

## Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (All Submissions)

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“Build Me a Store”: Creative Digital Authentic Assessments

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**Research Domain:** Learning, teaching and assessment (LTA)

**Abstract:**

Recently, the W.E.F. (2018) and QS (2018) have identified that creativity is valued and required by graduate employers, but students are lacking this core skill. Indeed, it is argued that as creativity is a “Human Skill” graduates will need to demonstrate to employers, that they have acquired creativity within their degree (W.E.F. 2018: ix). In this paper we argue that creativity, as an employability skill, can be developed by innovative digital assessments. Barber et al. (2013) urged for universities to take advantage of technological opportunities yet how this call can be answered, is underdeveloped. The researchers identified a digitally integrated solution (Kennedy et al. 2008) that would enable students to acquire creativity, digital and practical retail skills within an enhanced learning environment. We argue there is space for innovative creativity, within formalised university structures, that stimulates and excites students.

**References:**

Barber et al. (2013) *An Avalanche is Coming: Higher Education and the Revolution Ahead*. Institute for Public Policy Research.

Kennedy et al. (2008) *First Year Students’ Experiences with Technology: Are They Really Digital Natives?* *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*; 24(1): 108-122.

QS (2018) *The Global Skills Gap in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

World Economic Forum (2018) *The Future of Jobs Report*

**Paper:**

## **Background**

Recent reports by the World Economic Forum (2018) and QS (2018) have identified that creativity, as a graduate skill, is valued and required by employers, but students are lacking in this. Indeed, it is argued that as creativity is a “Human Skill” graduates will need to demonstrate to employers that they have acquired creativity within their degree (World Economic Forum 2018: ix). In this paper, we will argue that creativity can be developed by innovative digital assessments. In addition, in order to learn the practical skills of business, students need to engage in experiential learning (Kumar and Bhandarker 2016). In effect, as argued by Greene (2011) business students can only learn “by doing.” However, McMurray et al. (2016) argue business schools often lack a focus on teaching business skills, and are theory and research centric. Barber et al. (2013) have also urged for universities to take advantage of technological opportunities, yet, how this call can be answered, is underdeveloped.

As former retail industry practitioners, the researchers had identified that authentic assessments were missing from the curricula, yet these are needed to replicate tasks and standards required for the world of work (Villarreal et al. 2018). In a retail specific context, Cox et al. (2016) noted that retailers need graduates that understand experiential retail practice. Creativity in a work context has a high currency in retail practice as creative innovation directly contributes to organisational value and success (Ma et al. 2018). In addition to retail practice, it is argued that university students lack the digital skills that are vital to the future workforce (Langley 2019).

Therefore, this paper answers the combined call for creativity, experiential learning, practical business skills and digital skill development. This paper also directly answers the conference theme by offering a challenge to traditional assessment methods and demonstrating how creativity in assessment design can stimulate students, satisfy employer needs and meet exacting academic standards. Owston and York (2018:23) noted that there is a considered lack of research around the relative merits and student perceptions of such digital teaching and assessments.

## **Literature Review:**

Mareoff (2003:2) stated, that developments in digital learning are a “sea change not a fad” with students arriving at university having used technology during their earlier schooling as technology has become “infused...[in] the entire curriculum” (Tondeur et al. 2016: 134). Furthermore, it is noted that new technology makes it possible to redesign the learning process with technology becoming an “ever bigger part of the learning process” (Barber et al. 2013:44) and more pervasive in Higher Education (Garrison and Kanduka 2004). As such digital assessments offer great inclusive opportunities for academics and students alike over a traditional assessment e.g. essay format, by developing students’ digital citizenship (Adams Becker et al. 2017:22) and therefore, by allowing students to showcase their digital employability skills to future employers (Tomlinson 2010).

The researchers identified a digitally integrated solution (Kennedy et al. 2008) that would enable students to acquire these creative, digital and practical retail skills and enhance the learning environment. The students design their own store and brand using software e.g. ScreenCast-O-Matic to create a digital presentation. In the field of retail, it is particularly important for assessments to be authentic (Villarreal et al. 2018). Furthermore, Villarreal et al. (2018) found that authentic assessments have three key characteristics realism (real store design), cognitive challenge (applying core retail theories [Servicescapes, Bitner 1992] and [Retailtainment, Ritzer 2010]) and evaluative

judgement (establishing store viability), therefore this assessment meets all three criteria. Creative assessment and teaching is needed to ensure that students are able to develop their own creative practice that is needed for the retail industry (Ma et al. 2018).

### **Aim and Objectives:**

The core aim of this research project is to:

- Understand how students perceive the experience of a creative assessment

The specific objectives are to:

- Identify the level of engagement with the digital assessment
- Understand how the digital assessment has developed students' digital literacy
- Investigate how students feel that the digital assessments developed their work based digital skills

The research takes a qualitative approach and uses qualitative questionnaires issued to students to understand the student perceptions of the coursework experience (Owston and York 2018). Qualitative research was chosen as the methodology as this approach allows for the researcher to challenge and question their own assumptions around digital engagement (Haynes in Symon and Cassell 2012). This will enable an understanding of the students' interpretations of the digital exercise (Gill and Johnson 2010). Furthermore, this approach allows for emergent theory construction rather than theory testing.

The questionnaires were sent to students from the academic year 2017/8 and will be sent to students from the 2018/9 cohort in order to gain insights from two cohorts into how students viewed the experience of a digital experience. From the 2017/8 cohort 20 questionnaires were returned and similar number are expected from 2018/9.

The findings from the questionnaires from 2017/8 were and from 2018/9 will be analysed using Krippendorff's (2013) syntactical (units of language) and thematic (broad relationships and key issues) units of analysis. This strategy allows flexibility and for further refinement and tailoring of emergent themes, as the research progresses leading to the discovery of "buried treasure" (Saldana 2016: 289).

This is stage one of a longitudinal research project, in addition to analysing questionnaires from each academic cohort the project will be expanded by carrying out research with the careers team to monitor the effect of the project on graduate role attainment. The final stage will be post graduate follow up after one and two years, to identify the impact of the acquisition of digital skills on role success.

### **Conclusion:**

This paper directly answers the call to close the research gap around the merits and student perceptions of digitalising academic assessments (Owston and York (2018:23). We argue that there is indeed space for innovative creativity, within formalised university structures, that can stimulate and excite students who will go and on to make a positive difference to the retail sector.

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