



Empowering student ownership through flexibility, authenticity, and co-creation

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As the smoke clears from a challenging three years, the silver lining becomes visible: the requirement of wholly online teaching has catapulted us 10 years into the future. Educators were forced to use technology and techniques we avoided in the past, perhaps due to time pressures, reliance on our traditional teaching approaches, or a general lack of onus to change. But the global pandemic pushed us to bend existing methodologies and digital technologies to suit our purposes; we thought outside the box to craft meaningful methods for content delivery and online assessment. In one semester we solved conundrums of efficiency and delivery that had plagued us for over a decade. Now looking forward, we are equipped with our experiences to design accessible, blended subjects using the best elements of digital and face-to-face practices.

Pastoral care and wellbeing also came to the forefront of our approach. Instead we opted for flexibility, creativity, and co-creation; somehow learning at a distance brought us closer to the needs of our students, and also our colleagues, through empathy and compassion. By sharing these unifying, albeit distressing circumstances, we listened more closely, and we responded accordingly.

This talk will describe simple, yet effective methods employed during and after the pandemic which empower students to feel connected to their studies. Through flexibility, authenticity, and co-creation, assessment becomes a collaborative, and dare I say enjoyable learning experience, as opposed to an acute stressor of proving one's worth.

I stepped back from filling in tiny bubbles while a stern invigilator stared over your shoulder as you attempted to justify 50% of your mark for a 12-week semester in under two hours. I opted out of invasive online monitoring platforms to ensure students weren't collaborating or looking up answers. Instead, tests and exams were made to be open-collaboration, open resource, and open all day. This allowed students to communicate, debate, even research their answers in the absence of a ticking clock. The top students could demonstrate their deep understanding of the material in a way which couldn't previously be conveyed by selecting 'option C' on an MCQ. Students embraced this format, commenting that the assessment itself reinforced or even enlightened their comprehension of the material.

Assessing their answers and reading how well many were able to explain challenging concepts in their own words spawned an idea for a new assessment task involving peer-to-peer teaching, and co-creation. The brief for students was simple: create a 3-5 minute learning resource about any topic delivered this semester. You may work individually or in a group of up to six; you can make a video, a podcast, flashcards, Claymation, a human pyramid, anything you like as long as it teaches a concept clearly. Most importantly, have fun with it. The submissions were nothing short of inspiring. Students clearly got very excited about the task, put in significant thought, expressed their creativity, and felt ownership over this portfolio-building activity. Their learning resources were then added to an ever-growing bank of student-generated content for future cohorts to access.

Blending these assessment techniques with interactive technology-driven self-directed learning resources created an environment where students felt support, and a sense of ownership over their learning experience.