Case Study: Live Industry Projects and Experimentation of Pedagogy and Teaching Methodologies on Assessment and Feedback

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Introduction
In 'The Element: How Finding Your Passion Changes Everything', Ken Robinson identities some key concerns which I identify with, in assessment and feedback in higher education.

Context of the Live Industry Project
In 2019, in the first semester I launched a live industry project with a group of MSc students – the group are highly motivated, engaged and incredibly passionate about their subject area. The company is global and forward thinking, and whilst I realised that the prospect of industry engagement and feedback was exciting from a student perspective, I soon came to understand that the same prospect of presenting ideas to an industry panel at a Global head office was in equal measure petrifying for students, who were anxious and eager about employment opportunities in the fashion industry.

The company was Converse who are part of the NIKE INC group; the brief was based around sustainable measures and initiatives they could employ that would relate and be relevant to specific European markets in which they were trying to expand.

Challenges for the students
As often is the case with industry projects, limited information about the business is disclosed, and so the students are initially tasked with understanding the business and then undertaking an industry challenge.

Inevitably, the possibility of failure to match the expectations of the company or outline a suitable proposal is real and a valid concern, in some instances I would argue that is re-establishing the meaning of achievement in higher education that is important and necessary. Is achievement a grade, or is it a learning curve? And most importantly, what do students consider to be achievement. A concern is that for students, often achievement is linked to a grade. I would argue that a grade in the fashion industry will not define a student's future; instead I believe that it will be defined by courage, determination and hard work. However, my understanding is that students can define themselves by their grade and that can be very damaging (if this is for a journal at some point, it would be good to bring in citations from the literature to back up your feelings/beliefs/arguments).

Outcomes of the Live Industry Project: expected and unexpected
My intention throughout this brief was to try to explore a methodology which would allow me to facilitate learning for learning's sake. Whilst inevitably a grade would frame this learning experience eventually, my hope was for student learning to have been experienced and understood in advance of a grade, possibly determining the achievement of the work for students; furthermore I wanted to explore if I could credit risk and failure.

"The fact is that given the challenges we face, education doesn't need to be reformed -- it needs to be transformed. The key to this transformation is not to standardize education, but to personalize it, to build achievement on discovering the individual talents of each child." (Robinson, 2009)

In exploring Robinson's ideas around personalising education, discovering the individual talents of each student also seemed important. This brief encouraged students to work in groups, and therefore delivering individual feedback can at times become more difficult. Whilst each group engaged in tutorials around idea development and justification, the biggest learning outcome came two weeks before the final presentation to industry. Each group was allocated a time when they would present in front of their lecturer and the presentations were recorded; the next day, each group would again meet their lecturer and as a group they would watch the recorded presentation and perform a critique. Initially the students critiqued their own presentations; interestingly the majority of the group members self-critiqued their own individual presentation style, and many saw the exercise as an opportunity to look at presentation skills. My focus was to explore the value of the content of the presentations and to also offer critique. A strength was that each group's recording and screening was on an individual basis with the lecturer, and this allowed a safe space without an external audience for the group and the lecturer to openly and honestly discuss the strengths and weaknesses. Honesty and a genuine appraisal from and to the lecturer was significantly important in this environment, and to encourage this honesty between the groups. This approach to feedback allowed students to take ownership of their own feedback, and to understand the process further; it had no impact on the grading of the assignment and so allowed for risk and failure to be explored without fear:

"to support learner perseverance, they need to be substantively persuasive and genuine, rather than being gratuitously complimentary (Correll, Spencer, & Zanna 2004). *Thus there is merit in teachers emphasising that the glass is 'half-full' rather than 'half-empty' but also in calibrating positive messages with knowledge of individual learners and their achievements."* (MacLellan, 2013, p.9)

Another interesting outcome of these conversations with the individual groups was the idea of self-belief, because this cohort of students were extremely capable and I perceived that their self-belief was very much evident in this activity. It was my perceptions of the group which supported my engagement with industry and I believed they could offer great insights and value. On the contrary, with regard to self-belief and in relation to this current brief and subsequent ones, I became aware of a number of times when students highlighted that they felt I believed in them more than they believed in themselves. This observation always took me by surprise. I consider that my role or aim is not to instil belief, but it made me think about this idea of belief and its importance to students. I am a devoted Desert Island Discs listener. Whilst listening to Jimmy Carr's interview, he made an interesting statement about self-belief, one that resonated with me. *"It's interesting that thing of self-belief, it often does come from someone else, it's a pivotal thing".*

The next key learning curve in this brief was the presentations in Amsterdam to an Industry panel of the Converse Global team. Students presented their work in front of their peers and to a panel of six industry leaders including the Director of Buying, Planning & Merchandising Converse Digital Direct, Western Europe and the GM Digital Commerce Western Europe at Converse. As had been the case with the initial presentations, honestly and genuine appraisal was evident from the industry panel. For many of the students on this course, it was their first time presenting in front of industry, whose focus was not on grading but on forwarding thinking, risk and experimentation. At this stage in the process, a grade was also not awarded and there was also no winning group; all of this was important in allowing students to just experience and learn for learning's sake. They were not defined by one mechanism of achievement, and whilst later when grades were awarded, this may impact on how they defined the work; important feedback and learning had been experienced and understood before that point.

In response to the experience of presenting to industry, the students' feedback was engaged and reflective; this again was in advance of any grades being awarded and therefore I feel it captures the learning that took place:

"It was such a fantastic opportunity and great experience for us all in the future. Having the chance to visit their Headquarters and listening to various individuals about how they obtained their roles and what their jobs entails on a daily basis was fascinating especially as most of us hope to have jobs in similar roles in the future. Also presenting our ideas to Converse and witnessing their reactions to our projects along with their enthusiasm towards us and of course being able to receive industry feedback on our assignments was a once in a life time opportunity ....it was an invaluable experience that will benefit us in the future and has helped us to network with people in the industry outside of Ireland"

[student feedback]