a voice for doing; and
- an **ontological** voice, or a voice for being and moving forward. (Batchelor, 2006:787)

Batchelor (2006) believes that the ontological voice is less familiar, less valued and validated than voices for knowing and doing. Yet, she asserts, an ontological voice is fundamental to the other modes of voice, so that:

'... the person who is a student need not force himself into the identikit model of a successful student ... He (sic) can discover his own individual way of being a student.' (Batchelor, 2006:791)

Here we are presented with an opportunity for voice that is consistent with Freire's student as subject (Freire, 1976), one that opens up new possibilities for partnership and knowing (Batchelor, 2006). In more closely examining what is meant by the term by student voice, we can begin to envisage a conceptual model for integrating the role of student voice into higher education assessment practice. Through this, we might juxtapose the transformative goals of critical pedagogy with the transformative possibilities of student voice. Here we return to the classroom as a place where meaningful dialogue grounded in the experiences of students and teachers, results in new knowledge (Mayo, 1999). However, as Leitch et al. (2005) and Zgaga (2005) assert, providing an opportunity for voice does not always mean that students are willing or able to engage with that opportunity. We begin to understand that what might

be described as a tokenistic voice is not enough. If assessment is to become part of Freire's 'pedagogy of question' (Bruss and Macedo, 1985:9) as highlighted above, where students being assessed are subjectivised by transformative praxis, then the transformative space must be internal to assessment itself. To empower learners, assessment must develop spaces and practices that nurture dialogue, not as unusual features, but as integral practices of human learning and daily encounter (Griffiths, 2003; 2004; Leitch et al., 2005).

Features of higher education assessment rooted in critical pedagogy

Discussions of assessment for both students and academics in higher education are often dominated by the need to measure or certify learning. Examples include how grades should be awarded, or what constitutes a first-class honours degree (Elton and Johnson, 2002; Elton, 2003; Falchikov, 2005). Thus what we might term as 'summative assessment' becomes for many the most important purpose of assessment (Knight, 2002; Boud, 2007).

Summative assessment usually takes place at the end of a course of teaching to ascertain what students have learned (Chartered Institute of Educational Assessors (CIEA), 2009). It is deemed of value in the maintenance of standards (Dearing, 1997) and for diagnostic and certification purposes (Nevo, 1995). However, a predominant focus on summative assessment can be problematic. It may mean that large amounts of the time and energy are devoted to assessment that takes place after students have completed their learning. As such, it is too late to have an impact on what and how they learn (Black and Wiliam, 1998a; Falchikov, 2005; Boud and Falchikov, 2007a). If the dominant focus of assessment is on grading and classification, this has the, perhaps inadvertent, effect of encouraging students to study in negative ways, for example, surface-based learning or memorising answers rather than understanding concepts (Knight, 2002; Elton, 2003; Falchikov, 2005). Therefore, it is argued that this consequence of summative assessment, which is often negative, needs to be addressed strategically, so assessment that might have a positive consequential influence on learning also becomes integrated into practice (Brown, 1999). The focus on assessment that might help develop student autonomy and critical thinking is revealed through examination of a substantial literature review by Black and Wiliam (1998b). This review centred on research into how assessment influences learning, what Black and Wiliam (1998b) term 'formative assessment'. Formative assessment may also be referred to as 'assessment for learning' or 'assessment for teaching' (CIEA, 2009). It is usually carried out at regular intervals in the course of teaching and is intended to support and improve teaching and learning (CIEA, 2009). Black and Wiliam's (1998b:9–12) work suggests a number of directions for the development of assessment practice, including several relevant to assessment located in critical pedagogy, for example:

- The dialogue between learners and teachers should be thoughtful, reflective, focused to evoke and explore understanding, and conducted so that all learners have an opportunity to think and to express their ideas.
- Assessment feedback should be about particular qualities of the work, with advice on learners can do to improve, and should avoid comparisons with other learners.
- For formative assessment to be productive, learners should be trained in self-assessment so that they can understand the main purposes of their learning and thereby grasp what they need to do to achieve.

Although its greatest impact thus far has been on schools in the United Kingdom, its relevance to assessment practice in higher education is strongly advocated (Boud and Falchikov, 2007b). This, it is argued, will help to move assessment away from the limited reach of the high-stakes summative assessment described above (Knight, 2002).

However, it should not be assumed that formative assessment automatically leads to more deep level learning (Struyven et al., 2006; Dochy et al., 2007). Rather, it is argued that pedagogy that supports

partnerships in assessment should provide opportunities for both formative and summative assessment. The literature suggests that an assessment system might be designed to serve both purposes reasonably well (Newton, 2003; Wiliam, 2003).

Methods of assessment

How can we develop partnerships in assessment that lead to empowered autonomous learners? Rather than a prescriptive selection of method, it is suggested that the selection of assessment method should be negotiated and broadened beyond the traditional written account to include methods that provide us with confidence in the capabilities of students as practitioners (Brown, 1999). These methods might include, for example, essays or final exams.

Thus, it is argued that a focus on a broader range of alternative, or innovative, assessment methods, such as projects, portfolios and oral presentations, that are authentic, meaningful and engaging (Brown and Knight, 1994; McDowell and Sambell, 1999; Brown, 1999), is appropriate to assessment practice located in critical pedagogy. However, it is important to introduce students carefully to such innovative methods of assessment, so they are fully involved and aware (McDowell and Sambell, 1999). Resistance to introduction of innovative methods is often on the basis of manageability and workload (Brown, 1999). However, this valid concern can be reduced somewhat by the involvement of peers and the students themselves in feedback and marking (Brown, 1999).

Approaches to assessment

Through the literature two approaches to assessment, peer and self-assessment, present themselves as particularly relevant to a collaborative approach (Hounsell, McCulloch and Scott 1996; Black and Wiliam, 1998b; Falchikov, 2005). Learning with and from peers is the dominant mode of informal and everyday learning (Falchikov, 2007). In their seminal review of peer teaching in higher education, Goldschmid and Goldschmid (1976) argued that peer tutoring was particularly relevant in maximising students' responsibility for their own learning. The role of peers in assessment is also explicitly valued and understood in many theories and philosophies of learning (Dewey, 1887; Bruner, 1960; Feire, 1973). Dewey (1887:78) writes that, 'Through the responses which others make to his own activities he comes to know what these mean in social terms. The value which they have is reflected back into them'. Like Dewey (1887), Bruner (1960) and Freire (1973), Lave (1999) believes that knowledge needs an authentic content and structure requiring social collaboration and action. Peer-assessment can help provide opportunities for this kind of authentic collaboration (Falchikov, 2001). This type of assessment benefits student's critical thinking and social skills, personal and intellectual development and understanding of the assessment process itself (Tan, 2007). However, there are aspects of peer-assessment that might be considered detrimental to learning (McCormick and Pressley, 1997, Falchikov, 2007). In particular, if conducted within the dominant discourse of assessment described by Boud (2007), peer-assessment:

'...does not have the power to enable students to benefit from their involvement.'
(Falchikov, 2007:138)

It has been argued that self-assessment should be focused on throughout undergraduate education because of the role this type of assessment plays in enabling learners to evaluate their own performance after they have finished formal study (Brown and Glasner, 1999). The use of self-assessment activities helps students to examine their views of, and attitudes to, their roles and responsibilities in assessment (Falchikov, 2005). (Boud, 2007) shares this view, and asserts that a feature of a desirable view of assessment is a focus on students becoming reflexive (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Giddens 1991) and self-regulatory (Karoly, 1993). These are similar constructs, sharing a view that, in complex settings, if students are to learn they must be able to gauge their own performance and to examine their learning in the context in which it is deployed (Boud, 2007).

These approaches are closely related. Peer-assessment provides an important complement to, and may even be a pre-requisite for, effective self-assessment (Black et al., 2003). However, much like peer-assessment, self-assessment practice needs to be carefully considered if it is to help to develop the spaces and practices that nurture a student voice (Tan, 2007).

Feedback from assessment

Formative assessment in general, and self- and peer-assessment in particular, place importance on feedback as central to learning and high attainment (Black and William, 1998b; Hounsell, 2007). As such, it is asserted, that feedback as a component of student voice must be developed as authentic dialogue. For many working in the field of assessment, a central role for students in the targeting, generating, interpreting, and communicating of feedback has been vigorously advocated (Brew, 1999; Boud, 1995; Falchikov, 2001; Hounsell, 2007). Askew (2000) asserts that feedback needs to engage learners and teachers in collaborative and reflexive dialogue and this concept of feedback might be argued to place Freire's (1970) notion of praxis at the centre of assessment. Here, it is possible to imagine practice around feedback as an important element of a conceptual model of assessment located in critical pedagogy. This is quite different to feedback as part of the dominant discourse of assessment, that constructs learners as the passive recipients of information where:

'...the teacher identifies what is needed and provides this information to the student.'
(Boud, 2007:18)

Thus, in summary, it is suggested that assessment that embraces those principles of critical pedagogy less familiar in generic higher education assessment practice might include summative, formative, sustainable, peer-, and self-assessment. The focus would be on reflexive and authentic feedback in keeping with the features of student voice uncovered above. Integrating these features of assessment into a conceptual model through which to explore the role of the student in current higher education practice would, it is suggested, give such a model a practical as well as theoretical perspective.

Assessment that encourages critical thinking

'Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about the world is concerned with reality, and does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication.'
(Freire, 1970:72)

The suggestion here is that the learning and its subsequent assessment are intrinsically linked with student realities and lives (Simon, 1992). This view is supported by Harvey and Burrows (1992) who argue that the development of critical thinking, or metacognition, is one of the key ways in which students may be empowered and, therefore, become more autonomous.

In his seminal work *How We Think*, Dewey (1909:9) defined critical (or reflective) thinking as:

'...active, persistent and careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds which support it and the further conclusions to which it tends.'

Much like Freire's (1970) authentic thinking, Dewey's definition of critical thinking is built around the concept of social construction of knowledge, as opposed to the Socratic definition that knowledge is created by a divine being (Spring, 1999). Harvey and Burrows (1992) assert that critical thinking requires students to be involved in their own assessment, to be able to recognise good quality work and to be confident when they have achieved it. In short, they state that a pedagogical approach that encourages metacognition treats students as intellectual performers rather than as a docile and compliant audience. This view involves students taking more responsibility for their assessment and becoming more autonomous in their approach.

However, it is perhaps an overly simplistic conclusion that a focus on critical thinking will itself result in student autonomy and empowerment. Mayo (1997) describes critical thinking as not simply being concerned with overcoming individual and group 'ignorance' but with encouraging ways of thinking that are critical of the kind of status quo which supports inequalities, injustices and the abuse of power. Keesing-Styles (2003), develops this theme and indicates the limits of critical thinking as a path to empowerment for students. She asserts that, while critical thinking, or the development of critical thinkers, may encourage understanding in relation to the social and human condition, it is limited in empowering students as it does not specifically demand social action. She argues for the need to look further, to move from pedagogy preoccupied with social injustice to pedagogy that examines and promotes practices that have the potential to transform oppressive institutions through educational practices.

It is this expectation of action or social change that moves us from a focus on critical thinking back to critical pedagogy. Burbules and Berk (1999:55) make this connection between critical thinking and critical pedagogy even more clear and bring us back to a connection between students as critical thinkers and their relationship with academics. They state:

'Critical thinking is primarily aimed at the individual and largely ignores the pedagogical relations, which occur between teacher and learner, or between learners. Critical pedagogy is more interested in collective action so individual criticality is intimately linked to social criticality.'

Thus, the literature goes full-circle, returning to critical pedagogy, spaces for authentic dialogue between learners and educators as equally knowing subjects and an alternative focus for assessment practice.

Conclusion: a conceptual model of assessment for becoming

In keeping with the notion of openness and possibility uncovered by the examination of student voice, features of assessment and critical thinking, Keesing-Styles (2003), and Mayo (1999) point to a 'pedagogy of possibility' as a way forward for assessment practice. Here, Simon (1987:374), outlines a pedagogy of the 'not yet', a pedagogy that focuses on 'how we might live our lives, rather than on known understandings'. He goes on to suggest that such a pedagogy must endeavour to be transformative and suggests it:

'... will require forms of teaching and learning linked to the goal of educating students to take risks, to struggle with ongoing relations of power, to critically appropriate forms of knowledge that exist outside their immediate experience, and to envisage versions of a world that is "not yet"...' (Simon, 1987:375)

Badiou (2003:18) expands on this concept by suggesting:

'The question is not whether possibilities are possible but is there the possibility for new possibilities.'

Thus a possibility for assessment opens up beyond the closure of the present moment. This new possibility cannot be an articulation of given assessment choices. Rather, it must break away from standardisation and existing assessment practice by revealing new possibilities. This pedagogy of possibility counters some of the criticisms of critical pedagogy touched above. A pedagogy of possibility is not about prescribing a curriculum or assessment methodology, but rather:

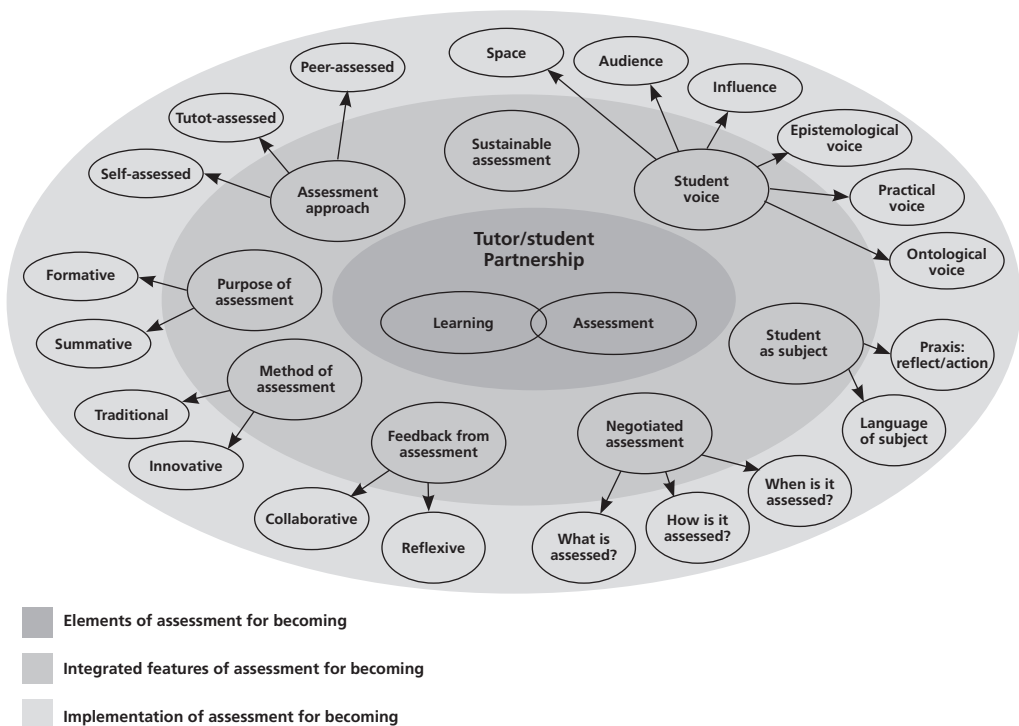
'... locally and contextually formulating practice within an integrated moral and epistemological stance.' (Simon, 1992:58)

Here we re-affirm the need for assessment to develop spaces and practices that nurture dialogue, what Giroux (1985:xii) describes as ‘a language of possibility’. Thus, we might start to build a picture of assessment practice that is very different to the dominant discourse uncovered by Boud (2007), one that challenges conventional assessment practices such as teacher-directed or institutionally imposed and standardised methods. Instead, through an emerging student voice, we might achieve:

*‘...authentic dialogue between learners and educators as equally knowing subjects’
(Freire, 1989:49).*

A conceptual model for authentic student voice in higher education assessment, ‘expressed in diagrammatic form’ (Robson, 2002:63) is proposed in Figure 2.

Figure 2. A conceptual model of assessment for becoming.



This model promotes assessment practice that must value and validate the experience students bring to the classroom. Importantly, it situates this experience at the centre of classroom content and process to avoid oppressive power relations and create a negotiated curriculum, including assessment, equally owned by teachers and students (Giroux, 1989). It must allow students an ontological voice, as well as an epistemological voice and a practical voice (Batchelor, 2006:787). It must allow the voice space, audience and influence (Leitch et al., 2005) and integrate assessment as a component of pedagogy that allows for a range of assessment purposes, methods and approaches centred on collaborative and reflexive marking and feedback (Watkins and Mortimore, 1999; Boud and Hawke, 2003; Hounsell, 2007; Bain, 2009). This conception of assessment must include differing stakeholder views of assessment, particularly students’ perceptions of assessment:

'... more important to learning than what staff take for granted as the "reality" of the assessment ... These perceptions cannot be assumed: they are only available from the students themselves.' (Boud, 1995:38)

If this is achieved then, holistically, it might be termed as a pedagogy of 'Assessment for Becoming', whose value might be in influencing change in higher education assessment practice at a local level.

In closing, it is possible to speculate on the long-term influence of assessment practice located in a conceptual model of assessment for becoming. Through opportunities for authentic dialogue and feedback, knowledge might be constructed in partnership, rather than supplied by didactic teaching:

'... teacher of the students and the students of the teacher might cease to exist ... discovering knowledge through one another and through the objects they are trying to know.' (Freire, 1976:115)

The dominant discourse of assessment might begin to change, rather than as Boud describes:

'... here students have no role other than to subject themselves to the assessment acts of others, to be measured and classified.' (Boud, 2007:17)

It might read:

'... here students' only role is to be placed at the centre of assessment, working in partnership with academics to become autonomous and empowered in their learning.'

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