



**Interrogating myths
and opening doors:
towards more
authentic assessment
designs**

Sally Brown

and Kay Sambell

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A photograph of three white doors in a hallway, each with a black frame. The doors are set against a light-colored wall and a dark floor. The lighting is soft, creating a clean and professional atmosphere.

About today's session

- **Lots of university and college staff are keen to implement authentic assessment on their courses, but express hesitations about how feasible it is to design and implement approaches that stray away from traditional formats.**
- **In this interactive keynote, we plan to**
 - **explore some of the myths associated with authentic assessment**
 - **consider some of the multiple definitions of 'authentic assessment', unpacking consequences for the choices that designers might make**
 - **offer pragmatic solutions to choosing and using assessment formats that integrate assessment with learning.**



Do you know what the difference between a labyrinth and a maze is?

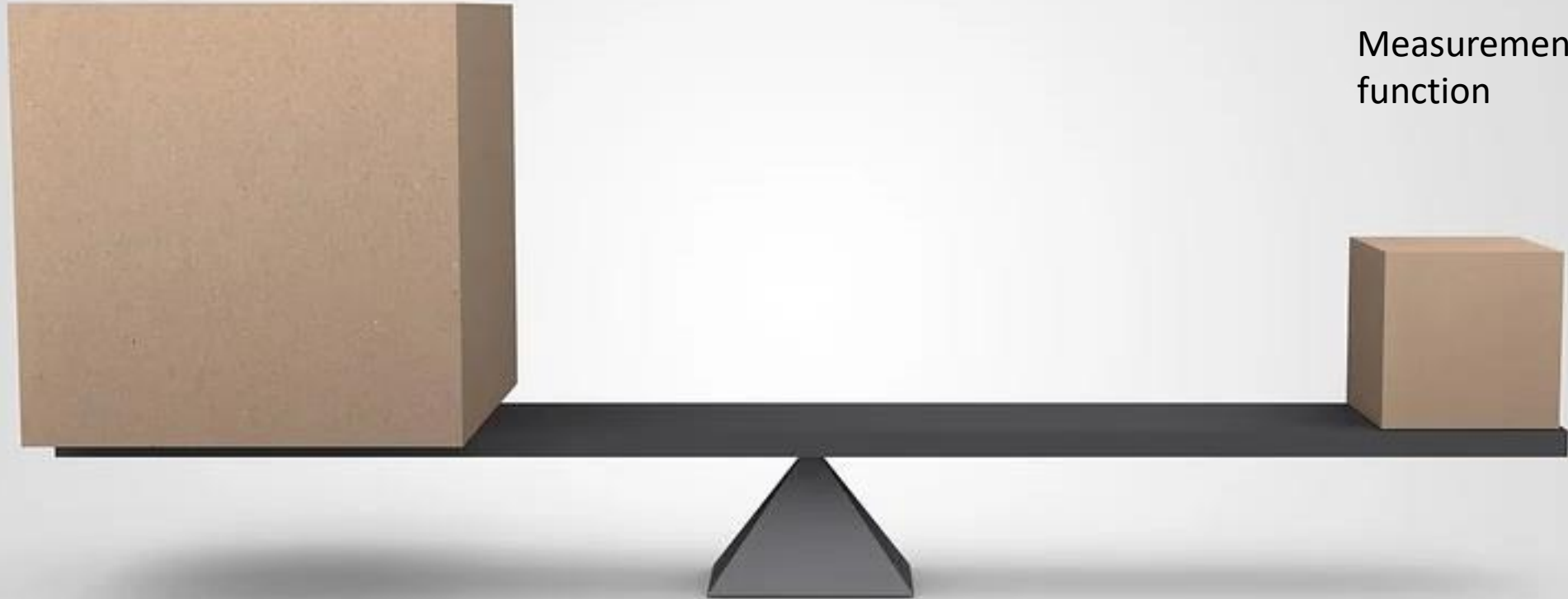
- **A maze is a path or collection of paths to a goal: it is easy to get lost and go wrong, which can be very frustrating;**
- **A labyrinth is a unicursal pattern, that is there is one way in and out, so once you enter, you follow a path to the centre and then back out again. They are often found in spiritual circumstances and can be used to aid peaceful contemplation.**
- **Authentic assessment is more like a labyrinth in that designing it can be straightforward and systematic, leading to positive outcomes.**
- **In myths labyrinths are often considered dangerous. We aim today to defuse some of that hazard!**

Why might we want to introduce more authenticity into our assessment practices?

- **Students often find it interesting and rewarding;**
- **Used well, it can be a driver for effective learning ;**
- **It can be a powerful means of developing students' higher order thinking skills;**
- **Authentic assessment tends to be invaluable in motivating students who recognise its validity and long term relevance;**
- **It can foster among students a wide range of life-relevant skills and attributes;**
- **There can be genuine rather than tokenistic opportunities for inclusive practice;**
- **Authentic approaches can help promote academic integrity;**
- **Tasks can link well to real-world challenges (if associated with industry, professions or civic groups).**

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

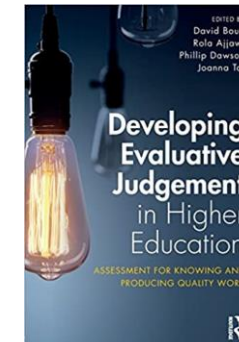
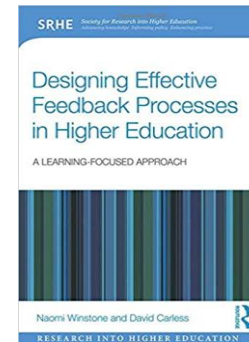
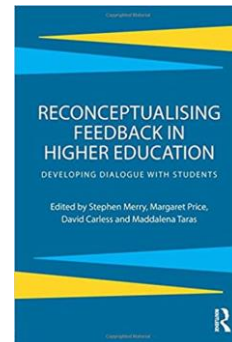
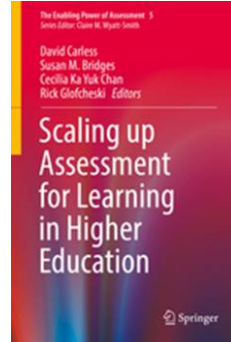
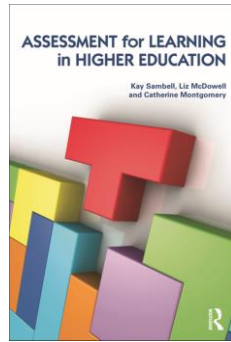
Learning
function



Measurement
function

Assessment for Learning: rethinking assessment to strike a better balance

Energise & engage by designing more **authentic**, learning-oriented assessment tasks

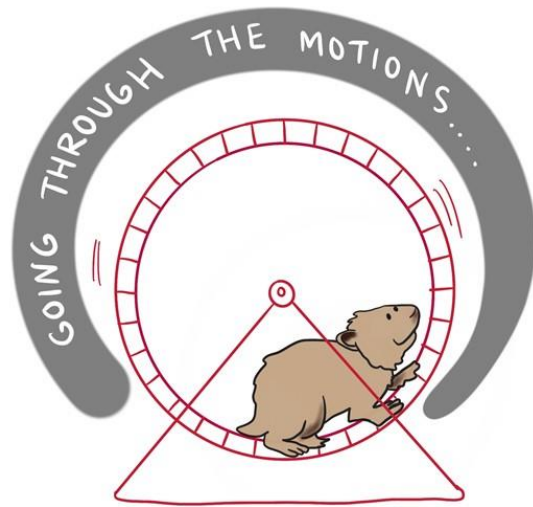


Enable student engagement with **guidance** and **feedback** processes

Empower learners to develop **evaluative** expertise and self-regulation

Towards more authentic tasks: why?

Using types of assessment that are more like the 'real things' that academics or professionals do in the field, and/or which they can see as having **relevance** in future, generally engage students more meaningfully than tasks which rely on triggering a set response



When have you used data from a diverse range of sources to solve a complex problem?

Tell us about when you have worked as part of a group and the challenges encountered

Can you describe a situation where you have had to work pragmatically with incomplete information?



The impact of assessment: addressing the challenges of student beliefs and attitudes about traditional assessments

'It's poor learning which you quickly forget. You just try to remember for the exam, then flush it out of your mind ready for the next exam.'



There's no obligation, you're writing for a set task and a set thing and once that's been achieved then that's it. You just copy down the books in a different language.

Normal assignments have no audience. I don't know what happens when they go in: they get read and they get sent back.

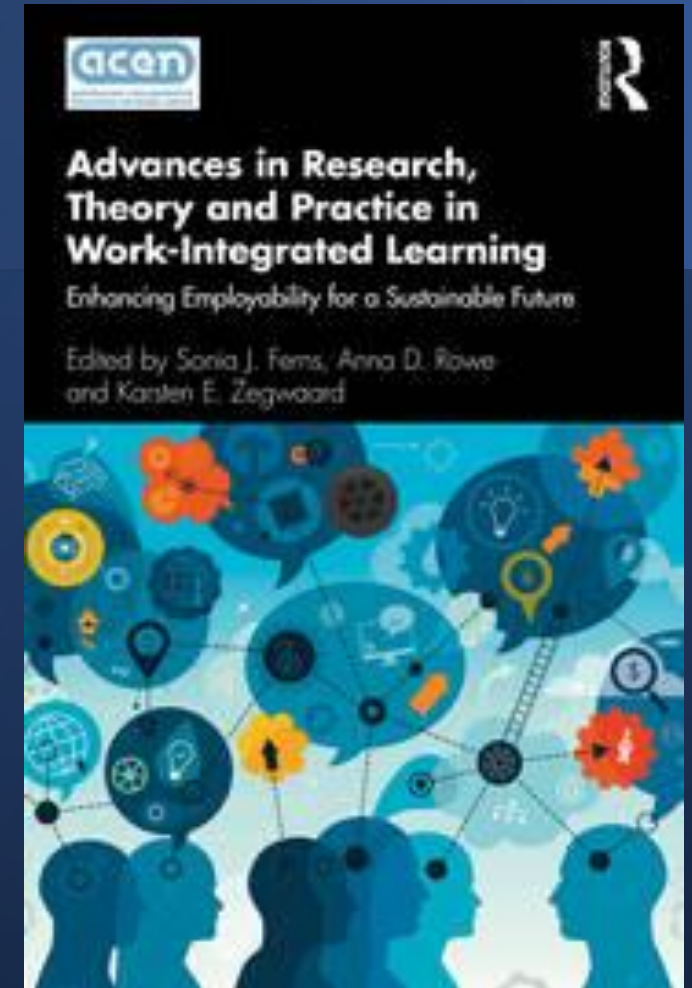
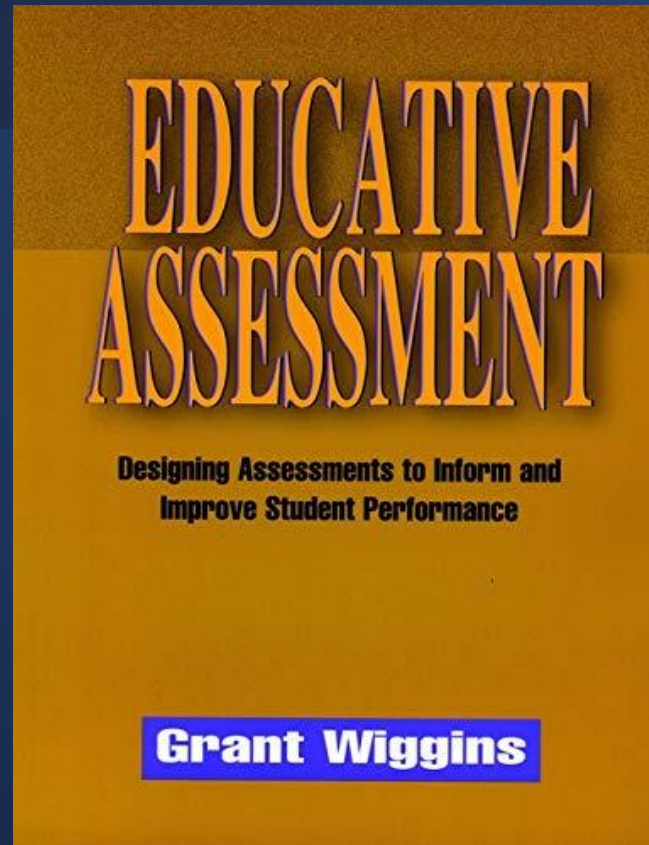
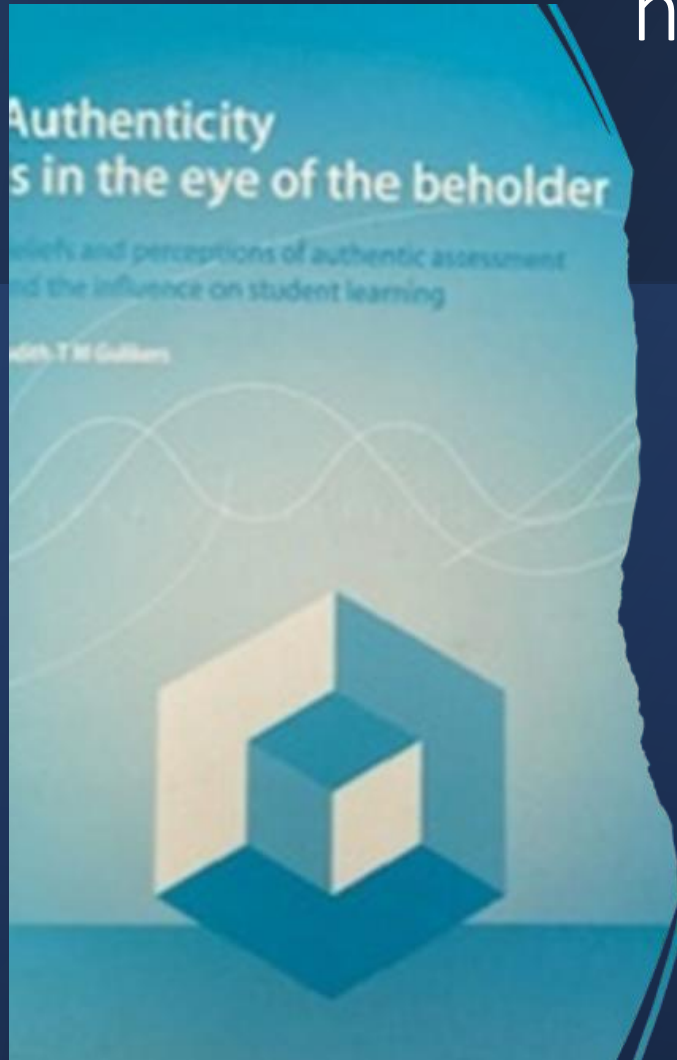
“I put so much effort into this, read loads, you had to. With this you can't just sit there and take the notes, you have to make sense of it...to produce something that gets the message over. “

“It's thinking....It's more analytical. “

“We definitely discovered working together you're giving so much more. You're pulling things out of each other you didn't realise you had!”

*“It's not just a pass or a fail or a number in a box, there's other important things like **satisfaction**, **recognition**, the feeling that it is going to **help other people**.”*

Extensive literature on authentic assessment in higher education.....



COMPLEX MULTI-DIMENSIONAL CONSTRUCT

e.g.
8 critical elements
that determine
authentic
assessment

(Ashford-Rowe, Herrington & Brown
2014)



Challenge



Product/outcome



Transfer



Metacognition



Recognisable to stakeholders



Fidelity



Discussion and feedback



Collaboration

3 Dimensions of Authentic assessment

Villarroel, V., Bloxham, S.,
Bruna, D., Bruna, C. and
Herrera-Seda, C., 2018.
Authentic assessment:
Creating a blueprint for
course design. *Assessment
& Evaluation in Higher
Education*, 43(5), pp.840-
854.



Realism



Cognitive challenge



Evaluative judgment

Systematic review of authentic assessment

Sokhanvar, Z., Salehi, K. and Sokhanvar, F., 2021

Advantages



Enhanced engagement



Improved student satisfaction & contributes to increasing students' efforts to reach educational goals



Enhanced employability skills

Challenges



Unfamiliar: students require guidance



Time consuming and costly



Staff concerns about workload implications

Authentic assessment often framed as 'real world' tasks

- **'Realism' typically conflated with the world of work and employability**
- **For instance Villarroel et al (2018), notably frame authentic assessment as follows:**
- **"Authentic assessment aims to replicate the tasks and performance standards typically found in the world of work, and has been found to have a positive impact on student learning, autonomy, motivation, self-regulation and metacognition; abilities highly related to employability." (p840)**



An Example: traditional assessment

Thanks to
Associate Professor (Engineering Education) and
Director, Center for Engineering Education
Innovation (E2I), Hong Kong University of
Science and Technology, Ben Y B Chan

Identify five serious contingencies that could occur on site over a period of construction and identify the main actions that would need to be taken in response to these incidents which would need to be undertaken by the Civil Engineer to prevent and mitigate disaster.





Authentic assessment: a scenario is provided establishing the context for the assignment, and over the course of a 24-hour period, students are required to respond in real time to emails received from the tutor which require prompt and informed decision making

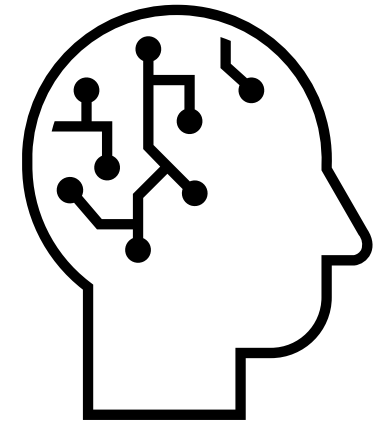
As final year degree students at HKUST as your capstone assignment integrating learning from different elements of your programme, you will be asked to work in a team to set up a simulated consultancy company, advising the management of a substantial building project in Hong Kong on construction management issues. During the course of the activity, you will be asked to respond to a changing context with timely and accurate advice, based on what you have learned here at HKUST, to demonstrate your capabilities to cope with crisis situations requiring immediate action.

Tasks

- To be submitted two days before the assignment day: “As a team, *review* likely problematic occurrences that could occur on the building site we have been studying this year and *produce* a short summary of risks, together with feasible mitigations. This should include reference to appropriate sources including at least two journal articles”.
- Email 1 from tutor: “In response to weather reports forecasting that a typhoon will be experienced in the locality within the next 24 hours, *draw up* an immediate plan of action for precautions to be taken to secure the site and minimise damage to works and personnel. These should be submitted two hours from receipt of this email.”
- Email 2: “Police have advised that storm damage has resulted in land slippage as shown on the enclosed diagrams: in your team you are required to *develop and submit* within the hour a costed plan to alleviate the damage immediately”.
- Within 10 hours, *submit* an incident report outlining causes for the landslip plus and *make recommendations* for avoidance of any similar events on this or other sites in the future.

We have a broader view of the sense of 'worth' that innovative assessment aims to create in students

- Impact on **learning**
- Positive influence on **employability** and **professionalism** (specific or general)
- Advancing student personhood and **sense of self** (agency, fulfilment, identity, belonging, contribution, potential change-agent, self-image)



Rethinking authentic assessment: three key principles (MacArthur, 2022)



From real world/world of work
to society



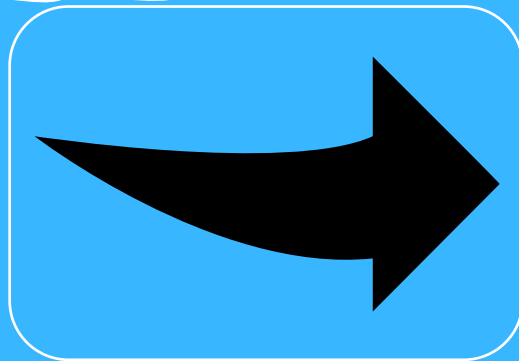
From task performance to why
we value the task



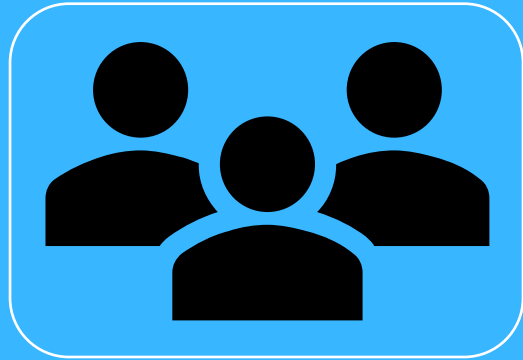
From the status-quo of real-
world/world of work to
transforming society

Lydia Arnold
(2022)
Expanded
Assessment Top
Trumps – Lydia Arnold
(lydia-arnold.com)

What is authentic assessment?



Relevant to future
employment



Relevant to the
advancement of the
discipline



Relevant to our
collective future



Relevant to
individual aspiration

- **Often mirrors real, complex challenges**
- **Results in diverse outputs**
- **Equips students to work with uncertainty**
- **Causes students to reflect meaningfully on their learning**
- **Focus on 'process' as well as product**



One myth

Authentic assessment
is exclusively about the
world of work and
fostering employability





More myths

**It's a binary choice-
'traditional' assessment
versus 'authentic' assessment.
It's all or nothing: using
authentic approaches
means abandoning everything
we've done before.**

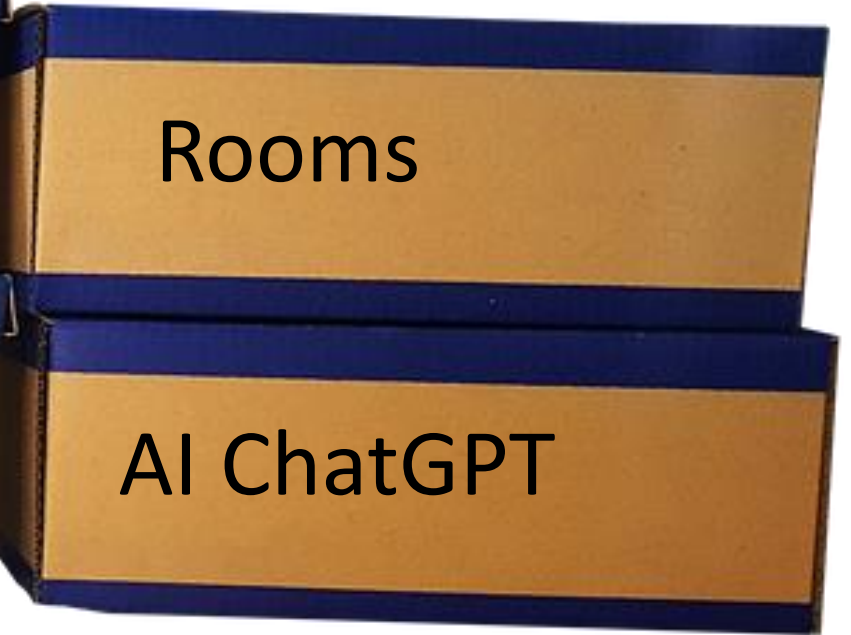




Myth

We used to do it, but things have changed so it's simply not possible any more

- Pandemic
- The person who organized it has left
- Used to have brilliant rooms but now always timetabled in lecture halls
- AI/ChatGPT





Myth



- You can only do authentic assessment in practical subjects and professional disciplines
- Or on placement, in Work Related Learning settings





Myth

My institution's Quality Assurance processes won't let me



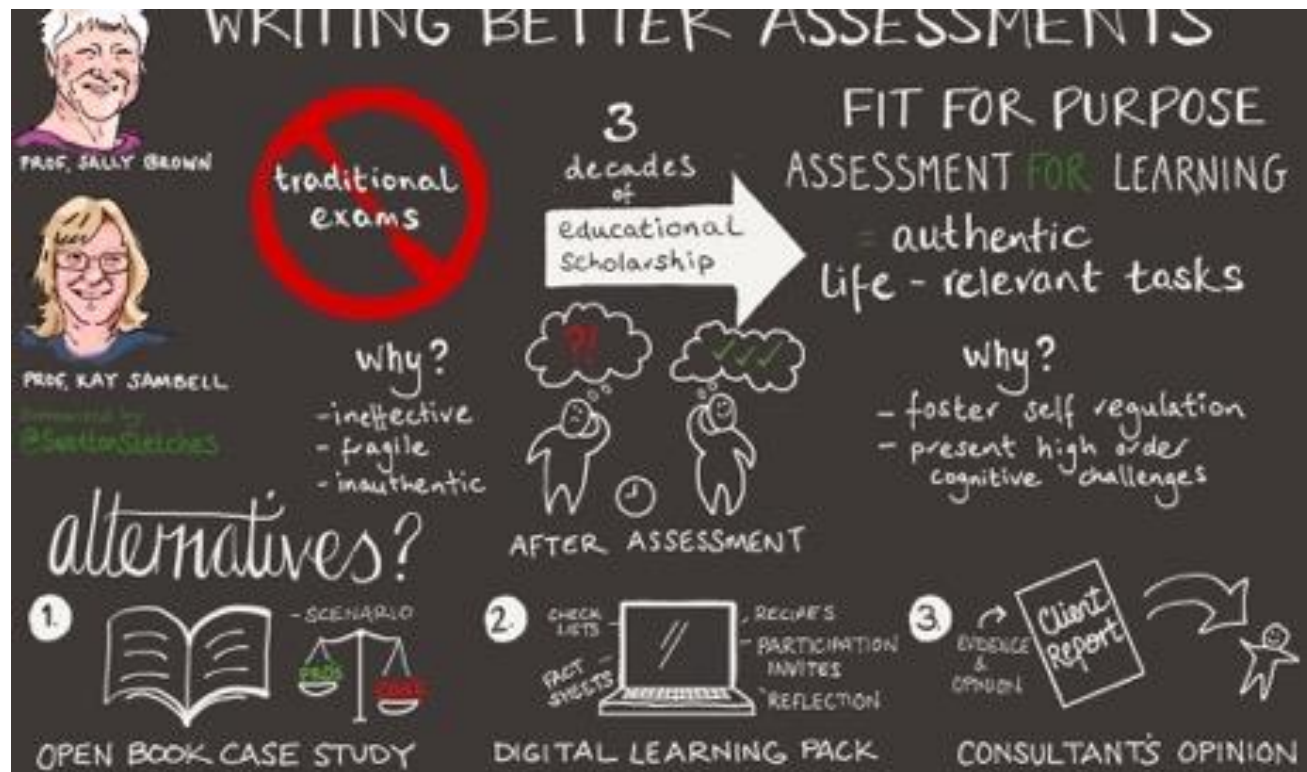
QQI



Myth

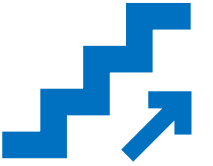
- Authentic assessment takes too much time- I'm just too busy to manage this

We developed our 'Task Generator' as a pragmatic approach to designing more learning-oriented, more authentic tasks



- 6-step blueprint to help people create more authentic assignments
- Can be seen in full in the article of 17th August 2020 “Writing Better Assignments in the post-Covid Era: approaches to good task design”
- Available at <https://sally-brown.net/kay-sambell-and-sally-brown-covid-19-assessment-collection/>

Six steps to designing authentic assignments



Whenever writing assignments, it's a good idea to start with the learning outcomes,



Identify powerful, driving verbs at their centre to direct student effort, such as 'interpret', 'research and review', 'set up and calibrate', 'evaluate' and 'compile'.



Consider the object of the verb i.e. what students do which provides a focus for action e.g. produce a digital learning pack, or provide a professional opinion in the form of a letter with appendices;



Next indicate what outcomes/evidence of achievement you require so you could be confident the outcome has been achieved;



Wrap round with detail around the subject or professional context/plausible scenario relevant to the subject area/ discipline/ course to bring the assignment to life;



Complete it with modifiers/developments/ range statements to guide the students about the scale and scope of what is required of them.

Verb/educational outcome	What? i.e. object	Outcome/ evidence of achievement	Modifiers/ developments/ range statements
Interpret	complex and sometimes incomplete or conflicting data	compile a summary meaningful for experts and laypersons	leading to a viable action plan.
Review	data from a variety of sources	produce an executive summary	for a specific audience
Set up	specialised equipment appropriately	draw up a 'quick guide' for peers	to enable them to use it safely and appropriately
Evaluate	three proposed solutions to a problem	propose a further two of your own	with suggestions about what might work best
Compile	contingency plans for a professional environment	produce disaster recovery in case of a serious emergency	leading to mitigations and remediation



Authentic assessment in Microbiology, based on ideas contributed by Dr Amreen Bashir, School of Biosciences, Aston University

Traditional essay assignment:

**What are the key factors leading to poor consumer health in domestic bathrooms caused by contamination?
What steps can be taken to improve health through more hygienic practices?**

More authentic assessment

Context:

Envisage that you live in a student house with four other students with a downstairs toilet but only one main bathroom that everyone shares upstairs, which also contains a toilet. You are the only microbiologist living in the flat and you are rather concerned at the overall level of hygiene in the flat, particularly the bathroom.



Tasks

- 1. Read the two set articles on contamination and highlight/ annotate on a hard copy or on screen what you consider to be the key points. Take a photo or a screen shot of your annotated texts and submit the outcome.**
- 2. Prepare a poster as a PowerPoint slide for your shared bathroom, highlighting the key contamination risks for your fellow flatmates in language that is likely to be convincing rather than preachy. You may include images, as well as footnotes with information from the articles (this is a student household after all!).**
- 3. Present your poster to staff/peers in the form of either a live presentation or a 3-minute video recorded on your phone talking through your poster.**
- 4. Write an article of 700 words for the student newspaper for a wide readership indicating the precautions students living together in shared flats should take in the relation to keeping safe from contamination in the bathroom.**
- 5. Write 100-word reflection on what undertaking this set of activities has caused you to consider, and identify what actions this has caused you to make your personal behaviour as a result.**



Myth

- It just isn't possible to scale up with large classes



Alternative outputs to nudge exams/essays in more authentic direction

Example output



Leaflet or guidance document



Reflective commentary



Grant application/bid for funding



Analysis of live data

Could be useful for....?

- Writing concisely for a specific audience/ simplifying complex information for laypersons
- Consider process as well as outputs & develop self review
- Ability to make convincing case against criteria
- Make calculations reliably and accurately

Thank you

Contact us

s.brown@leedsbeckett.ac.uk



@ProfSallyBrown

Kay.sambell@cumbria.ac.uk



@kay_sambell

Please join us

Thursday 22 & Friday 23 June 2023 in Manchester UK
for the next Assessment in Higher Education Conference

Details and booking:

<https://ahenetwork.org>



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