



## Blogging as a form of creative authentic assessment for inclusive education

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### ABSTRACT

Whilst some disciplines in higher education encourage creative practices and expression in their assessments, they are less common in others, leading to a disparity in creative skillsets which are beneficial for multiple cognitive activities, such as critical thinking and leadership skills. Educators may also fear that implementing an assessment which has more flexibility and opportunity for students to express themselves in a format which benefits *their* learning, would be harder to grade in an equitable way. Therefore, creative assessments sometimes pose a risk to educators which could lead to perceived failure and lack of self-efficacy. Students in turn might feel anxious with different options for assessment and looser ways of presenting knowledge without a more structured and scaffolded approach. However, the implementation of creative, sustainable assessments can be integral in the learning journeys of students to think differently, which can create space for innovation and development of critical thinking skills for employability. This paper explores the use of blog writing as a sustainable creative option in assessing student knowledge and development of reflective practice. It draws upon personal experience of using blogging as a form of assessment as a Module Leader and comments on the prevalence and affectivity of blog writing in the development of IT-based technical skills and in the promotion of original development of ideas, reducing the potential misuse of AI in facilitating learning. It will also comment on the need for sustainable assessments and joy of learning to enhance student engagement and performance.

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**Keywords:** creative, assessment, sustainable, critical-thinking, employability

### Creative Assessment Practices- a disparity of embedment

“As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another’s voices, in recognizing one another’s presence.”  
(bell hooks, *Teaching To Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* p.8).

This influential quote by bell hooks is a reminder that learning can be and is *supposed* to be transformative. In amongst the pressures of funding cuts, student retention targets and new quality frameworks, we sometimes forget that learning and teaching can be joyful, creative, critically reflexive *and* contribute to positive student outcomes.

Whilst creative forms of assessment such as video presentations, mind maps and even poetry tend to be firmly embedded in arts-related disciplines, they are rarely used in STEM-based subjects. Yet, creativity is a

key skill for problem-solving and the development of novel solutions within the STEM disciplines of science, technology, engineering and maths, and is key to the improvement of socio-economic challenges faced by the world (Vincent-Lancrin et al., 2019). This disconnect goes further back into secondary education. A study by the British Science Association in 2022 revealed that young people aged 14-18 years old believe there is minimal overlap between STEM and what are deemed 'creative' subjects (such as the arts, humanities, languages and literature). This has created siloed ways of learning which leads to a deficit in potential problem-solving for the future (British Science Association [BSA] Report, 2022). In the report, 1000 young people were asked to rank a range of actions in importance regarding future well-being, with almost 35% stating that encouraging creativity was *very important* in supporting this. A further 45% ranked this action as *somewhat important*. Overall, young people believed that having creative skillsets and diverse perspectives are required for both the imagining of new futures and successfully addressing complex problems (BSA report, 2022).

Embedding creative and flexible forms of assessment, such as creating and maintaining a blog can be a practice which could be applied in any discipline, with a multitude of benefits and development of future skills required for employment and navigation of global challenges.

### **Blogging as a form of assessment :Why blog?**

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Blogging as a form of assessment is not a new academic practice, but the benefits to students in terms of self-reflection, development of critical thinking skills and even the enhancement of well-being are only surfacing now (Alsamadani, 2017; Campillo-Ferrer et al., 2021; Christie & Morris, 2019, 2021)

In an epistemic context, the use of blogging to foster critical pedagogy, whereby power structures and inequalities are examined to provoke an awakening of critical consciousness can enable students to help transform higher education institutions (HEIs) operating under neoliberalist models which demote equity and inclusive practices. Indeed, blogging by its very nature has the capacity to be discursive and interactive, promoting connection between individuals and idea-sharing to create the foundations of collaborative sustainable learning communities (Custin & Barkacs, 2010).

I have been blogging for about a year, which began as a passion project to muse about sustainability. I created and maintained my blog as a means of making sense of the world around me. It was an opportunity for self-reflection and problem-solving as I directed my stream of consciousness in a way which hopefully made sense for my readers. Through my personal experience of blog writing, I was then able to support my students in the setting up and creation of blogs for their own assessment.

As a Module Leader, having the opportunity to facilitate a summative assessment in the form of a blog, for students on a Blended and Online Education Master's Programme was exciting. Students (both internal and external colleagues working in HE) wrote a series of blog posts about their learning experiences and the application of learning to their roles after each unit of the module. They received formative feedback from the teaching team halfway through the module and signed an AI declaration to state whether AI had been used in the writing of the blog and to what extent. In addition, students shared links to their blogs on our Teams site and could comment on each other's posts.

I was concerned that it might not be comfortable for everyone to share their thoughts on an open platform and be graded on the content and level of reflexivity and criticality they conveyed. I was pleasantly surprised by the formal evaluation that the students provided. Overall, students looked forward to writing their posts and doing something a little bit 'different' to the usual essay/literature review/report that they

had been used to. One student even implemented blogging as a form of formative assessment for their own students after experiencing this as a learner.

It is always helpful to put ourselves in the shoes of students when designing and implementing assessments. By asking questions such as:

- How will this assessment enhance my students' skillsets?
- How can I best understand the learning that my students have experienced on this module through these assessments?
- How can I ensure that the use of AI (if used) is conducted in an ethical way which not only improves student learning, but maintains original thought and criticality?

Based on running a module where blogging was part of the summative assessment, I argue that this practice has the potential to achieve the above goals as well as being an enjoyable and reflective practice for students which can consolidate and expand their learning. However, a clear explanation of what sort of content the blog should include as well as examples of what this might look like are key to scaffolding students' learning with a new tool and a novel way of writing for some.

Having regular feedback on the structure and content of posts for students as a form of feedforward can help promote inclusion and aid neurodiverse students who may struggle with the requirements of such an open assessment. Moreover, it may help in the flexibility of responses, moving away from a generically structured essay, which may not allow for personal reflection or opinions to be expressed in a way that comes naturally.

The nature of blogging is that it has the potential to be continuous, so enabling students to write posts at regular intervals, after a lecture or a specific topic has been introduced and discussed is key to maintaining momentum and engagement. This self-directed learning is a core skill which is gained through the very nature of this type of assessment.

Blogging can still be critical and show persuasive arguments but also allows for a personal, reflexive element. Allowing written posts to be opinion-based and integrated with subject knowledge in a way which fosters critical thinking can also reduce the potential for the incorrect use of AI. This is linked to the concept that there is less room for the regurgitation of ideas and knowledge when the main purpose of a blog is for reflection on topics learned and individual ideas (Meakin, 2024; Rudolph et al., 2023). Blogging can create a platform for student voices to be heard and listened to through a series of posts, as they develop their opinions over time in comparison to one 3,000-word essay, through interaction with posts by other learners and lecturers who are teaching on the module. Blog posts do not need to be shared publicly, but still have the capacity for discussion between peers and lecturers, which in turn enhances learning. For instance, students who blogged on the Master's course said they found that reading and interacting with their peers' posts helped them understand different perspectives and similarities in thinking about educational topics.

#### Open educational practices and links to well-being

Blogging can also be viewed as a form of Open Educational Practice (OEP) which promotes active engagement and the potential to collaborate, enhance creativity and encourages skills such as interaction with new tools and self-management and autonomy over learning processes (Geser, 2007). Blogging as a form of open educational practice can also have social justice connotations and have the potential to be used in an ameliorative context (if applied to increase the

representation of diverse groups of students). This can be powerful in the support of decolonising and anti-racist practices in the context of education (Bali et al., 2020).

Christie and Morris (2019, 2021) speak about the benefits of blogging as an assessment to bring emotion and individual voices to a piece of work. They link blogging to increased well-being and improved engagement, although blogging initially caused some anxiety about the unknown nature of this type of assessment in comparison to more generic types, such as essays. The challenges and technicalities in setting up and using unfamiliar platforms were transformed into learning moments which were commented on by students in their blogs. When students can relate to the materials and assessment on their courses they may have more of a sense of self-responsibility for their own learning, which in turn increases engagement and positive student outcomes (Brown & Hirshfield, 2008).

## Conclusion

Blogging as a form of assessment can be initially intimidating to students who are not familiar with it and have little or no experience of setting up a blog, however the benefits to student learning and as a form of inclusive education can be seen in the application of this mode of creative assessment. It acts to reduce the inequalities in education by aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 4 “Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all”, through providing a flexible mode to communicate thoughts, subject knowledge, and development of arguments in a form which is continuous and promotes engagement with other learners and educators.

Whilst this form of assessment may not suit all courses, its openness and flexibility as well as student-centered mode of learning provides many opportunities for joyful and creative learning experiences which may result in positive student outcomes and link to an increase in emotional well-being (Hibsch & Mason, 2020). With clear scaffolding, milestones and understanding of why this assessment form has been chosen, students have more autonomy over their approach to learning with space for reflection which can be sustained over the duration of their time in higher education and beyond.

## Biography

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Bloggging as a form of creative authentic assessment for inclusive education

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