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Assessments: letting students decide

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Introduction

The wider current discourse within Higher Education is strongly anchored in and based upon the students as partners in learning (see Dunne and Zandstra, 2011; Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Healey et al., 2014; Bovill and Felten, 2016), who take interest in and responsibility for their own learning. At the same time, the dominant discourse on assessment (see Austin, 2012; Tannock, 2017) skews this view through its strong focus on measuring attainment. Assessments within Higher Education are used to determine students' specific achievements and to identify whether and how far learning outcomes and objectives have been achieved, which, in turn, helps inform quality assurance strategies and initiatives. If, however, students are to take responsibility for their learning, then why are they not also in charge of their assessments? It is this particular question that forms the basis for this paper, in which we will outline the background, context and implications regarding a new approach for assessment at UCL Institute of Education.

Following a question raised by one of the students enrolled in a BA Education Studies Year 1 compulsory module, who challenged traditional essay writing as the primary assessment method for a module whose nature is to expand the understanding of meaning-making as spurring from diverse modes of communication, students were given the opportunity to combine their essay with output that was not in a traditional academic form. On the one hand, the resulting experiment was framed by the institutional assessment policy of UCL, which holds that, besides gaining knowledge and understanding of their subject of study, students ought to be engaged as "partners in their education, and as co-producers of knowledge" (University College London, 2018: 7). On the other hand, the experiment was also bounded by the dominant assessment discourse which focuses on measuring attainment and renders students as passive subjects in their education (Boud, 2007).

Theoretically, the paper makes use of the concept of policy enactment (Ball, 1993; Braun et al, 2010; Braun et al, 2011) to analyse how the module leader and, most importantly, students, exercised their agency throughout the new assessment approach and how, by creatively translating institutional policies, they were able to depart from a position of passive subjects towards active agents in education. Another theoretical lens for exploring the assessment experiment is the conceptualisation of empowerment that results from giving students access to learning spaces where discussion, reflection and actions have a transformative potential (McPhee and D'Esposito, 2018), both at an individual, and also at collective level (Leach et al, 2001).

As this paper is co-written by the module leader and the two students who co-created this new approach for assessment, the reflections on the experiment's advantages and challenges will capture the perspectives of both students and the module leader. The advantages of the approach concern: the opportunity of the students to bring their whole selves into the learning process by

creatively engaging in a more natural way of learning; their enhanced perceived meaningfulness of the assessment; the increased engagement resulting from the greater freedom and responsibility embedded in students' ownership of the assessment process; and finally, the increase in the depth and breadth of learning generated by students' deeper engagement with the course content and by the coherence they built within a modular programme. The challenges on which this paper sheds light are all resulting from the fact that the new assessment approach focused on an individual, rather than collective level, and cover tensions such as: the solitary nature of the learning journey, the increased amount of time and effort required on the part of the students which was not matched by an increased amount of support or guidance on the part of the tutors¹, and lastly, the need to balance the new approach with the traditional ones and with the overall focus on high standards of other modules.

At the intersection of theory, context and reflections, this paper, notwithstanding the challenges of this new approach for assessment at UCL Institute of Education, seeks to give a positive account of how letting students shape the what, the how and, most importantly, the why of learning by offering them the possibility to engage in discussions, reflection and actions with transformative potential, can empower students by interrupting the imbalance of power between them and module leaders.

Policy enactment, assessment in Higher Education and empowerment

The transition from a modernist project of abstraction to a post-modernist project of "localised complexity" shaped two conceptualisations of policy: policy as discourse and policy as text (Ball, 1993: 10). On the one hand, grasping policy as discourse offers the possibility of recognising that through extension, policies are "about what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority" (Ball, 2006: 48). On the other hand, given the post-modernist departure from the humanist notion of socialisation which renders the subject as one who cannot speak, towards the "concept of subjectification", which sees the subject as being only positioned as one who cannot speak (Davies, 1994: 76, cited in Bacchi, 2000: 54), grasping policy as text makes visible how policy is both encoded and decoded by agents who exercise their agency, but who also struggle and compromise (Trowler, 2003: 131). At the intersection of the two different conceptualisations, policy as discourse and policy as text, it can be understood how "policies do not normally tell you what to do; they create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed" (Ball, 1993: 12). This post-modernist approach to policy, by acknowledging its constraining discursive nature, while also recognising the agency which lies in the hands of "writerly readers" (Ball, 1993: 12) of policy texts, constitutes the premise on which it can be asserted that policies are enacted, namely 'interpreted and translated by diverse policy actors' in learning environments, "rather than simply implemented" (Braun et al, 2010: 549).

While policy enactment is a useful lens for critically inquiring how constraint and agency manifest themselves in "big-P policy" formulated and legislated by governments, it also proves helpful in understanding how "little-p policies" formed within institutions (Ball, 2013, p.8) are creatively recontextualised in practice (Braun et al, 2011), such as in Higher Education, more generally, and Higher Education assessment practices, in particular. Boud, in his attempt to reframe assessment "as if learning was important" (Boud, 2007, p.14), by analysing assessment policy documents in the UK

¹ In the current structure of undergraduate courses, module leaders are usually taking responsibility for the management of the module and the delivery of lecture contents, whereas graduate teaching assistants or teaching fellows work as tutors and are responsible for the delivery of weekly seminars, where assessment support would be provided.

and Australia Higher Education institutions, identifies a dominant discourse of assessment developed at the intersection of a primary focus on "outcomes", "measurement" and "integrity" and a secondary focus on "feedback", "improvement" and "learning as a process". Building on these findings, Boud (2007, p.17) argues that:

The fundamental problem of the dominant view for assessment is that it constructs learners as passive subjects. That is, students are seen to have no role other than to subject themselves to the assessment acts of others, to be measured and classified. They conform to the rules and procedures of others to satisfy the needs of an assessment bureaucracy: they present themselves at set times for examinations over which they have little or no influence and they complete assignments which are, by and large, determined with little or no input from those being assessed.

Similarly, speaking of monological approaches to assessment, Fecho (2011, p.32, italics in original) asserts that "If assessment is always something that is done *to us* rather than *with us* or *by us*, it will rarely ever be *for us*". However, Reynold and Trehan (2000, cited in Tan, 2004), suggest that the tendency of hierarchy to persist in student-teacher relations can transform even participative approaches into subtle disciplining techniques. Furthermore, Tan (2004, p. 661), building on this contention in their research about alternatives to the dominant assessment discourses, suggests that the disadvantaged position of students as "subjects of unilateral power" of teachers, complicate supposedly participatory practices, such as self-assessment, by enhancing, not only their liberating, but also, their disciplining potential.

Contrastingly, as the discourses which inhabit policies are open to interpretation given the possibility to contest the meaning of policy texts, there are many attempts to re-construct students as active agents in assessment. This is either by creatively translating assessment policies into empowering practices or by rewriting them. One telling example is the way in which practices of formative assessment, inspired by the work of Black and Williams (1998, cited in Boud, 2007), gained popularity in Higher Education and were either used to reshape policy texts or as a basis for creative enactment. Likewise, the popular advocacy in favour of student self-assessment in academic literature reflects an urge to challenge teacher's "unilateral power" as the basis for assessment practices (Tan, 2004, p.661). Importantly, notwithstanding perverse effects of marketisation in education, such as social closure, less collegiality, increased hierarchisation, based on social class, and a focus on attracting cost-efficient students (Adams, 2014), the wider current discourse in Higher Education, while perceiving students as customers rather than beneficiaries of Higher Education (Harland, 2009; Temple, 2012; McPhee and D'Esposito, 2018), has created the impetus for them "to be far more likely now than at any time previously to challenge methods of assessment and to expect greater input into the assessment process on their part" (Francis, 2008, p.547).

The efforts to re-constitute students as active agents in assessment practices is subscribed to the wider Higher Education discourse of empowerment which understands places of learning not only as potential places of social control (Illich, 1971, cited in McPhee and D'Esposito, 2018) but also as "potential places of empowerment" (McPhee and D'Esposito, 2018, p. 156). And while the complexity of the term "empowerment" implies that its definition varies across educational contexts (Francis, 2008), for the purpose of this chapter two formulations will be taken into account.

On the one hand, this paper is built on the definition inspired by Freire (1971, cited in McPhee and D'Esposito) and formulated by McPhee and D'Esposito (2018, p. 156):

Empowerment refers to the possibility of accessing spaces that provide moments of discussion, reflection and actions with transformative potential that require active participation.

On the other hand, the paper rests on Leach et al's (2001) two-fold definition of empowerment in the assessment context, which takes into account both the individual level, where it sees empowerment as the ability of students to make personal decisions about how they are assessed, and also the community level, at which empowerment translates into the ability of students to take together, as a community, decisions concerning how they will be assessed.

Context

The first section of UCL's Academic Manual chapter entitled 'Assessment Framework for Thought Programmes' holds that assessment "*must* develop students' knowledge and understanding as well as measuring attainment", but also that through assessment students "*should*" be engaged "as partners in their education, and as co-producers of knowledge" (University College London, 2018, p.7, italics in original). Following from this, the policy establishes that "assessment tasks *must* enable students to demonstrate the extent to which they have attained and exceeded the intended learning outcomes" (University College London, 2018, p.7), but also that "development teams *should* consider whether assessment... encourages the development of autonomous learners" (University College London, 2018, p.7-8).

The choice of the words, "must", in the case of measuring attainment, and "should", when it comes to engaging students as partners, reflects an increased emphasis on students as passive rather than active agents, and a disequilibrium between the agentic power of students and the power of module leaders and programme developers enabled by the assessment policy, to constrain and render them as "subjects of unilateral power" (Tan, 2004:661). However, as the context analysed in this chapter will demonstrate, UCL's assessment policy follows the dominant assessment discourse in Higher Education, whilst also challenging it, as it opens possibilities for student empowerment by recognising, respecting, protecting and promoting their agency in relation to assessment practices. The project of letting students decide on their own assignments came about as a result of enabling students' agency within the scope of the fertile ground offered by an assessment policy which values students as partners.

The Literacy, Language and Communication module is a compulsory module in year 1 for the BA Education Studies being pursued at the time of writing by the two student co-authors at UCL Institute of Education. The module introduces students to a range of disciplinary perspectives on learning-related literacy practices in formal and informal education settings and digital environments. Students are exposed to key ideas in literacy and language studies and explore contemporary forms of communication for learning and working in diverse contexts. Students have the opportunity to engage with and create 'literacy artefacts' and 'multimodal texts', whilst focusing on how different modes and media remodel understandings about meaning-making. Whilst the module is laid out so that difference in knowledge production is explored and fostered, the final assessment modalities for the module do not reflect this openness: a group presentation and a 2000-word essay. As such, there is a clear mismatch between the richness of literacy practices discussed in the module and the scarcity of modes allowed for the assignment. In order to remedy this situation without impeding on validation rules, students were invited to combine their essay with output of their choice (artefact, installation, video recording, board game) as an additional resource in the appendices (for further exploration, please see the afterword to this chapter). In a face-to-face session, Diana asked the module leader Nicole why the assessment modalities for the module did not reflect the module's focus on how different contemporary modes of communication and media alter the production and sharing of knowledge. This opened the possibility for enacting,

namely creatively translating, the UCL assessment policy so that the equilibrium between agency and constraint would be restored. Taking the question seriously, while also recognising, respecting, protecting and promoting students' agency, Nicole decided to allow her students to decide what they wanted to do in terms of assessment.

In their cohort, Diana and Nnenna, were the only students to accept this invitation and challenge (see afterword to this chapter for an exploration). Their experience of shaping their own assessments, together with the experience of the module leader of facilitating the learning space so that the students could exercise their agency in assessment practices, act as the basis for this paper.

Significantly, the fact that the two students are, together with their module leader, co-authors of this chapter is also subscribed to the aim of challenging the hierarchy of power between students and teaching staff in Higher Education. Rather than being studied, the two students exercise their agency in shaping the purpose, the structure and the content of a study in accordance with their struggles, curiosities and aspirations as students passionate about social justice in education and co-creating their learning journey in the degree they are pursuing. Luckily, the UCL policy on "Connected Curriculum" (University College London, 2019a) which informs its "Education Strategy 2016-21" (University College London, 2016) and its 20-year strategy *UCL 2034* (University College London, 2019b), with its strong emphasis on "research based-education" and on "engaging all UCL students in research and inquiry", opens the possibility for such a choice in enacting it.

In practice: letting students decide

This section constitutes a reflection of both the students and the module leader on how empowerment resulted from inviting the students to decide why, how and what they wanted to do for their assessment within the Language, Literacy and Communication module.

The advantages of letting students decide on their assessments

By deciding why, how and what students wanted to do for their Language, Literacy and Communication assessment, they have experienced empowerment by engaging in discussions, reflections and actions with transformative potential. These themes are all explored in the following individual accounts.

After challenging the more traditional type of assessment which she found disconnected from the learning objectives of the module, Diana did not expect that the module leader would extend the invitation to students to shape their assignments. Even though she was taken by surprise when the module leader opened this possibility for them, Diana immediately decided to embrace the challenge especially because she considered the invitation a unique opportunity to take more ownership of her learning journey within the module in particular and the degree in general. In making this decision, Diana compared the amount of additional work required with the benefits of exerting more agency than usual. The decisive factor for her in this dilemma was the fact that she found the additional work required to offer her the possibility to engage in a creative endeavour and to make her academic work more meaningful. Once given the opportunity to shape her assessment, Diana first spent time reflecting on the aim she wanted her work to serve. She decided to align the assessment aim with her overarching personal purpose to challenge unequal power relations. Then, she chose to own the process by creating a learning journey for herself in which she started from her own experiences, identified patterns, complemented them with theoretical perspectives and finally

transited towards action in the real world. In terms of the content and the final form of the assessment, Diana ended up creating a digital portfolio showcasing a video time-lapse following her creation of a collage and using that as the basis for her final essay. The choice of collage enabled Diana to create a new whole form of expression from an assemblage of different forms, a lucrative technique for her aim to trace the role played by the multimodal texts and imagery of Romani language primers in the creation of Roma children identities. At the intersection of her choice of the why, how and what for the assessment, Diana was able to enhance the breadth and depth of her learning by building coherence between the aims of the module, her personal experiences, struggles and aspirations. Lastly, as a result of her self-designed assessment approach, she was also inspired to take the decision to enrol in a Summer School where she could take action to support Roma culture.

Similarly, Nnenna also did not feel obliged to take on extra work, but felt compelled to explore a topic that was of interest to her as much in a personal way as her interest was academic. There were moments at which Nnenna asked herself whether she should have taken on this opportunity to create a separate portfolio and wondered if writing an essay would have been easier. She knew that if she wanted to she could decide not to submit the appendix and revert to submitting just an essay. It was this sense of freedom that made her want to submit and put in extra work even more. She did not feel obliged to the module leader to hand in extra work, yet more so to herself because she knew that this was an opportunity that she might not get to experience again during her time as an undergraduate student. Working on the appendix gave her a great deal of energy and joy which made all the extra work seem worth it. The purpose of Nnenna's assignment was to explore the relation between literacy and language histories and how these shape personal identities. In shaping her assignment, she engaged in a reflective process that drew a connection between language histories and her own lived experiences. Moreover, through discussions with her parents and her brother, Nnenna was able to also anchor her exploration in the literacy communities she has been part of. As a result, she chose to use her appendix to discuss, illustrate and filter the concept of multimodality through the lens of her own language history and her literacy communities. Attached to her essay, Nnenna created her own multimodal language history by creating poems, paintings and collages, all connecting the academic literature, theory and concepts to her own personal experiences. While the essay she wrote was also part of the creation process, it was the combination of research, multimodal artefacts, and the curating of all the pieces together into one assignment that made her feel as if some actual action was taking place. For Nnenna, the curating process also enhanced the overall meaningfulness of the assignment and helped her construct an assessment with purpose. Last but not least, one of Nnenna's main insights is that the enhanced sense of freedom spurring from the fact that she was able to express by using multimodality feelings she could not convey through words, generated in turn an increased sense of responsibility.

Both Diana and Nnenna consider that their approaches were rooted in creativity on two different levels. On the one hand, they consider that by being able to decide on the form of their assessment, creativity manifested itself as a result of their ability to depart from essay writing. The students experienced the assessment process as liberating because they engaged in a more natural way of learning which enabled them to bring their whole selves into the learning space. On the other hand, Diana and Nnenna found that creativity was to a certain extent required in the process of defining their overall approaches. In a sense, they think that challenging traditional practices require creative interpretations of assessment guidelines and teacher-student hierarchical relations. Creativity related to the shape of assignments and the process of assessment was seen by the two students as increasing their agency in the epistemic community of their module.

The challenges of letting students decide on their assessments

Diana and Nnenna both recognise an aspect of loneliness embedded in their acceptance of the invitation to shape their assessment for three main reasons: Firstly, they were the only two students taking the Language, Literacy and Communication module who decided to choose to accept the invitation to decide why, how and what they want to do for their assignment. The fact that their peers did not jump on board with them, closed some of the opportunities to share with them thoughts and discuss feelings about their work in a way that they usually can do when writing essays. The discussions around the essay part of the assignment were also hampered, as for Diana and Nnenna the essay and the creative project could not be separated.

Secondly, the experimental approach to assessment, required them to put in more work than it would have been necessary if they had decided to only write essays. Because of the fulfilment this approach gave them, they did not mind the higher workload. However, they were both consciously aware that doing extra work allowed for other students to perceive them in a negative light. They were aware of a certain 'nerd' discourse circulating within university spaces, including their own, that suggests that doing a lot of academic work and enjoying it is not considered cool or compatible with being a socially successful student. By doing this assignment in a way that implied a voluntary commitment to an increased workload, they felt that they were feeding into this 'nerd' discourse.

Thirdly, Diana and Nnenna were challenged by the fact that they had to put in extra work without additional support or guidance. The amount of support available to them from their seminar tutors was the same as for all the other students: formative feedback on a draft. They would have benefited from extended tutor's support so that it would cover aspects related to formulating the purpose, designing the process and choosing the form of assessment. Diana and Nnenna consider that tackling the three issues outlined above would make the experience of shaping their assessment a less solitary learning journey.

Both students consider that the lonely journey resulted from the fact that the emphasis on empowerment was on an individual, rather than a collective level. In retrospect, they find the experiment as giving individual learners the opportunity to decide why, how and what they want to do in terms of assessment, even though the question that inspired this invitation, and the invitation itself, was addressed to all students. However, they think that the experiment was not framed so that it implied shared moments of discussion, reflection and actions between the students enrolled in the module, or between the students who accepted the invitation and tutors.

Furthermore, thinking about not only the module community, but the wider degree community, Diana and Nnenna found that the creative interpretation of assessment guidelines through this experiment was in tension with the other traditional assignments that were due in the same period. While the Language, Literacy and Communication assessment experiment was empowering, it was isolated and the students had to balance the increased workload with the requirements of other modules. They had to strategically choose where to use their time and priorities. And yet, the role the assignment took became much more than a mere assessment for the purpose of gaining a good grade. Diana and Nnenna both saw the assessment as a form of identity work that they needed to complete, once they had started exploring these aspects of self. Their workload on this module was framed by the wider university assessment practices, meaning that the dominant discourses around doing well and the pressure to get good marks remained. Therefore, they had to balance the time and effort invested in the empowering assignment and consider carefully marking criteria and the assignments of their other modules. This was complicated by the fact that they had significantly less experience with shaping their assignment than with the dominant approach of writing essays. Thus,

although the experiment was an exciting challenge, their unfamiliarity with this kind of process made them perceive a somewhat increased risk of failure and an enhanced uncertainty related to how their efforts would be reflected in their final marks.

Diana's and Nnenna's discussion and conclusion

UCL's assessment policy was creatively interpreted and translated, so therefore enacted rather than implemented (Braun et al, 2010), by both the module leader and also the two students co-authoring this chapter. Following a question raised by one of the students, who challenged the way in which the module was assessed, the module leader decided to experiment and let students shape their assessments. As a result of the experiment, for the two students an equilibrium was restored between measuring students' attainment and engaging them as true partners in their education.

Students' acceptance of the invitation required their active participation on all three levels of an empowering learning space: "discussion, reflection and actions with transformative potential" (McPhee and D'Esposito, 2017, p.156). The transformative potential of the experiment is concentrated in the experiment's disruption of the Higher Education dominant assessment discourse which constitutes students as "passive subjects" (Boud, 2007, p.17). Through discussions, reflection and action, Diana and Nnenna formulated the purposes, the processes, the forms and the contents of their assignments. On an individual level, by being given the space to exercise their agency, these two students enjoyed the freedom and took the responsibility for designing a meaningful learning experience for themselves. Consequently, as the unilateral power of the module leader to define assessment was interrupted, these students have been reconstituted as active agents.

Throughout their personal accounts it can be observed that the students' approaches differed with regards to the purposes they embedded in their assignments, the assessment processes they decided to follow and also to the final assignment form and content they created. However, consistent with Leach et al's (2001) understanding of individual empowerment in the assessment context as the ability of students to make personal decisions about how they are assessed, both students found their ability to exercise agency by deciding the why, what and how of assessment led to empowerment. Besides experiencing a greater feeling of satisfaction when they submitted their work, empowerment made them more engaged and personally invested in the overall assessment process. And while it can be argued that traditional forms of assessment, such as essay writing, allow students decision making powers, it is the extent to which this empowering experiment allowed them to do so, that makes the two students, by paraphrasing Fecho (2011, p.32), assert that assessment became something that was done *with them* and *by them*, rather than *to them*.

From the students' perspective, this means that they experienced: the opportunity to bring their whole selves into the learning process by creatively engaging in a more natural way of learning; an enhanced perceived meaningfulness of the assessment; an increased engagement resulting from the greater freedom and responsibility embedded in their ownership of the assessment process; and finally, an increase in the depth and breadth of learning generated by their deeper engagement with the course content and by the coherence they built within a modular programme.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that from the students' perspectives, they were challenged by the fact that they experimented individual, rather than collective, empowerment. Without having a shared space for discussion, reflection and actions, meant that they felt certain levels of disempowerment on a collective level. In the students' views the tensions spurring from this are: a solitary nature of the learning journey, an increased amount of time and effort required on their

part, which was not matched by an increased amount of support or guidance on the part of the tutors, and lastly, pressures to balance the new approach with the traditional ones and with the overall focus on high standards of other modules. These in turn render the experiment an isolated attempt which did not to sharpen the ability of the student community to make decisions together concerning how they will be assessed.

Overall, from the students' perspective, in their capacity as active agents, two conclusions emanate from this paper.

Firstly, when the potential for enactment of assessment policies is used to empower students, they suggest that individual empowerment can be developed using a matrix defined horizontally by the power to exercise agency, and vertically by practices with transformative potential. They think that horizontally, individual empowerment should reflect students' ability to decide the what, the how and the why of their learning. Vertically, they propose that individual empowerment should be concerned with the transformative potential of discussion, reflection and actions.

Secondly, and equally important, the students conclude that if empowerment is to fulfil its potential to challenge unilateral power relations and the exaggerated focus on measurement of the dominant assessment discourse in Higher Education, there is a need to attend to its individual, but also to its collective nature.

Nicole's afterword

Initially, most students on the module were thrilled to be given the opportunity to choose their own assignment and they put a lot of thought into their choices. Not many students did rise to that challenge, in the end, with the vast majority of students choosing the traditional essay. The two students who developed their own projects found the experience enriching and beneficial. Above all, these students felt that having a sense of agency and being responsible for their learning provided them with the opportunity to be self-directed learners and enabled them to connect content from different modules to such an extent that the programme took on a more coherent experience. I experienced the students' enthusiasm and interest as infectious and it soon became obvious that more time was spent on module content than would have been spent otherwise. This links to the two major challenges or concerns Diana and Nnenna highlighted in relation to developing their own projects: time and support.

From the viewpoint of a university course or module leader, the issues with this kind of assessment go deeper, yet. There are formal requirements, quality assurance standards and benchmarks that must be met. The danger is that by handing the responsibility for the assessment over to the students they may not necessarily be best placed or best equipped to make relevant judgement calls. Another concern raised with this kind of assessment relates to fairness. If seen through fully, where an output replaces the essay altogether, how is it fair to compare an essay with the production of a poem or a film, for example? Whilst academic rigour and fairness certainly are relevant and need detailed and considered thoughts, the argument of fairness actually becomes moot, when we consider how many students we may be excluding from a fair assessment through our over-emphasis on written essays.

From the module leader's perspective, the outcomes of the assessments were of incredible quality and demonstrated keen engagement with the module concepts. As such, it would be a shame if we did not pursue this alternative form of assessment further. Indeed, the subsequent cohorts of

students was also offered this freedom and was provided with a more structured approach to the completion of the personal project. At this stage, due to the length process of institutional validation procedures the students still only have the opportunity to create a project or artefact in addition to the essay rather than instead. However, the new cohort of students were offered more support in relation to the development of their projects, were provided with supporting materials and tutorials with me as module leader, as they are losing out on peer-support. Gradually, the uptake of this option increased from Diana and Nnenna's year, where they represented 2% of the cohort to this year's 10% of the student cohort. Excitingly, due to the increased support provided students were also more adventurous and daring in their approach, with one student having baked banana bread and another student having introduced a board game to represent their learning. This is by no means the end of the road for a project as daring as this one. Instead, I have in the meantime been able to build in an assessment choice in a newly validated module. Students will be asked to create an artefact and will then be able to choose whether they present their critical commentary in writing or as an oral presentation.

What this project shows, is that given the right support, students do embrace opportunities to take responsibility for their learning and to take a more active role in shaping their educational experiences. Not only did the two students take charge of their assessments and how they would best represent their learning, they also engaged with the wider implications of such a novel approach. At the UCL Education Conference 2018 Diana presented "Assessments: letting the students decide" to a standing room only audience of academics and educational leaders. Also, this chapter is down to the students' engagement with and commitment to exploring the topic further. As such, Diana and Nnenna are the best examples for how empowering such opportunities can be.

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