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The Essay and Multiple-choice Questionnaires Are Not Dead, But No Longer Enough: Generative AI and Assurance of Learning

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Abstract

Since the rapid proliferation of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in tertiary education, much scholarly and sector discourse has framed the technology in the binary as either a threat to academic integrity or a tool for enhancement. This Editorial argues that such framings obscure a more consequential issue: generative AI has not caused a crisis of assessment validity, but has exposed the limits of long-standing, artefact-based approaches to assurance of learning (AoL). Drawing on contemporary scholarship on post-plagiarism contexts, assurance of learning, academic integrity, and relational pedagogy, this Editorial examines why traditional reliance on essays and multiple-choice questionnaires is no longer sufficient to support defensible judgements about learning when authorship cannot be reliably observed. It argues for a shift from verification-focused assessment practices towards judgement-based, programmatic, and relational approaches that foreground transparency, process, and longitudinal evidence of learning. In doing so, the Editorial seeks to reorient debate within higher education away from detection and control, and towards the design of assessment systems capable of sustaining credible assurance of learning under conditions of epistemic uncertainty.

Editors

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Practitioner Notes

1. Higher education research on generative AI must move beyond binary assumptions of new technologies like GenAI as either threat or opportunity.
2. Research agendas that treat generative AI as an isolated intervention risk missing its role in exposing the limits of artefact-based approaches to assurance of learning.
3. Essays and multiple-choice tests remain legitimate assessment forms, but are no longer sufficient as stand-alone evidence of learning.
4. Assessment design should assume collaboration, including with generative AI, and prioritise transparency over surveillance.
5. JUTLP calls for greater balance in the appraisal and research of tools such as GenAI in learning and teaching practice.

Keywords

GenAI, artificial intelligence, assessment, educational technology, essay.

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Introduction

Since late 2022, generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has moved from a peripheral tool for computer science students to a feature now salient with higher education (for better, or for worse). What began with large language models has rapidly become routinely used tools that can enhance, augment, and penalise learning and education; often simultaneously. This pace of proliferation and technological embeddedness has outstripped our collective capacity to continually think carefully about what GenAI is (Bearman et al., 2023), and ought to be. Many of these tools have incredible potential but are, at the same time, unhinged and unbalanced (Rudolph et al., 2023). We imagine that what these tools are actually doing to teaching, learning, and assessment eludes even the brightest of higher education scholars.

At present, much of the GenAI discourse has focused on immediate questions of policy compliance and academic integrity. As a result, research and practice have oscillated between fascination and fear, producing work that is either uncritically enthusiastic or (reflexively) resistant (Rudolph et al., 2023). What remains comparatively underdeveloped is sustained, critical engagement with what GenAI is revealing about the longstanding assumptions we have in higher education and adult learning, particularly those underpinning assessment and assurance of learning (Corbin et al., 2025).

Within submissions to this Journal and what we see produced across the sector, GenAI is frequently framed as either a problem to be controlled or a tool to be adopted. Both positions tend to foreground technology rather than pedagogy. Before AI, Cowling and Birt (2018) were making this case about mobile phones and virtual reality. The focus has been on what GenAI can do, or what it should be prevented from doing, without adequately interrogating the assessment systems into which it has arrived. Sometimes these are superimposed, like the popular Artificial Intelligence and Assessment Scale (Perkins et al., 2024), and others encourage accepting greater messiness and uncertainty (e.g., entanglement pedagogy: Fawns, 2022).

If we are to leave the pandemic era with only one point of wisdom, it is that we ought to actively transfer knowledge from other contexts first, before we replicate the same strategies as have previously been implemented (Crawford, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic was not the first time universities used open fields (literally) to conduct examinations and allowed students to take home materials for assessments in order to avoid viral spread. Just like the disruption of the pandemic, the AI technology moment of higher education has been incredibly disruptive, and in ways both similar to, and unique from, the popularisation of the internet. These external disruptions offer educators a form of stress test that exposes existing educational designs. In the case of assessment, GenAI has not so much disrupted established practices as it has made visible the fragility of the evidentiary claims those practices have long relied upon: That we can *assure* learning at a student-level.

The challenge of the assurance of learning did not begin with GenAI. For decades, higher education has contended with contract cheating, essay mills, collusion, and the known limitations of plagiarism detection technologies. Authorship and honesty in disclosure have been threats to assurance for decades (Sims, 1993). What GenAI has done is remove the remaining cues that once allowed educators to act as though originality and authorship were reliably observable through line-by-line comparison tools or linguistic and keystroke comparators. Familiar indicators such as anomalous phrasing, inconsistent citations, or mismatched writing quality have become

increasingly unreliable. It is sometimes a helpful aide for editors or assessors that the odd hallucinated reference offers an easy identifier for students and professionals alike not checking their computer-produced text (Karp, 2025). In their place is a condition of uncertainty where it is often impossible to determine with confidence whether work is authored by the humans with their names on it or outsourced.

Higher education has entered a ‘post-plagiarism’ era (Eaton, 2023), characterised not by the absence of integrity, but by the collapse of artefact-based proxies for learning. Essays and multiple-choice questionnaires, long treated as stable evidence of individual understanding or retention (respectively), now operate in environments where authorship is augmented by default (even if just by a spell-checker in Microsoft Word). Attempts to restore certainty through increasingly restrictive assessment conditions may offer short-term reassurance, but they also risk narrowing curricula, exacerbating inequities, and conflating assessment security with validity (Dawson et al., 2024). The more pressing challenge is not how to eliminate all unauthorised assistance, but how to make credible, defensible judgements about learning when assistance is ubiquitous and often invisible. And, importantly, to support a relational approach to learning that enables students to feel psychologically safe in conditions of development, a key protective factor for learning.

This Editorial is written in response to a growing pattern in the scholarship submitted to the Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice (JUTLP) where GenAI is frequently treated as either an integrity threat to be neutralised or a pedagogical tool to be optimised. Both framings miss the consequential issue. GenAI has not caused the erosion of assessment credibility, but exposed the limits of long-standing, artefact-based approaches to assurance of learning. In post-plagiarism contexts, learning can no longer be assured through individual assessment items alone, nor through outputs treated as self-evident proof of cognition. Instead, assurance must be built through coherent systems of evidence, professional judgement, and pedagogical designs that prioritise transparency, process, and longitudinal understanding of student learning. By examining essays and multiple-choice questionnaires, and by distinguishing assessment artefacts from assessment judgement, this Editorial seeks to reorient scholarly debate in this journal away from questions of detection and control, and towards the more difficult task of articulating how learning can be credibly judged when authorship is no longer observable by default. And to do so, we draw on educational technology and educational psychology expertise, in particular.

Conceptualising Post-Plagiarism

In recent months, many Journal readers will have encountered short videos circulating on social media that appear, at first glance, to be documentary in nature. A polar bear leaping from ice into open water catching a salmon mid-air feels plausible enough to pass without scrutiny. Once, small imperfections helped distinguish fact from fiction: an extra limb, a distorted shadow, a biological impossibility. Increasingly, those cues have disappeared. The question is no longer whether such artefacts are fabricated, but whether it is even possible, or necessary, to know of a strong deepfake. This everyday experience captures something fundamental about the epistemic conditions universities now face. The confidence that we can reliably distinguish the authentic from the assisted and the original from the generated has eroded not through deception alone, but through AI innovation and improvement. What was once exceptional is now ordinary, and

what once demanded verification now exists within a field of uncertainty. What it can mean for educators is that when a student struggles on essay one, and takes advice to heart and invests significant intellectual energy to the second, we will progressively be more likely to ask of possible AI cheating than to praise the effort behind unveiling their innate motivation to learn.

Since the release of large language models in late 2022, higher education has entered what Eaton (2023) describes as a post-plagiarism era, where traditional differences between original and less original work are no longer reliably observable. Familiar markers such as unlikely phrasing, Turnitin originality reports, and mismatched citations have largely disappeared and in their place is epistemic uncertainty where we cannot tell with confidence what is human authored, collaboratively produced or even strategically outsourced. This exposes the fragility in how higher education has historically assured learning, which has for many years been in contention with paper mills, contract cheating (TEQSA, 2024), collusion, and even the limits of plagiarism detection software. To a certain extent, GenAI did not cause the vulnerable position we are currently in, it just makes it impossible to ignore. We find ourselves in a position where we cannot restore certainty about authorship and so we need to find how to make credible, defensible judgements about learning in a world where authorship is augmented at best.

Yet, an exclusive focus on uncertainty, detection, and loss risks obscuring a parallel and underexplored possibility. In worlds where the boundaries between what is real and imagined are increasingly blurred, new spaces also open for creativity, exploration, and intellectual risk. Long before GenAI, science fiction authors imagined futures that later became technological realities, not because they were correct, but because imaginative synthesis preceded empirical verification. Post-plagiarism contexts invite professors to reconsider whether the primary purpose of assessment is to authenticate artefacts, or to cultivate judgement, critical thinking, and the capacity to work productively despite ambiguity. When learning is framed solely through the lens of cheating prevention, opportunities to rethink assessment as a site of creative, reflective, and critical engagement are forgotten. The challenge, then, is not simply to protect higher education from GenAI, but to ask what forms of learning and assessment become possible when certainty about authorship is no longer the organising principle.

Assurance of Learning in a Post-Plagiarism World

Assurance of learning rests on learning processes, programmatic coordination, temporal conditions, and multiple modalities. At its core, assurance of learning rests on assessment of the learning *process*, rather than on certainty derived from assessing knowledge based on individual *products* or assessment artefacts. This requires a paradigm shift in assessment philosophy whereby asynchronous written outputs or MCQs potentially form just one component of an assessment toolkit. Assurance of learning, therefore, may concern the capacity of educators to make credible, defensible judgements based on students' ability to demonstrate *how* they know what they know and/or for students to reflect on the learning process. This is also known as metacognition or metacognitive awareness, originally conceptualised by Flavell (1979) to refer to one's knowledge, monitoring and regulation of cognitive processes. Students' ability to regulate their learning can come before, during, and after the event in what psychologists call cognitive strategies of planning, monitoring and evaluating. Self-regulated learners manage their thoughts and behaviours to set goals, monitor progress, and review/reflect on their progress. As discussed by Pintrich (2002), metacognitive knowledge has an important role in learning, and by implication,

assessment. In a post-plagarism era, the assessment could become students' reflection of the process of producing an asynchronous written assignment, not the assignment itself. This is not necessarily straightforward, and requires a shared responsibility between students and educators to create an environment where students have opportunities to develop their metacognitive awareness and reflect on what enables/enabled them to learn. Kofinas et al. (2025), for example, argue for a shift towards process-based, socially engaged, and more experiential assessment processes that enable teamwork and foster a student social identity as a learner, rather than a consumer.

In post-plagiarism environments, where certainty about authorship can no longer be assumed, reliance on judgement over time becomes the best guess of validity. As Dollinger et al. (2025) note, no assessment is ever fully secure, and attempts to treat security as a prerequisite for assurance misunderstand the nature of educational judgement itself. Another key factor in assurance of learning is the recognition that no single form of evidence is sufficient to demonstrate learning. Traditional distinctions between direct (e.g., student work, performances, portfolios, examinations) and indirect (e.g., student self-reports, graduate surveys, employer feedback) evidence, while sometimes treated hierarchically, were never intended to imply that one type could function independently of the other. Student written work, performances, portfolios, examinations, and feedback each offer partial insight into learning, but none provide self-evident proof. And diving into methods thought to be guaranteed to be secure (e.g., the Lane 1/no AI use and Lane 2/any AI use in the two-lane approach) are fraught from the beginning (Curtis, 2025). The major concern is that when authorship honesty is impossible to accurately detect (whether AI or a third party) in one assessment artefact, particularly essays and online quizzes, our capacity to know whether a student has learned is complex. What matters instead is how multiple forms of evidence are interpreted together, triangulated, and situated within a coherent program narrative of learning.

The purpose of assessment within assurance of learning has also been frequently misunderstood. Assessment has often been positioned primarily as a mechanism for verification rather than as a means of informing judgement about progression. In response to GenAI, many institutions have sought to restore confidence through increasingly restrictive measures, including banning tools outright or re-centring invigilated examinations and viva vocas. While such approaches may serve summative purposes, they risk conflating misplaced 'security' with assurance. Control over assessment conditions does not, in itself, generate insight into learning, nor does it guarantee that assessment outcomes meaningfully reflect student capability. As Lodge et al. (2025) emphasise, assurance is strengthened not through tighter constraints, but through coherent, programmatic designs that enable educators to make informed judgements across time.

Post-plagiarism contexts therefore require the sector to re-centre GenAI assessment against earlier scholarly approaches emphasising defensible professional judgement based on patterns of evidence accumulated over time. Programmatic approaches to assessment, where learning is scaffolded, revisited, and interpreted across multiple opportunities, alongside students' metacognitive reflections of their learning, offer a more credible basis for assurance than continued reliance on isolated artefacts. Secure assessment moments may still have a place, but only as partial contributors rather than as definitive proof. Framing the GenAI challenge as a problem to be solved through detection (human or technology-based) or prohibition risks

entrenching fragile assessment practices and diverting attention from the more substantive work of designing systems that make learning visible in meaningful ways. It is for this reason that this Editorial calls for a shift in how assessment scholarship is framed and evaluated within this Journal. Re-centring GenAI assessment research around core theoretical extensions, applied through practical and contextually-relevant contexts (see Crawford, 2025) remains core to the Journal mission.

The Essay and Multiple-Choice Questionnaire

This Editorial takes aim at the essay and the multiple-choice questionnaire not because they are outdated, nor because they should be abandoned (Corbin et al., 2025), but because together they offer a useful juxtaposition through which to interrogate the current polarisation of GenAI scholarship. Much of the contemporary discourse oscillates between exaggerated optimism and exaggerated threat, framing generative AI as either a pedagogical breakthrough or an existential crisis of learning and learners (Bearman et al., 2023). Essays and multiple-choice questionnaires sit at opposite ends of this spectrum. One is often defended as the site of deep thinking and originality, the other as reductive or mechanical but useful tests of knowledge recall. Precisely because they are so familiar, and so differently valued, they provide a productive lens for examining how GenAI exposes the limits of treating any single assessment artefact as definitive evidence of learning.

Essays and multiple-choice questionnaires have long held a central and legitimate place in higher education assessment. Multiple-choice questionnaires have, and continue to play, a critical role in assessing levels of learning associated with memory and recall, capacities that are often essential in professions requiring rapid access to stored knowledge, such as law or medicine. Essays, particularly in their pre-GenAI form, were positioned as assessment tasks that created space for the synthesis, exploration, and connection of ideas rather than mere recall (Neal, 2010). Their respective roles should not be dismissed lightly. Under these conditions, essays operated as plausible proxies for reasoning, synthesis, and disciplinary communication, reflecting long-standing traditions in writing assessment concerned with learning, feedback, and professional judgement (Shepard, 2000). Both formats emerged within an era of individualised learning in which students worked slowly, largely independently, and with limited access to external support.

Multiple-choice questionnaires, by contrast, evolved as a widely adopted, efficient, and highly automatable instrument, particularly in contexts characterised by large student cohorts and the need for consistent marking at scale. Their appeal has typically been justified on pragmatic grounds, including efficiency, comparability, and ease of administration, rather than on claims about their capacity to capture complex or integrative understanding (McKenna, 2018). While well-designed multiple-choice items can test conceptual discrimination, their widespread use has more often been driven by institutional imperatives than by pedagogical aspiration.

In post-plagiarism contexts, however, the limitations of both formats are increasingly exposed. Essays can privilege written fluency and rhetorical competence, rewarding surface-level polish over disciplinary judgement or conceptual mastery, particularly when GenAI can reproduce these surface features with increasing sophistication. Multiple-choice questionnaires, while efficient, can overestimate understanding, as students may select the correct option without knowing it to be

correct, a pattern demonstrated empirically in comparisons with constructed response questions that require answer generation rather than recognition (McKenna, 2018). The challenge posed by GenAI, therefore, is not that essays and multiple-choice questionnaires lack historical legitimacy, but that their evidentiary authority is no longer sufficient, on their own, to assure learning.

Collusion is Just Collaboration without Disclosure

In post-plagiarism environments, the boundary between collaboration and collusion has become increasingly porous. Students routinely learn with peers, family members, professional contacts and now GenAI tools. Viewing these behaviours as anomalies, rather than recognising them as prevalent aspects of modern learning, risks portraying learning as abnormal instead of acknowledging its collaborative and socially interconnected nature (Bretag et al., 2019; Eaton, 2023). We suggest reframing collusion as collaboration without disclosure. The ethical breach does not come from working with others or with AI but from misrepresenting the nature and extent of that work. This reframing aligns with emerging integrity scholarship that privileges transparency, attribution, and disclosure over simplistic prohibition, particularly in contexts where assistance is ubiquitous and difficult to meaningfully detect (Dawson et al., 2024; Eaton, 2023). It also shifts responsibility away from surveillance and towards assessment design, where collaboration can be expected, clearly defined, and explicitly acknowledged.

It is important to consider this because efforts to enforce individualisation in unsecured assessment environments are becoming increasingly unsustainable. Also, decades of research on academic integrity demonstrates that when assessments are high-stakes, loosely supervised, and poorly aligned with authentic learning practices, students draw on whatever resources are available to them (Bretag et al., 2019). It is encouraging to see that some recent regulatory and sector-level responses reflect a shift away from detection-driven approaches and are moving towards redesigning assessment in ways that preserve assurance of learning under contemporary conditions (Lodge et al., 2025). Instead of relying on constraint to secure compliance, educators should assume collaboration as a baseline and design assessment systems that either explicitly legitimise it or make unauthorised assistance pedagogically irrelevant.

This reframing has implications for assessment integrity and assurance of learning. When collaboration is an expected condition, integrity will be secured through explicit articulation of what collaboration looks like, what must be disclosed, and how individual judgement is evidenced. Academic integrity research consistently shows that clarity around expectations and assessment purpose is more effective in supporting ethical behaviour than surveillance or punitive controls (Bretag et al., 2019). Requiring disclosure statements, reflective accounts of tool use, or contribution statements shifts attention from product to process, surfacing students' metacognitive regulation and how they engage with, direct, and critically evaluate GenAI as part of their knowledge-building practices. This also aligns with professional practice, as collaboration with others and with GenAI are both permitted and in many cases, *expected*. To deny this reality risks task authenticity and more importantly, students' capability to learn about proper and responsible use of GenAI (Fitzgerald & Curtis, 2025). This can lead to significant issues in future professional practice, a recent high profile example is the Deloitte report for the Australian Federal Government, where parts of a consultancy report were found to contain fabricated references, inaccurate footnotes and a misquoted legal case after GenAI was used to draft it (Dhanji, 2025).

Reconceptualising collusion as collaboration without disclosure moves us away from deficit framings of student behaviour and towards an integrity-by-design approach which is much needed in a post-plagiarism, post GenAI world. It places responsibility with educators to design assessments that anticipate collaboration, and with students to disclose, justify, and reflect on how support was used. In this way, integrity is maintained by ensuring that learning is transparent, accountable, and reflective of the authentic processes through which knowledge is created.

Relational Pedagogy in the Age of GenAI

As assessment becomes increasingly insecure, relational pedagogy becomes an important extension towards education as a place of learning. When we can no longer rely on artefacts as self-evident proof of authorship or cognition, we depend more heavily on sustained engagement, dialogue, and interpretive judgement exercised through educator–student relationships. The experience of assuring learning becomes part of a teacher-student relationship where progression is collaboratively discussed and witnessed rather than expected through artefact alone. This does not imply that assessment becomes informal, permissive, or unbounded. Rather, it reflects the reality that credible judgement in post-plagiarism contexts is inseparable from the relational conditions under which learning is made visible.

To some degrees, however, relationality risks becoming an empty signifier when it is invoked without attention to context, positionality, and the relational reality (Hickey & Riddle, 2023). Relationships do not automatically guarantee trust, learning, or ethical behaviour, and some students will breach trust regardless of pedagogical intent. Yet assurance of learning has never been about eliminating risk altogether. It has always involved making defensible judgements under conditions of uncertainty, informed by rich, triangulated evidence accumulated through ongoing interaction. Relational pedagogy does not remove this uncertainty, but it provides the conditions under which judgement can be exercised with greater validity.

Within higher education, relational pedagogy has been increasingly articulated as an intentional practice grounded in trust, reciprocity, and recognition of students as sense-making participants in learning (Su & Wood, 2023). Such approaches foreground learning as a relational process rather than a transactional exchange, resisting marketised logics that reduce assessment to credentialing or performance metrics. In post-plagiarism contexts, this relational framing becomes particularly salient. When assessment cannot be secured through surveillance or restriction alone, assurance must instead be supported through dialogic feedback, longitudinal supervision, and programmatic review practices that allow educators to know students' metacognitive processes across time and contexts.

Relational approaches to assessment also challenge the assumption that learning is best evidenced through isolated or individualised tasks. Assessment itself is a relational, ethical act, shaped by power, care, and the conditions under which students are invited to demonstrate learning (Killingback et al., 2025). In this framing, authenticity is not located in the task alone, nor in its resemblance to a putative real world, but in the quality of engagement, dialogue, and mattering that assessment enables (Gravett, 2025). GenAI intensifies the relevance of this perspective by exposing how little can be inferred from polished outputs detached from process and relationship.

Importantly, a turn towards relational pedagogy should not be mistaken for an appeal to naive trust or the suspension of standards. Rather, it signals the limits of approaches to learning and teaching that are organised primarily around suspicion, verification, and control. When assessment design is driven by the anticipation of misconduct, the complexity of learning is reduced to a technical problem, and the conditions required for meaningful judgement are weakened. This Editorial position recognises that trust, rigour, and accountability are not competing values but interdependent ones. Without relational conditions that support interpretive judgement, efforts to assure learning risk collapsing into either performative compliance or increasingly elaborate forms of surveillance that offer diminishing educational returns.

For this reason, the challenges posed by GenAI cannot be addressed within a single domain of scholarship or practice. Relational pedagogy in post-plagiarism contexts demands contributions from across curriculum and assessment design, educational technology, educational psychology, educational leadership, academic development, and the study of student experience. Each of these domains is uniquely positioned to illuminate different aspects of what is, at its core, a human problem: how learning is recognised, supported, and judged under conditions of uncertainty. In positioning relational pedagogy as a structural response rather than a pedagogical technique, this Editorial calls for scholarship that moves beyond narrow solutions and instead engages with the interconnected systems through which learning and teaching are enacted. GenAI does not diminish the relevance of this work. It makes it unavoidable.

So, Why Comment on This?

As editors of *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, we see GenAI appear across greater volumes of submissions, often framed either as a problem to be solved or a tool to be leveraged. What is less common, and what this Editorial seeks to encourage, is scholarship that situates GenAI (or any pedagogical or technological resource) within the deeper pedagogical, epistemic, and ethical questions it has surfaced. Too much of the work submitted to the Journal treats GenAI as an isolated variable, rather than as a stress test that exposes long-standing assumptions about assessment, learning, and assurance. As editors, we are less concerned with whether GenAI is present in a given context than with whether authors have critically engaged with what its presence reveals about the nature of higher learning and knowledge.

This Editorial is therefore not an argument for or against GenAI, nor a call for uniform responses across disciplines, institutions, or assessment contexts. Rather, it reflects our collective judgement that the field (despite repeated calls against these risks from scholars) risks becoming distracted by narrow debates about detection, compliance, and tool selection, at the expense of more consequential questions about how learning is recognised and judged. We are concerned when submissions assume that AI is inherently beneficial without considering its learning and human implications, just as we are concerned when it is treated as inherently corrosive without regard for how learning already occurs in collaborative, supported, and technologically mediated ways.

As a Journal, we remain open to research that documents where GenAI should be restricted, including in secured assessments such as vivas, interviews, or invigilated examinations, where the purpose of the task is incompatible with its use. Equally, we welcome work that explores how

generative AI can function as a critical friend, a sparring partner, or a catalyst for reflection and metacognitive development. What we ask of authors is not allegiance to a particular position, but clarity of purpose, theoretical grounding, and an explicit account of what is being assured, how, and why.

In advancing this Editorial position, we draw on the breadth of expertise represented across the journal's scope. Questions of assessment and curriculum design cannot be meaningfully separated from educational technology, educational psychology, educational leadership, academic development, or student experience. Each of these domains offers partial insight into what is, ultimately, a shared human learning problem: how educators make defensible judgements about learning under conditions of uncertainty. We see generative artificial intelligence not as a discrete topic area, but as a catalyst for scholarship that crosses these boundaries and engages with the interconnected systems through which learning and teaching are enacted.

Our intent in publishing this editorial is to signal the type of scholarship we hope to see more of in the *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*. We encourage submissions that move beyond binary framings of generative AI as either threat or solution, and that instead grapple with the harder work of rethinking assurance of learning in ways that are pedagogically principled, theoretically informed, and attentive to context. If generative artificial intelligence prompts the field to take this work seriously, then its most enduring contribution to higher education may lie not in what it automates, but in what it compels us to examine.

Conclusion

This Editorial does not argue for the death of the essay or the abolition of multiple-choice testing. It argues for the end of their unexamined dominance as evidentiary stand-ins for learning. In post-plagiarism contexts, assurance of learning cannot be secured through artefacts treated as self-evident proof of cognition or capability. It must instead be constructed through coherent systems of assessment, relational pedagogies, and the exercise of professional judgement informed by multiple forms of evidence accumulated over time.

GenAI has not defeated assessment, nor has it made validity impossible. What it has done is make visible the fragility of some contemporary assessment practices that rely on certainty about authorship and individual production as the primary basis for assurance. The challenge now facing higher education is not how to restore that certainty, but how to design learning and assessment systems that remain credible when it cannot be assumed. This requires a shift away from detection and control, and towards transparency, process, and interpretive judgement exercised within clearly articulated educational purposes.

If GenAI compels the sector to undertake this work seriously, then its most significant contribution to higher education may not be technological at all. It may lie in forcing a long overdue re-examination of how learning is recognised, supported, and judged. For journals, educators, and institutions alike, the task ahead is not to defend familiar assessment forms, but to ensure that assurance of learning remains meaningful under the conditions in which learning now occurs.

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