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# Critical Pedagogy and assessment in higher education: The ideal of ‘authenticity’ in learning

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## Abstract

Current forms of marketisation in university systems create pressures towards purely ends-focused expectations among students and have implications for learning and assessment processes. The potential harm that these trends have on ‘learning’ should be resisted by educators and students alike. Critical Pedagogy approaches offer one way of conceptualising and implementing such resistance in the interests of ‘authenticity’ in learning. However, the issue becomes sharpest at the point of assessment. Here, the ideals of Critical Pedagogy can collide with student expectations of final degree success. By addressing the question of ‘authenticity’ for assessment in relation to Critical Pedagogy, this article explores the challenges posed by this conundrum and draws upon interviews conducted with module leaders who apply recognisably (although not explicitly) Critical Pedagogy principles in their teaching and in the types of assessment they use. The themes that emerged present a picture of the kinds of potential that Critical Pedagogy influenced forms of assessment have for supporting authenticity in learning, as well as the difficulties involved in its application. It also helps to trace out the possible boundaries for further inquiry.

## Keywords

Assessment, authenticity, critical pedagogy

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## Critical Pedagogy and higher education

The most influential theorist in the Critical Pedagogy tradition is Freire (1970, 1974). For Freire, learning must overcome oppression, be liberating, be ‘humanising’ and emerge from a ‘love for the world’. Through Critical Pedagogy, the learner must become more ‘conscious’ of their situation and of how to change it: a process Freire termed ‘conscientisation’. Finally, throughout Freire’s work, there is a discernible and sometimes forcefully expressed concern with ‘authenticity’. For Freire, authentic learning is critical, rational and transformative. Modes of learning that are rooted in oppression and self-interest can only be irrational and based not upon trust but upon deception. Only modes of learning that lead to emancipation then can truly be regarded as authentic.

In the educational context, ‘authenticity’ means learning in the sense of ‘understanding’ as opposed to the mechanical memorising-of-facts. This deceptively simple statement obscures complexities of learner motivation. Pegg and Carr (2010), for example, employing Bourdieu’s (1998) concept of *illusio*, have explored the ways in which the learner adapts to the ‘rules-of-the-game’, both espousing a belief in ‘learning for its own sake’ while operating a personal calculus of optimal outcomes from the formal educational programme. There are complexities also in the structure of the learning environment. Universities, for instance, are institutions with established ways of doing things, with cultural norms, rules, protocols and hierarchies that have operated over decades. Critical Pedagogy, by definition, seeks to introduce an alternative set of norms that are not necessarily compatible with current trends in higher education. Some have explored the difficulties faced by educators who strive to deliver authentic learning within the necessarily artificial environment of the modern university (Stein et al., 2004). Others have risen to this challenge by paying close attention to the means by which ‘authentic learning environments’ can be created via online platforms and through blended teaching methods (Herrington et al., 2007, 2014). Concerned also with the challenge of ‘authentic learning’ in the context of increasingly marketised forms of higher education, a new generation of theorists has developed Critical Pedagogy using pre-Freirean traditions of thought. The ‘Student as Producer’ movement (Neary and Winn, 2009) has gained traction in some progressively inclined British universities; particularly at the University of Lincoln, where it is becoming established as the in-house educational model for social science and humanities curriculums. Pioneering this, Neary (2013) particularly emphasises the influence of Benjamin (1998) and Vygotsky (1978).

Benjamin (1998) explores the inter-dependencies between the technical aspects of creative production and its consequences for the relationship between artists and writers, and their audiences. By critiquing the technical modes of creative production that operate within capitalist social relations, artists, no longer believing in their own ‘magic strength’ (Benjamin, 1998: 103), cannot connect meaningfully with the audience, as a hitherto fixed and fundamentally alienating relationship is deconstructed. As Neary (2013) notes, however, while applying such critical thinking to educational processes, the limitations of the ‘Student as Producer’ model are brought into sharp relief when it comes to the question of formal assessment. In particular, he notes that learning outcomes are antithetical to the model in that they can become overly prescriptive, stifling creativity and undermining ‘critical, open-ended notions of student-centred learning’ (Neary, 2013: 8). The result is forms of assessment that encourage an instrumental and success-oriented student mentality – the polar opposite of an authentic self-assessment of what has really been learnt. Of course, this type of problem is acknowledged and addressed elsewhere. Forms of peer-learning and assessment (Boud et al., 1999), dialogue-based modes of assessment feedback (Nicol, 2010), student self-regulated models of learning (Nicol, 2009) and self-assessment (Orsmond et al., 2002), for example, all have a central place in the current generation of educational scholarship. Throughout all these types, assessment is taken to be part of the learning process, rather than as something that is mechanically ‘attached’ at the end of a programme of learning. Indeed, for this study also, ‘learning’ and ‘assessment’ have been linked and are frequently referred to conjunctly.

The marketisation that has intensified in higher education in recent years has introduced processes and practices that create obstacles to authentic learning and assessment (Fenton, 2011; Giroux, 2011; Neary and Winn, 2009). The recent leap in rates of student fees in the United Kingdom, coupled to a highly individualised ‘student-as-customer’ model, has elevated the ends (good grades) above the means (the learning process) in unprecedented ways (Bailey and Freedman, 2011; McGettigan, 2013). The net effect is, as Gibbs (2006) points out, that ‘students are strategic as never before, and they allocate their time and focus their attention on what they believe will be assessed and what they believe will gain good grades’. This individualised model of learning prevails in a highly commoditised system of higher education, even where there is clear evidence that collective learning strategies based on mutual support and solidarity are more effective (Burgess-Proctor et al., 2014). However, it is because of this ontological ‘crisis’ in education that Freire’s insistence upon authenticity in learning assumes special importance (Giroux, 2010; Toscano, 2011).

## **Towards ‘authenticity’ in assessment**

Over recent years, there has been an ongoing interest in and development of participative approaches to academic assessment. There are many reports, for instance, of innovations in assessment that employ students’ reflections upon their own work and accounts of how they judge their own performance against agreed standards or through discussion with peers (Bromley et al., 2007; Mulder et al., 2014; Smith and Sodano, 2011; Stefanou et al., 2013). While much of this work has focused on the potentially empowering character of such approaches, some studies have also addressed issues of assessment rigour and reliability (De Grez et al., 2012; Lindblom-ylänne et al., 2006). A smaller sub-set of studies have also considered approaches to assessment that are more explicitly influenced by Critical Pedagogy in a higher education setting (e.g. Keesing-Styles, 2003).

Reflecting upon a decade during which radical educational practice had gained currency in higher education, with alternative forms of assessment increasingly in evidence (e.g. self-assessment, peer-assessment, consultative-assessment and participative-assessment), Reynolds and Trehan (2000) commented on the relative absence of applications of Critical Pedagogy principles to assessment methodologies. The result, they argued, was approaches to assessment that remained either at worst hierarchical in the traditional and didactic sense or, at best, *falsely* participative insofar as power relations remained unquestioned. In this situation, the experience of ostensibly participative assessment for students could be actually disempowering: ‘If self-awareness, consciousness-raising or reflexivity are introduced into the assessment process without power, authority and judgment-making being examined or changed, students have even less control than in more traditional methods’ (Reynolds and Trehan, 2000: 71).

More recent work echoes these earlier concerns with an emphasis on the learner’s disposition-in-the-world that pushes assessment beyond formal attainment outcomes (Boud, 2014; Kreber, 2014). Still, far more work is needed to establish Critical Pedagogy as an educational philosophy that can work for assessment. Relating to this issue then, the key interest driving the study reported here was that of ‘authenticity’ in assessment in relation to Critical Pedagogy. Drawing upon Freire’s notion of ‘authenticity’ in its interconnected pedagogical and political aspects, it was conceptualised for this research as having the following strategic intentions:

- To recognise and make more visible the material impact of power relationships in the educational process;
- To reshape the relationship between teachers and learners;

- To facilitate the development of students' social consciousness as part of the learning process;
- To involve dialogue as opposed to what Freire called the 'banking model' of education – to allow teachers and students ultimately to become co-investigators.

The principal aim of this research was to explore whether methods of authentic teaching and learning that deliberately subvert the conventional student and teacher relationship, that deconstruct the formal educational environment and curriculum and that invite students to question the standard modes and tropes of formal learning can be combined with demands for clear learning outcomes and recognised forms of assessment required by university quality assurance processes. Such principles might encourage student learners to be open to personal change through their learning; be concerned with knowledge and understanding before accreditation success; develop a deeper understanding of their own life experience, cultural identity, social background and personal viewpoint as valid in the learning relationship; critique the structures of oppression and hierarchy that shape the physical, social, cultural and pedagogical aspects of the learning environment; and to teach as well as learn in the context of a 'learning-group' or 'learning-community'. These principles are also the types of outcome – less measurable than the normal learning outcomes found in standard module specification – that are crucial not just to the intellectual gain of individual learners but to broader aims of collective social and intellectual growth (McArthur, 2010a). So, it is the challenge for Critical Pedagogy approaches to assessment that this article responds to, with the notion of 'authentic learning' positioned as an ideal. The contribution it offers is a development of our understanding of the practical meanings of authenticity for assessment and learning in relation to Critical Pedagogy in a concrete setting. It seeks to answer the following questions. To what extent are applications of Critical Pedagogy principles in evidence for assessment? Where there is evidence of such principles being applied, to what extent is authenticity achieved? What are the issues raised? The aim is to develop the concept of 'authenticity' that is as central to Critical Pedagogy in assessment as it is to the ongoing learning process.

## Methodology

This is an inquiry into existing practice for assessment in modules in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in which principles of Critical Pedagogy are being applied within the humanities curriculum at the University of Liverpool in the United Kingdom. Eight Year 2 and Year 3 undergraduate modules were used. Interviews with the eight staff members who separately co-ordinate those modules, to explore how successfully those principles are applied for assessment, were carried out.

## Research design

The research used a purposive sampling strategy (Oliver, 2006). The sampling strategy relied upon the willing participation of colleagues in the Faculty. On 11 February 2014, a call was sent by the project-lead to staff with leading roles in teaching and learning at each school in the Faculty. This approach means that it is likely that some modules that would have been relevant to the research were excluded, simply because module leaders did not read the message, or were unwilling or unable to respond. In the 3 weeks following the call, details of 12 modules from across the Faculty were forwarded to the project-lead. The team then met a month after the call, in early March 2014, to discuss those modules with a view to selecting eight, based on the time constraints. The module sample was finalised on the following basis:

- To include as wide a range of ‘non-traditional’ teaching and assessment methods as practical (indicated by published teaching and learning/assessment strategies);
- To include a range of modules committed to the ‘authenticity’ of the student learning process (indicated by the degree to which students play a role in defining the perspectives and structures of learning adopted in the module);
- To include a range of modules committed to moving students to action and that promote and further the causes of social justice and democracy (indicated by both the modes of learning and assessment and by the substantive content of the module);
- To include as wide a range of academic disciplines from across the social sciences and humanities as was practicable.

All eight of the modules included in the study were taught by academic staff who worked with some level of ‘intuitive’ Critical Pedagogy. The modules that were included on this basis were a performance module for music students (Module 1); a module on immigration law (Module 2); a volunteering and experience module for arts students (Module 3); a module enabling law students to work on real asylum cases (Module 4); a module on community and public involvement for criminology, social policy and sociology students (Module 5); a module on ethnographic research in politics for criminology, social policy and sociology students (Module 6); a module on the global media industry for communications and media students (Module 7); and a work-based learning module for criminology, social policy and sociology students (Module 8). All of the students on these modules were ‘young’ (18–21 years) full-time undergraduate students.

### *The interview schedule*

The interview schedule was designed to provide a common overall structure for each discussion. It laid out broad inquiry themes while allowing a degree of latitude for exploration of important or interesting themes that emerged. The interviewers used the following schedule for each interview. (1) What do you understand by ‘Critical Pedagogy’? (2) Did anyone’s work, or a particular tradition inspire you? (3) Why do you assess in the way you do? (4) What were your thoughts when you designed this module assessment, considering the following: reflecting the student’s ‘lived reality’, outside normal structures of learning; allowing students to be ‘free learners’ (i.e. not passive recipients of knowledge); moving students to action and involvement in the world; and challenging inequality? (5) Please talk to us through what you do in terms of non-traditional assessment. (6) What kinds of activities and/or learning strategies are organised to support the assessment? (7) What problems have you faced in applying these approaches? (8) How does this approach to teaching fit with your research work? (9) How successful do you consider the module assessment to have been, considering the following: reflecting the student’s ‘lived reality’, outside normal structures of learning; allowing students to be ‘free learners’ (i.e. not passive recipients of knowledge); moving students to action and involvement in the world; and challenging inequality? (10) What are your observations of how students from different social backgrounds experience the module assessment? (11) What kinds of student feedback do you typically get? (12) Have there been any issues or complaints from students about the form of assessment? (13) Have there been any problems of student participation in learning arising from these approaches? (14) Have there been any institutional barriers to the assessment approaches you have adopted? (15) What do you think could have been done to overcome those barriers?

### *Analysis*

The interviews were conducted by the students who were part of the research team in May 2014. Interview transcripts were then analysed to allow major themes to be delineated and key responses

across those themes to be compared and contrasted. Illustrative quotes reproduced in the analysis use the same module number indicated here to tag those quotes. Thus, the tag (I1: 'interview 1') indicates a quote from the module leader of the performance module for music students and so on.

## Findings

### *Awareness of Critical Pedagogy*

Most module leaders had no detailed understanding of the tradition of Critical Pedagogy. Two were aware of Freire's work, and one expressed familiarity with Henry Giroux's work (although not his work on Critical Pedagogy). However, all of the participants did report motivations for developing particular approaches to teaching that corresponded closely to aspects of Critical Pedagogy. The leader of the performance module for music students, for example, reported that he had read critiques of the 'banking model' since being asked to participate in the research and noted a natural affinity with this approach and the way he taught music:

I had no idea there was such a thing ... so I've looked it up, and as I understand it, it is the assumption that a student changes from being an object to fill with information to an active participant. Now, the reason why I've never heard of it is because you cannot fill somebody with the knowledge as to how to play the violin. It doesn't work that way, never has done, never will. (I1)

### *Authenticity and the learning process*

A key theme that emerged from the interviews was that the complexity and contradictions that students face in the real world are less easily captured in traditional learning strategies. A unanimous response was that student-led research work in particular opened up a rich process of social inquiry. As one noted, what students commonly find in their investigations into local politics is that '... things are not always as simple as they seem and the lines e draw are not as obvious and clear when we actually come to engage with practices' (I7).

Moreover, where the project or research problem itself throws up unexpected findings or problems, a reflexive element in the assessment can allow students to use this as part of a learning process. 'If [something] broke down, that could be written about. So, there is that opportunity to reflect on why it didn't work. The fact that there is that reflective element mitigates that problem' (I3). This kind of reflexive practice was incorporated into four of the modules.

There was also a general awareness that the traditional techniques and skills students are taught within academic disciplines can be very limiting. The process of music performance, for example, by definition involves both autonomous learning and an element that is important for authenticity in Critical Pedagogy approaches: the ability to be autonomous. For some, encouraging creativity also ensured that each student developed an independent and even unique approach to their work.

A majority argued that developing a range of assessments was crucial to enabling a more open and inclusive style of learning. As one noted,

What I assess is the process, rather than the end result. What needs to happen is that the teacher and the pupil need to understand how you get to be good, and that is an assessment of the process. The process is where the work is. (I1)

Some argued explicitly that more traditional forms of assessment are less authentic to students, simply because they tend to be removed from their cultural experience.

### *Active learning*

For the majority of participants, practical engagement with the world was crucial to developing alternatives to traditional ways of teaching. Indeed, two noted that they incorporated elements of their teaching which involved students in building the curriculum. In those two modules, students were asked about the particular skills they felt they needed to work on, and a workshop around those skills was then designed into the schedule. In one, open ‘learning cafés’ are used for which student-groups have an appointment with their tutor to discuss progress on the course in more general, unstructured, terms. Another participant reported that their module used student fieldwork in a manner that facilitated active learning. The majority of participants noted that the relationship between students’ personal experience and the subject matter at hand was intimately connected to creating opportunities for critical reflection in the classroom. Indeed, for some, it was as important for students to critique their own experience-based knowledge as it was for them to simply to draw upon that experience.

### *Motivating students to action*

Participants were asked about the extent to which they invited students to actively engage in the world, particularly on issues of social justice and equality. All eight said that the teaching and assessment styles used in the various modules were important in motivating students to action. Some also reported that raising awareness around a series of social and political issues did lead to student-activism. Considering also the educator, teaching in a truly critical sense requires that they challenge their own perceptions or assumptions. For example, one module leader highlighted the need to challenge how to conceptualise ‘student engagement’ in the first instance:

... for some people, keeping a family together is the most political activity to engage in. It can be incredibly difficult, particularly if you live in a bad area where things are difficult, resources are stretched, asking them to engage over and above with political issues is a very difficult thing to do, because they’re very insecure you know financially, socially insecure; they don’t have the security to say ‘actually I’m free tonight and I’m going to go off and campaign’ about whatever. Many do ... so that’s also to be highly respected. But you should also respect those who don’t ... we shouldn’t necessarily say action comes in one particular form. It takes many different types of forms and lots of things can be political when you think about it. (17)

For those module leaders that administrated student placements in external organisations (three in the sample), social action was often about mutual exchange and co-operation in the community. In one module, a community organisation was invited to participate in the assessment as part of a mutual learning process. These members of staff all noted that it was also important that students were encouraged to think critically about the organisation they were collaborating with.

### *Critical Pedagogy as transformative practice*

All of the module leaders claimed a personal transformative potential for their teaching approaches. This transformative potential was explained in two broad senses: first, as enabling students to move beyond the perspectives that had resulted from their background or social position; second, as supporting students’ growth in personal confidence, rising to challenges beyond the formal programme, that they had previously found daunting. Two participants were cautious about a simplistic, ‘top-down’ and essentially *inauthentic* approach to transforming students’ social awareness or consciousness. One, for instance, talked about the dangers of reproducing a ‘socially aware’ but

nonetheless *banking*-type model of teaching. For the second sense of transformative impact, module leaders reported a marked difference in the confidence of students as their module progressed. As one teacher put it,

Going into court can be quite a daunting thing ... Once they've done it, it has an impact on students' confidence ... so there is an anxiety about it and then the overcoming [of that anxiety] and then there's the strength in the overcoming which is quite nice to see. (15)

This theme of personal transformation of different types recurred throughout all of the interviews. Six interviewees reported that they could clearly see students change their minds about issues they engaged with and could also see how their perspectives changed when confronted with 'the unfamiliar' in a learning situation. Indeed, for some students, this could be radicalising as they shed long-held beliefs.

### *Institutional barriers*

For most modules, room facilities were seen as a key barrier to developing alternative learning and assessment approaches. Three participants reported that facilities were wholly inadequate for what they were trying to achieve in the classroom. Another pressure noted was the structure of the university year. One pointed out that the semesterised system, with a requirement that teaching be carried out across two semesters of 12 weeks, was not flexible enough to achieve a level of interaction that would produce the best results. A rigid application of anonymous marking also caused problems for authentic assessment strategies. The unconventional nature of the assessments in most cases required that more time be allowed to support the students who were unconfident about these types of learning and assessment. In some modules, the formative nature of the work, for example, meant that ongoing developmental feedback in workshops was time intensive. In modules that employed collaborative relationships in the community, there were additional time and resource pressures.

### *Student resistance*

For most of the participants, key barriers to developing authentic learning included the expectations and commitment of students themselves. As one noted, the idea that being an 'autonomous learner' was an *option* to be offered to students made little sense. In other words, students, in the experience of this module leader, had to be *forced* to be 'autonomous learners'. The module was set up in a way that if students did not engage in autonomous learning strategies, they would not be able to pass the module. Others related this issue to the context of a marketised university system in which students expect learning strategies and resources to be 'delivered', and in which students expect learning to be less rather than more autonomous.

A majority of the module leaders also reported that students typically found their module more challenging than other modules. Half of the sample noted that although students tend to find their module highly rewarding, at the outset, the intensity of the work was a source of student complaints: 'We get: "It's a lot of work." We get "It's a real shock to the system. I knew it would be a shock, but it's more of a shock than I imagined"' (14).

Four reported that they had to deal with student antipathy to, or fear of, a new style of learning and assessment. This anxiety means that the module leader is required to dedicate more time to reassuring students in classroom discussion. 'I think it's because it's unusual, they haven't really come across it. So, I do spend quite a lot of time in the seminars saying: have you got any questions



about the assessment?’ (I2). In the case of the modules that involved fieldwork-based assessments, it was reported that students simply feared being out of the classroom and encountering different organisational settings. Another problem was student concerns about inconsistencies of marking standards across modules. On some modules, students were worried that a higher standard of work was required, or that the marking criteria would be different from other modules.

All of the module leaders reported recording consistently high and above average levels of student achievement in their feedback. They all noted that their modules tended to see relatively high levels of student performance. In three modules, the results were typically higher than any other module in the department. As one noted, ‘It’s down on the left-hand columns and it’s very, very embarrassing. I mean, any single sheet is all down the left-hand column ... “Excellent, excellent, excellent, excellent ...” every single sheet, every year’ (I1).

One module leader reported that some weak students tended to do better because they responded to the social relevance of their work on the module. The preparedness of students for different forms of assessment and different learning strategies was reported by another as dependent upon the extent to which they have experienced them earlier in their degree programme. In this sense, Critical Pedagogy approaches, even where they are not explicit, applied extensively across a programme can help to prepare students for explicitly alternative forms of module assessment later on.

## Conclusion

To summarise, the findings of this research were that none of the participants explicitly applied Critical Pedagogy to their assessments, that all of the participants applied approaches that conformed implicitly to aspects of Critical Pedagogy and that there were examples found of students being involved in curriculum design. For the purposes of assessment in many cases, students were encouraged to develop their own approaches to complex challenges, reflect personally upon their own development and learning, reflect upon their own ‘lived realities’ for the purpose of assessment and learning, address questions of power and hierarchy in learning contexts, consider their own personal learning constraints and critique dominant ways of interpreting the world.

All of the module leaders worked with some level of ‘intuitive’ Critical Pedagogy, even if they did not follow a particular author or refer to a specific pedagogic school of thought. Within the sample, a range of innovative ways of enhancing learning could be identified that unconsciously applied some of the core values of Critical Pedagogy in their assessment design. In many cases, the object of those assessment strategies was to enable students to play a part in developing their own approaches to complex questions, and even to define research questions and shape the topics of inquiry themselves. Alternatively, the key motivation was to allow students to reflect upon their personal development and skills acquisition. Participants reported that student-led research work opened up a rich process of social inquiry. Two of the modules involved students in building the curriculum themselves. Continuous reflexivity, for example, aimed to enhance students’ experience of the learning process. In some of the modules, students were required to use their own interpretations of their social environment. In others, they were required to critically assess their own life experience in order to gain a better understanding of the perspectives of other social groups.

There were explicit claims across the modules analysed that teaching and assessment approaches were challenging the traditional relationship between students and teachers, enabling the learner to reflect on power differentials in the educational arena. For some, this meant that such power differentials were explored in collaborative project work with tutors, with other students and with community organisations. These modules were also described as offering students a potentially transformative learning experience by providing opportunities to overcome the intellectual and

emotional constraints arising from their background or social position. For others, the transformative process occurred simply by giving students the confidence to deal with novel and difficult assessment tasks. The majority were explicitly committed to allowing students to critique dominant ways of seeing the world. Resonating with Kreber's (2014) emphasis on unfamiliar experience – or 'the strange' – as an aspect of authentic learning, this meant that their understandings of the social world were challenged. Indeed, for some, introducing an understanding of the social and political dimensions of their subject in ways that identify power and oppression was their key motivation.

Limitations need to be acknowledged. This study is not representative in design. The sample was purposive and based on a broadly uncritical acceptance of responses to the call-out for participants. No requirement was imposed upon the respondents to justify their decision to include themselves in the research. The reliance on staff responses to the research call-out does mean that some modules of relevance might have been overlooked, again emphasising the non-representative character of the sample. The type of evidence considered is that of participant testimony. The participants were interviewed for their own perspectives regarding approaches to assessment within their modules. In that sense, the research relied upon participants' opinions of their own practice and of their students' responses to and experience of that practice. No interviews were conducted with students to validate the accounts given. In particular, this means that assessments of student performance and experience were wholly reliant on the views of these tutors. While valid as perceptions within a purely interpretive study, these participant assessments would need further verification independently of this testimony to enable claims for pedagogical efficacy to be made with confidence. The study was also university- and discipline-specific. Further work will be needed to strengthen the evidence base for the conclusions reached here. Crucially, research with students on these types of modules would be important to validate the perspectives offered by these participants.

As has been argued, there are considerable structural barriers to the application of Critical Pedagogy in the modern university. Noting the warnings by Reynolds and Trehan (2000) previously alluded to, regarding the danger of inauthentic (and therefore oppressive) forms of participative assessment, the problem that always confronts a subverting culture entering a dominant culture is that the former will lose its autonomy to the latter. In that scenario, attempts to impose student participation for teaching and assessment can lead to inauthentic 'mimic-type' forms of Critical Pedagogy. The participants were generally aware that this was a potential problem, and some questions were raised in relation to processes of incorporation. It is important to note, then, that all of the modules included in this study were designed by staff members who were individually (or collectively in their departments) very committed to developing non-traditional learning strategies. None of the participants felt that the Critical Pedagogy aspects of the modules identified in this research had been directly encouraged by the institution at Faculty or University level; however (and importantly), neither were they discouraged. Still, these module leaders did not generally feel supported by the institutional environment in their attempts to pursue alternative forms of assessment. Indeed, a series of unintended institutional conditions restricted critical assessment approaches. These included a lack of appropriate room facilities, the structure of the university year and the rigid application of anonymous marking. None of these would generally be regarded as problems within more traditional modules. These conditions merely reflect that fact that despite frequently stated commitments to inclusivity for education, explicit Critical Pedagogy orientations are not mainstreamed in the university system. Participants were also aware of the more general problem of seeking transformative forms of learning and assessment practice in a system that is in many ways increasingly inclined away from Critical Pedagogy. Validating Neary's (2013) concerns regarding problems created by an exclusive emphasis on learning outcomes, these module leaders were acutely aware also of the importance of their emphasis on the *process* of learning, rather than adopting a simple reliance on the measurement of *outcomes*.

As we have seen, Gibbs (2006) has drawn attention to the levels of student instrumentality that have been raised by the marketisation of higher education. Indeed, a significant area of difficulty described by the participants was that of how students themselves responded to some of the assessment approaches employed. At the same time, it was precisely the possibility that their assessment results might be compromised by a new and challenging (even though authentic) form of assessment that makes students nervous and in some cases unwilling to engage in those modules. The marketisation and commoditisation of higher education, however, have made it simultaneously more difficult and more important to pursue principles of Critical Pedagogy. Again, this was a contradiction that participants were well aware of. Yet there are practical advantages to offering assessments based on principles of Critical Pedagogy that can resist some of the worst effects of marketised education. Assessments that depend upon a high level of authentic and original student work, especially those that involve students formulating their own research questions, are not those in which students can simply draw upon standard texts. In an increasingly results-focused system of higher education, self-directed learning strategies allow the process of learning to be valued, rather than the grade alone. That said, in terms of the final grading of students, it is also clear that students, on those modules, did perform very well; indeed, based on these testimonies, students often performed better overall than on more traditional modules, supporting the findings on this theme by Burgess-Proctor et al. (2014). Intriguingly, this suggests that applications of Critical Pedagogy may even help to *bridge* the gap between authentic learning and authentic assessment. In so doing, it may help us to meet the challenge identified by Pegg and Carr (2010), created by the ways in which students learn the ‘rules of the game’ as they move from the processes of learning towards its end-goals.

In conclusion, and on the strength of the findings from this research, it seems that formal assessment, rather than necessarily presenting an limiting boundary for Critical Pedagogy, may be an area that could benefit greatly from a more explicit application of its core values and working principles. If so, Critical Pedagogy approaches may offer an important route to maintaining not only high-quality educational experience and authentic learning for students but also new approaches to assessment that can work albeit under increasingly inclement conditions.

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