

Digital Literacy, Assessment and Higher Education

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Abstract : Recent evidence suggests that academic staff face difficulties in applying new technologies as a means of assessing higher order assessment outcomes such as critical thinking, problem solving and creativity. Although higher education institutional mission statements and course unit outlines purport the value of these higher order skills there is still some question about how well academics are equipped to design curricula and, in particular, assessment strategies accordingly. Despite a rhetoric avowing the benefits of these higher order skills, it has been suggested that academics set assessment tasks up in such a way as to inadvertently lead students on the path towards lower order outcomes. This is a controversial claim, and one that this paper seeks to explore and critique in terms of challenging the conceptual basis of assessing higher order skills through new technologies. It is argued that the use of digital media in higher education is leading to a focus on students' ability to use and manipulate of these products as an index of their flexibility and adaptability to the demands of the knowledge economy. This focus mirrors market flexibility and encourages programmes and courses of study to be rhetorically packaged as such. Curricular content has become a means to procure more or less elaborate aggregates of attributes. Higher education is now charged with producing graduates who are entrepreneurial and creative in order to drive forward economic sustainability. It is argued that critical independent learning can take place through the democratisation afforded by cultural and knowledge digitization and that assessment needs to acknowledge the changing relations between audience and author, expert and amateur, creator and consumer.

Keywords : higher education, curriculum, new technologies, assessment, higher order skills

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