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Assessment and emotion in higher education: the allure of blogging

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Abstract

This paper explores the emotional responses that assessment can provoke in undergraduate students. The literature on the link between emotions and learning is well established, with an emphasis on confidence and anxiety, but there is surprisingly little research on the relationship between emotions and innovative assessment practices. This article aims to make a contribution to these debates by looking at courses where students were assessed through blogging, an assessment strategy that was new and unfamiliar to all of them. Focus groups were undertaken with students on four courses at the University of Edinburgh. The data from the focus groups identified positive emotional responses to blogging with students outlining how it was a way to enhance engagement because of the enjoyment it brought them. Blogging also evoked negative emotions, with respondents detailing how a new assessment method initially engendered feelings of unease and anxiety. Our analysis indicates that it is important to pay attention to the wider emotional landscape of assessment strategies. Students compared the allure and appeal of blogging, despite its unknowns and uncertainties, with the often negative feelings they had about being assessed using more conventional means such as essays and examinations.

Key words

Assessment, blogging, emotion

Word count

~~6555069~~ words

Introduction

In the last three decades attention has focused on assessment as a deeply emotional process for students (Boud 1995, Hattie and Timperley 2007, Weiss 2000). Studies conducted on the self-reports of first year university students suggest that there is a relationship between the ways in which they experience their course and their emotional engagement with it. Assessment is a point in case. Students undertaking assessments make huge time investments, and the work they undertake, alongside the feedback they

receive, engages them on an emotional level (Carless 2012, Higgins et al 2001). The process of undertaking an assessment can be accompanied by a whole range of emotions from enjoyment to extreme anxiety and fear of failure, with differing implications for the students' engagement with the course. Further, the impact of grades can have an effect on student engagement with assessment and feedback because grades are inherently bound up with perceptions of self-identity and self-worth (Butler 1988). The students in Higgins et al's 2002 study appreciated the feedback they received on assessments. However they were more than simple instrumental consumers of education, driven solely by the extrinsic motivation of the mark and as such desire feedback which simply provides them with 'correct answers'. Rather, the situation is more complex. While recognising the importance of grades, many of the students in the study adopted a more 'conscientious' approach. They were motivated intrinsically and sought feedback which helped them to engage with their subject in a 'deep' way.

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In the context of these debates, we offer an account of the kinds of emotional entanglements that are bound up with the use of innovative assessment strategies amongst undergraduate students. ~~The paper uses evidence gathered from a case study of UG students at the University of Edinburgh to unpack some of these issues.~~ Our focus is on one novel assessment practice, namely blogging. A blog is a regularly updated website, featuring short articles written in an informal style, usually with hyperlinks and audio-visual content. Blogs are one of the most important new communication web tools in recent years and academics are increasingly urged to blog as part of their engagement and dissemination activities (Dunleavy and Gilson, 2012). Many positive teaching and learning outcomes are associated with the use of blogs as a form of assessment. For example, educational theorists and practitioners have documented that blog writing can improve critical reading skills, empower and motivate students to engage in reflective and collaborative learning, and encourage students to read regularly and engage more deeply with their course materials (Christie and Morris 2019, Gracia et al 2019, Jackling et al 2015, Kerawalla et al 2008, Morris et al 2019).

~~The paper uses evidence gathered from a case study of UG students at the University of Edinburgh who were all taking courses which were being assessed by blogs. to unpack some of these issues.~~

The aim of the research was two fold. First, we sought to investigate the links between student engagement and assessment methods with a view to understanding the course organisers' reasons for implementing new forms of assessment. Secondly, we wanted to explore the students' perspectives on innovative assessments, including their emotional entanglements with them, and the extent to which they engaged more deeply and consistently with the course. Our focus in this paper is on the second of these aims and looks to the students who were being assessed by blog posts – an assessment strategy that was new to all of them and that as a result offered rich insight into the emotionality of the learning process. In particular, we focus on the students' emotional responses to a new assessment strategy to understand better understand if, and how, these responses were connected to their engagement with the course connected to these responses. We also

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attend to the processes through which students approach assessments, showing how these are mediated by their emotional responses to the course content as well as to their feelings about taking on an unfamiliar assessment strategy. We argue that a more fully nuanced understanding of student engagement must attend to the emotional dynamics between the students and the assessment method.

Learning and emotions in higher education

A number of recent analyses have revitalised an interest in emotion and learning (Gilmore and Anderson 2016, Leathwood and Hey 2009, Shields 2015). For Weiss (2000), the more emotionally engaged the student is the more they are likely to learn. Emotional states that facilitate motivation (Dweck 2000) and confidence (Christie et al 2008) are recognised as being conducive for learning, and authors have identified a plethora of both positive and negative emotions that are associated with achievement and self-identity (Pekrun 2006). Assessment has been identified as the key factor in student learning and understanding, and the emotional impact that assessment has on those being assessed needs further examination (Falchikov and Boud 2007). Much of this work has focused on the difficult emotional states that assessment is bound up with from exam stress (Putwain, Woods and Symes 2010) to fear of failure (Meijer 2001) and threats to self-esteem (Lowe et al 2008). However, as Trigwell, Ellis and Han (2012: 812) argue, the majority of this research has its origins in test anxiety or attributional work on achievement, and addresses a small range of emotions, such as anxiety and shame. Despite the emergence of an 'emotional turn in HE' (Gilmore and Anderson 2016), there is more work to be done to unpack students' wider emotional responses to their assessment practices.

Further, the majority of the research to date has focused on quantitative measures of students' emotions. Following a cognitive-motivational model, Pekrun, Goetz and Titz (2002), for example, developed the Academic Emotions Questionnaire which measures students' academic emotions including enjoyment, hope, pride, relief, anger, anxiety, shame, hopelessness and boredom. They found relationships between students' emotions and their motivation, learning strategies, cognitive resources, self-regulation and academic achievement. This research has proven useful in unpacking the relationship between emotions and task performance, showing that positive emotions have a positive effect on learning achievement but that negative emotions can have both positive and negative effects on learning achievement. Developing this work for an English context, Trigwell, Ellis and Han (2012) employ a developmental approach to capture students' emotions as part of their learning experience. Using the Revised Study Process Questionnaire (Biggs, Kember and Leung 2001), they found that deep learning is more likely to occur when students experience positive emotions such as hope and pride, while students who describe a more surface approach to learning are more likely to report a lower experience of positive emotions and a higher levels of negative emotions such as anger, boredom and anxiety. Both the experience of the more positive emotions and the adoption of a deeper approach are associated with higher achievement scores. What has been missing from these accounts to date, however, is more detailed qualitative research that seeks to understand the

processes through which learning involves students in reconciling both positive and negative experiences. Such an investigation would allow a better understanding of the specific ways in which these complex emotional states are bound up with assessment practices.

Debates about student engagement have also turned their attention to emotions. Student engagement is considered as an overarching meta-construct that consists of several components including cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural dimensions (Fredericks, Blumenfeld and Paris 2004; Kahu 2013). In this holistic approach, student engagement is the mediator that links important contexts such as students' prior experiences, university studies, peers and community to student success. As such, engagement requires a range of different inputs from effort, persistence and motivation, through to attention and a willingness to apply critical thinking skills. And, crucially for this paper, it encompasses a range of emotional states such as interest, sadness, happiness, boredom or stress (Pekrun et al 2002).

In unpacking the connections between emotions, assessment and learning, attention has focused on the concepts of involvement, self-belief and self-esteem. According to Hu, Ching and Chao (2012: 74) students "learn more when they are intensely involved in their education". Involvement has direct links with the affective dimension of engagement, as the more involved a student is, the higher the propensity for the creation of intrinsic value (for example joy, elation, enjoyment, pride and passion) from their university studies (Kahu 2013). Emotionally engaged students are able to identify the purpose and meaning behind their academic tasks, including their assessments, and these positive emotions correlate with behavioural engagement (D'Errico et al 2018). Engaged students are more likely to persevere through academic challenges, which results in higher self-belief (Hu and Kuh 2002; Chipchase et al 2017). And, continuing this virtuous circle, students who are intrinsically motivated to complete academic activities report higher levels of self-esteem compared with extrinsically motivated students who are 'going through the motions' (Shernoff et al 2016). The impact of learning environments and task design on students' emotions is largely unexplored, again with the exception of research on the antecedents of test anxiety (see Wigfield and Eccles, 1990; Zeidner, 1998, 2007) and task interest/enjoyment (e.g., Deci and Ryan, 1987).

The point of departure in this paper is that assessment tasks (for example exams and essays) are among the most important influences on how students engage in different learning activities (Ramsden 2003, Gibbs and Simpson 2004). Thus in any understanding of how students' learn during their university studies it is essential to investigate what assessment tasks students encounter and how they make sense of them in the course of their study programmes. There are two issues here. First, it is important to understand assessment as socially situated in disciplinary practices and historically developed rules, standards and routines (for example preference for certain types of assessment forms, routines for weighting grades) (Boud et al 2016). Different disciplinary traditions shape the ways in which assessment and feedback practices are structured and enacted in different course units (Esterhazy 2018, Esterhazy and Damza 2019), with implications for how students experience their local assessment practices. Secondly, the format of assessments has been found to be relevant. Open-ended formats (e.g., essay questions)

seem to induce more anxiety than multiple-choice formats. In contrast, giving individuals the choice between tasks, relaxing time constraints, and giving second chances in terms of retaking tests have been found to reduce test anxiety. These findings are in line with well-established research demonstrating that task structures that promote autonomy and a sense of control are positively related to intrinsic motivation, cognitive flexibility, positive affect, and well-being (e.g., Deci and Ryan, 1987).

Our examination of the issues arising from the emotionality of the assessment process is based on a study of the experiences of students who were being assessed by blog writing at The University of Edinburgh. This was a novel learning experience for them, both personally and in the university context, because the local assessment practices in their disciplines focused on the use of traditional exams, essays and report writing. Blogging was new and unfamiliar to them bringing with it a plethora of emotions from excitement to fear of the unknown and worries about their failure to perform. The discussion highlights the range of emotions that the students experienced and acknowledges the power of an innovative assessment practice to inspire confidence and enthusiasm amongst the students rather than an increase in worry and anxiety. The remainder of the paper is split in to three sections. First, the research design is discussed. Secondly, themes from the findings are explored. Finally, recommendations are made for our understandings of the emotionality of the assessment process.

Materials and method

The research study was underpinned by a constructivist approach to learning. We based the study on the belief that participants' approaches to learning are a response to the social, cultural and relational circumstances in which they undertake their assessments. Humans are reflexive and their actions are embedded in the wider situations in which they find themselves, as well as in relation to their own beliefs and assumptions. This study draws on focus groups that were carried out in 2016/17 with students who were being assessed using blogs. In total 17 participants were drawn from four case study undergraduate courses across the University, which spanned Geology, Human Geography, Law and Veterinary Medicine. The courses were chosen to give a spread of subjects right across the arts, humanities, medicine and sciences. In the focus groups the participants were guided through a set of open ended questions which asked them to reflect on their experiences of blogging including what had and had not worked well, the extent to which blogging allowed them to develop their own voice and the pros and cons of being assessed by blogs. The focus groups were recorded and transcribed in full before being anonymised and uploaded to Nvivo for analysis. Analysis of each case study course included course evaluation feedback from previous years as well as interviews with the course organisers. For the purposes of this paper we only draw on the focus groups with the students. Ethical approval was received from the School of Geosciences where the principal investigator was based. Table 1 shows each course and its assessment methods.

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Table 1

Case study	Subject	Course type	VLE	Blog	Other assessment
1	Human Geography	Optional Year 3/4	LEARN	Independent Private 40%	3,000-word essay 60%
2	Geology	Compulsory Year 5	PebblePad	Independent Private 30%	Technical report 70%
3	Law	Optional Year 3	LEARN	Individual Visible to peers 40%	Group presentation 60%
4	Veterinary Medicine	Optional Year 2	WordPress	Group Private 100%	N/A

Students were recruited using face-to-face methods which involved the research assistant going in to the classroom to outline the nature of the project and to ask for volunteers. ~~With willing subject volunteers contacting the research assistant by e-mail.~~ In one course, Human Geography, the Principal Investigator of the project was also the course organiser. Here extra care was taken to ensure that that the research process was not influenced by this position of power. To do so the Principal Investigator withdrew from the classroom which the research assistant (RA) was outlining the project and asking for volunteers. Further, the RA explained to the class that their participation in the project would not in any way influence their relationship with the course organiser or their overall grade for the assessed blog. ~~In the focus groups the participants were asked to reflect on their experiences of blogging including what had and had not worked well, the extent to which blogging allowed them to develop their own voice and the pros and cons of being assessed by blogs. The focus groups were recorded and transcribed in full before being anonymised and uploaded to Nvivo for analysis.~~

The focus groups were recorded and transcribed in full before being anonymised and uploaded to Nvivo for analysis. As is appropriate for a qualitative study, the validity in the research comes from context-rich, meaningful and ‘thick’ descriptions (Geertz 1973, Blaikie and Priest 2019). In analysing the data we followed the constant comparative method (Braun and Clarke, 2006) where coding takes place across the whole data set. To this end, we gave each data item equal attention in the coding process; the themes we identified

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were checked against each other and back to the original data set; and, the research team independently checked the themes to ensure that they were internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive (Gibbs 2018). In looking at particular themes, we referred to both an entire section and to the remainder of the transcript to ensure that any extracts used were consistent with views expressed on other topics. We found this method of analysis particularly useful for giving a holistic picture rather than a fragmented view of individual variables. The quotations selected for this article are those that represented significant constructs that appeared across the sample as a whole. Given the small size of the student cohort (17 in total) we have not assigned percentages to the data. Where a quote has been selected it is because it was a commonly held view across the cohort. Each student has been allocated an identifier and this is used to attribute quotes to individuals as well as to the course they were taking.

Results

The focus group data identified the emotional dynamics of this assessment process. First, we explore the very positive responses to blogging outlining how it was a way to engage students because of the enjoyment it brought them. Here we consider the fun, creativity and excitement that students felt when they blogged, as well as the allure and the appeal of being assessed in a novel way. Further, we demonstrate that the opportunity to individualise and personalise the blogs was an emotionally rewarding – and hence engaging – experience for the students. We also investigate negative responses to blogging, detailing how a new assessment method initially engendered feelings of unease and anxiety, as well as annoyance at software tools that were not user friendly. Our analysis indicates that it is important to pay attention to the wider emotional landscape of assessment strategies. Students juxtaposed the allure and appeal of blogging, despite its unknowns and uncertainties, against the often negative feelings they had about being assessed using more conventional means such as essays and examinations.

Blogging as an enjoyable – and agentic – assessment process

Noteworthy in the participants' comments about being assessed by blog were the many references to the enjoyment that it brought to them, and the sense of agency this gave them. Like Whitton and Langan (2019) who focused on fun in higher education, students felt that blogging was 'fun' and 'exciting', as well as being 'creative'. Together these very positive emotions contributed to their enjoyment of, and hence engagement with, the course. They commented:

It's just a different way of assessment. Like most other courses are always just essays or exams. And yeah, I just quite really enjoyed blogging. It was different. Even though at times it seemed like a lot of work it was still really enjoyable (Law R3).

It also made the course a bit more fun, because, like, you were able to have fun in geology rather than writing an essay about something that's quite dry. It was a bit more excitement [...] you could have fun with the blog (Geol R3).

Some, like R2 in Geography, 'almost looked forward to doing it'.

A common theme was to juxtapose the prescriptive routine of doing yet another exam or essay with the allure of blogging. While learning a new writing skill like blogging could be 'overwhelming' initially, the majority of students reported that the very positive feelings about this new assessment method soon outweighed the negatives they identified. Blogging engendered feelings of excitement, and this had knock-on-effects for their engagement with the assessment:

So whereas when we're doing an essay obviously we've done it through school and you've done it through uni, so we all know how to write an essay very easily. Whereas a blog was just like completely alien. But then I think that was also good because it's something completely new which is exciting as well as it is a challenge (Law R4).

Part of the excitement centred on the more informal approach to writing which was something that the students appreciated and enjoyed:

I found it very refreshing, because it's such a difference from the normal writing that we have to do. It's much less formal. [...] And it made me a lot more aware of how different the writing styles are, the academic and informal ones. And how much nicer it is to write in an informal way (Geol R1).

The excitement too centred on the opportunity to personalise their blogs and use them as a way to express their individuality. They tailored the blog by working on its style and design, often using different media and playing with its layout and presentation. In this way they were able to take a great deal of pride in their assessments whilst also having fun. One commented:

It's just so weird. I was overwhelmed by that option and that freedom, but it is good. And YouTube videos and stuff like that and multimedia, that was fun (Geog R1).

Some pointed out how the inherent creativity of the blogging process catered to the learning profiles of all of the students in the cohort. One welcomed this innovative approach:

not everyone's academically minded, but you're in a situation where you go to uni and you have to be, and it's not necessarily for everyone. So this gives you somewhere to let your mind run and do that aspect of creativity. But not necessarily in a way that's formed and functional (Geog R3).

The students also individualised their blogs by defining their own content and exploring a range of subjects of interest to them. Often this was the first time they'd had the opportunity to choose their own subject material and while the amount of choice could be 'daunting' they

found this both refreshing and liberating. One commented on how this element of choice awoke his interest in the subject:

It's like a lot of work on its own, but it's definitely worth it, it's interesting. You can pick and choose what you think is interesting (Law R2).

This student went on to discuss how choosing a topic, and then using it creatively to make connections across the course, was an important part of the blogging process:

I feel like when it comes to actually getting a good topic for the blog I didn't really have a problem with it because I like linking things together [...]. Most of the time whenever I'm doing a blog I pick the broad topic and look up about aspects which can be in it. It's like when I did human enhancement, instead of making it human enhancement I linked it to designer babies. [...]. When it came to mitochondrial DNA initially I was just thinking about doing pros and cons. But in my mind it's like that's so bland because the law has been passed anyway. So it was more about the whole thing about gender selection, when it comes to if people should actually be given the right (Law R2).

For this student, the struggle with blogging was the continuous excitement it engendered about the course and the possibilities for making the posts ever more interesting and engaging. This engagement had the capacity to take over a student's life:

My problem was actually ... I wake up and it's like yeah, okay, oh my god, that's a better topic. And that's what I actually really struggled with (Law R2).

Together with the opportunity to write in a more informal manner, to illustrate the blog in novel ways and to work on its design, this sense of the positive emotions was a shift from their prior learning experiences. We consider this shift in the next section.

The emotional landscape of assessment practices

Students took a great deal of pride in their blogs, often labouring long and hard to make them interesting, informative and engaging for their assessors. Part and parcel of their enjoyment of blogging was the sense that it was different from the assessment strategies commonly used in their Schools. In all four case studies the common practice was for assessments to be driven by conventional essays and exams. As Shields (2015) points out, emotions are socio-structural as well as cultural and thus we need to understand the wider landscape of the assessment process. This was very evident in the data generated from this project. Students spoke in largely negative terms about exams and essays, assessment practices that they had come to know and believed they could do, but which they felt were 'regimented' and 'boring'. They commented:

you're indoctrinated into a 2,000-word standard format, literature based essay (Geog R3).

assessments just want to make everyone the same, and how it just encourages that narrow confine of right, everyone has to write 2,000 words on X topic (Geog R4).

As indicated above, the blogs were an opportunity to do things differently and this was revelatory for the students. Some even chose the course, with its alternative assessment method, precisely because of the test anxiety they felt about sitting conventional exams:

Personally I was really excited about it because it was basically one of the criteria I used to actually pick a course [...] not everybody does well with exams, I always have so much anxiety when I'm in an exam room. There was a time I had property law and [...] after looking at the questions, I just had to go out. And I was just like this is actually good (Law R2).

Doing things differently was transformational for the students involving them in changing their whole approach to learning. Again, they drew attention to the emotional dynamics of this shift. Some spoke of the huge rift between blogging and their known and familiar assessment practices. This involved an entire shift in their approach to learning:

it was a massive break from anything that I'd ever done, any assessments I'd ever done which was, not like a shock, but it meant that you had to change your approach, well, at least I found you had to change your entire approach to the way you started something and planned something (Geog R5).

Others spoke of the transformative effect that the metric of choice had on them. What began as a negative process was often turned around into something very positive and rewarding. They spoke about how blogging had motivated them and again drew attention to the emotional underpinning of this:

I think it was a new challenge. I think up to this point the only way I've been assessed is through essays and exams. And I think I liked it. I was a little bit daunted by it at the start. [...] I found it hard to think of a topic, because you can do anything. So that's almost overwhelming in thinking what am I actually going to do then? But once you do get it I think I really liked it. It wasn't... Like with an essay I really have to motivate myself to sit down and think of every single sentence (Geog R2).

This challenge encouraged the students to think differently, and challenged them to be more open to thinking creatively and independently about their assessments. Again, what often began as a negative feeling was quickly turned in to something much more positive:

Yeah, I suppose, one of the biggest disadvantages was like, challenging a side of your scientific brain that you don't normally use. Like, I've never had to write a blog for uni, really, before, so I was a bit like, oh I did it. So, yeah, it was good (Geol R3).

Blogging was embraced with enthusiasm by the students:

Yeah. But I liked it. As soon as I got into it, it was very much a welcomed way of learning. Because I definitely do think I've learnt from it. And I think it had value in it being different but still learning and not being so rigid and boring (Geog R2).

Again, they contrasted the sense of agency they felt in being assessed by blogs with the sense of entrapment and standardisation inherent in conventional assessments:

It just comes back to...for me university assessments feel like they just want everyone to be the same. Here's your mark criteria, you've got to adjust, no matter how you feel, how you think, what your perspective is, where you've come from or whatever. This is what you've got to do, all 200 of you in geography. And it's like well, for something like this then it allows you a different way of expressing thoughts and your perspective and stuff (Geog R4).

Students really appreciated the opportunity to be assessed by blog which brought with it the opportunity to personalise their assessments both stylistically and through the choice of the content matter. What was important here was how this made them feel, and the strong sense of agency that this gave to them.

Discussion

Attention has begun to focus on affect and emotions as scholars recognise their importance for students' learning, achievements, identities and health (Beard, Clegg and Smith, 2007). Our point of departure is that assessment tasks are amongst the more important influences on how students feel about, and hence engage with, different learning activities and course content. To understand how students learn, it is thus necessary to investigate how different assessment practices make students feel and how they make sense of these emotions over the course of their university studies. The most significant finding of this paper is the strength of positive emotion that students attached to an innovative assessment method, in this case blogging, and the extent to which this was then translated into their active engagement with the course. [This suggests that teachers looking to enhance student engagement by sparking feeling of fun, excitement and enthusiasm, should actively consider using blogging as an assessment strategy.](#)

Another important finding from this research is that students' emotional responses to blogging were shaped by the wider landscape of the assessment process, confirming Barbalet's (2001) point that emotions are socio-structural phenomena. Conventional assessment methods were known and familiar, and therefore safe for the students, and they could be reasonably confident about what they needed to do in order to pass. While test anxiety remains a huge part of the assessment process, the students in this study, who were all in the later years of their undergraduate degree programmes, were assured that they had mastered the art of the written essay and exam and felt secure in these learner identities. Blogging, by contrast, was a step into the unknown and, as such, heightened the awareness of their emotional responses to this new assessment strategy as well as

encouraging them to develop new learner identities. What our findings suggest is that the opportunity to do something different engendered a range of different emotional responses. While these often began negatively, with students feeling daunted and overwhelmed, it was clear that these difficult feelings quickly gave way to those of excitement. It was common for students to describe blogging as fun, creative and enjoyable and, as such, was an assessment method that fostered greater student engagement (Christie and Morris 2019) based on these new learner identities. [This suggests that the development of a varied approach to assessment methods and a move away from the more traditional, and often stressful, methods such as exams and essays would be beneficial to staff.](#)

These findings raise a number of questions for further investigation. First, what steps can staff take to effectively provide assessment strategies that will invoke a positive activating emotional response and, in turn, encourage further student engagement? To a large extent, students' emotional responses to blogging were shaped by the assessment strategies in place in their subject area, as well as by the process of developing new learner identities. This suggests that simply adding in an innovative assessment method is not sufficient to induce the positive activating emotions required for learning. The level of confidence that students have when they begin a new assessment strategy, and how this can shape their experience of it, has yet to be explored in detail by researchers in this area. We do know, however, a great deal about the effects of timely feedback on early formative assessments, and this suggests fruitful ways forward [for staff](#). Introducing a low stake formative blog, on which students get in-depth feedback, provides the opportunity for students to be guided into the rules, standards and routines of this new assessment practice, as well as removing the burden of failure in this early transitional phase (Ecclestone 2007, Shields 2015). This, of course, raises questions about the time that staff have to give to formative feedback (Blair et al 2013). If we are serious about giving early formative feedback on new assessment methods then decisions about support and resources are required at a strategic level.

Secondly this research raises questions about how we conceptualise the emotional dynamics of assessment in higher education. This literature is characterised by a dominant research tradition in which assessment is treated first and foremost as a 'unilateral act of the teacher to which students are subjected' in order to measure their learning outcomes (Boud et al 2016: 3). This view of assessment generally underplays the consequences of how assessments are experienced by the students. Recently, however, an alternative perspective has emerged that attempts to account for the social and relational aspects of assessment. Boud et al (2016: 4) suggest that a socio-material theorisation of assessment opens up questions about assessment as a practice that has 'purposes, is located at particular places and times, with various people (teachers, students, peers, others), with various material artefacts used and with a discourse of sayings and doings associated with it'. As our study has shown, such a view on assessment helps us to understand how blogging is socially and emotionally situated in the disciplinary practices and their historically developed rules, standards and routines. Estherhazy's (2018) work on how disciplinary practices shape the ways assessment and feedback practices are structured and enacted in different course units is helpful here, but there is little specific

work on how these assessment strategies are experienced at an emotional level. This is an important avenue for future research.

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