



“... the ability to apply understanding in novel contexts, integrate insights across disciplines, and make ethical judgements in complex situations.”

The story below from Ding Global will be music to the ears of those struggling with dyslexia who often exhibit strong visual thinking abilities, excel at creative problem solving, can grasp big picture concepts, and are adept at thinking outside the box.

RESPONSIBLE TEACHING

When Agatha Christie published *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* in 1926, she upended the detective genre by introducing one of literature’s most famous unreliable narrators. The seemingly trustworthy village doctor who narrates the tale turns out to be the murderer, forcing readers to question everything they thought they knew about truth and reliability in storytelling.

Today we are witness to another death – or if not a death quite yet, then certainly a mortal wound. The traditional written assignment – that steadfast pillar of academic assessment for generations – lies bleeding at the hand of AI language models. True, the current generation of AI writing still bears its telltale fingerprints – those slight linguistic anomalies and structural patterns that give away its artificial origins. But AI is still in its infancy, and like Christie’s readers, educators find themselves questioning everything they once trusted about evaluating student learning.

But as any seasoned detective knows, first impressions in a case can be deceiving. Our recent webinar for Independent Higher Education (IHE) on AI and Assessment suggests something more nuanced: perhaps AI isn’t the perpetrator we initially suspected. Instead, it might be our key witness, revealing vulnerabilities in our assessment practices that have been there all along ...

Looking back through educational history, we see a consistent pattern: from the introduction of writing in ancient Greece (which Plato worried would weaken memory) to the advent of calculators in mathematics education, initial alarm about new technologies typically gives way to innovative adaptation that enhances rather than diminishes learning. Like any cold case reopened, these historical patterns offer valuable clues for our present situation.

This pattern holds true today. Our research and practical experience at Ding suggests that AI isn’t so much breaking assessment as it is revealing what was already broken – particularly our over-reliance on written work as the primary evidence of learning.

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The evidence points to a crucial distinction in what we're trying to evaluate: at one end lies declarative knowledge – facts, definitions, and basic comprehension that AI can indeed replicate convincingly. At the other end sits functioning knowledge – the ability to apply understanding in novel contexts, integrate insights across disciplines, and make ethical judgements in complex situations.

There's something revelatory in the Latin root of 'assessment' – 'assidere' – to sit beside. This isn't just etymological trivia, it's a profound reminder of what assessment should be – not an autopsy, but a living, breathing dialogue.

Yet somehow, we've pushed assessment to the margins of education – treating it as the thing that happens after the 'real' learning is done. It's as if we've forgotten that the act of evaluating understanding is itself perhaps the most valuable content we can offer our students. When we 'sit beside' our learners, engaging with their thinking in real-time, we're not just measuring it, we're catalysing it.

If we're to revive meaningful assessment, we need to reconsider our approach to time itself. "But there isn't enough time" is a common refrain we hear when suggesting more frequent interactive assessment practices. And yes, if we treat assessment as additional to content delivery, the maths doesn't work. But what if we flipped the equation.

Instead of asking how to fit more assessment around our content, we should be asking how to deliver less content to make space for deeper evaluation and engagement. This isn't about diminishing learning – it's about privileging the moments where learning is most likely to occur: in the dynamic space between understanding and application, theory and practice.

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