scope
Contemporary Research Topics

learning & teaching 16

November 2026

Article

https://doi.org/10.34074/scop.4016005

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RETHINKING ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING DESIGN IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: A REFLECTIVE PRACTICE FROM BUSINESS LECTURERS IN NEW ZEALAND

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INTRODUCTION

The emergence of generative artificial intelligence (AI) has become one of the most significant topics of discussion in contemporary higher education. Much of this discussion has centred on academic integrity, assessment security, and the implications of AI-generated content for traditional forms of assessment. While these concerns are important, they have also prompted many educators to revisit more fundamental questions about how learning is demonstrated and how assessment provides evidence of student capability.

Within Level 7 Applied Management education in Aotearoa New Zealand, these questions have become increasingly relevant. The programmes in which we teach are designed to develop capabilities such as critical thinking, problem-solving, professional judgement, and the application of knowledge to authentic organisational situations. These expectations have not changed with the emergence of AI. What has changed is the ease with which students can access tools capable of producing coherent written work. This prompted us to ask not simply whether AI was affecting assessment, but whether some of our existing assessment approaches provided sufficiently rich evidence of the capabilities they were intended to assess.

At the same time, our institution had already begun encouraging greater use of experiential learning and active participation across programmes. Rather than relying primarily on lectures and written assignments, there was increasing emphasis on learning activities that required students to discuss ideas, solve workplace problems, apply theory in context, and reflect on their decision-making. Experiential learning emphasises learning through experience, reflection, conceptualisation, and application (Kolb, 2015). Although these developments preceded the widespread adoption of generative AI, they provided an important foundation for many of the changes that followed.

The intersection of experiential learning and generative AI became the catalyst for this reflection. AI did not suddenly create concerns about assessment validity or authentic learning. Instead, it brought existing questions into sharper focus. As we redesigned learning activities and assessments, we found ourselves returning repeatedly to questions such as: How do we know meaningful learning has occurred? What kinds of assessments provide convincing evidence of student capability? How can learning activities support authentic engagement in an environment where AI is readily available?

This article presents a reflective account of how these questions influenced our teaching practice across several Level 7 Applied Management courses. Rather than evaluating a specific intervention or reporting empirical findings, it examines how ongoing reflection shaped changes to classroom teaching, assessment design, and the use of experiential learning in response to an evolving educational environment.

The paper argues that AI acted as a catalyst for re-examining long-standing assumptions about teaching, learning, and assessment. Through this reflective process, we also developed the EAST framework (Evidence, Alignment, Scalability and Sustainability, and Trust and Transparency) as a practical reflective tool to support educators when considering changes to learning design and assessment in rapidly changing educational contexts.

REFLECTIVE APPROACH

This paper adopts a reflective practice approach to explore how our thinking about teaching, learning, and assessment evolved as experiential learning initiatives intersected with the rapid emergence of generative AI. Rather than attempting to evaluate the effectiveness of particular teaching strategies, the paper seeks to understand how professional judgement developed through ongoing experience, uncertainty, and adaptation.

Our approach is informed by Schön's (2017) concept of the reflective practitioner, particularly the complementary processes of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action occurs while teaching is taking place, as educators respond to unexpected situations, modify activities, and make decisions in the moment. Reflection-on-action occurs afterwards, when experiences are reconsidered to identify assumptions, evaluate decisions, and inform future practice. These ideas have been widely recognised as valuable approaches for supporting professional learning and pedagogical development within higher education (Mann et al., 2009; Ryan, 2013).

The reflections presented here draw on our collective experiences of teaching Level 7 Applied Management courses in Aotearoa New Zealand over several years. During this period, our institution progressively encouraged greater use of experiential learning, while discussions surrounding AI increasingly influenced conversations about assessment, academic integrity, and learning design. Rather than resulting in a single course redesign, these influences prompted numerous small changes that accumulated over time. Some changes were deliberate, whereas others emerged unexpectedly through classroom experience and subsequent reflection.

These reflections are informed by professional observations, collaborative discussions among colleagues, iterative course redesign, and repeated teaching experiences across multiple course deliveries. They do not draw on formal empirical data, student surveys, or the results of systematic research. Consequently, the purpose of this article is not to present generalisable findings but to provide a transparent account of how teaching practice evolved within one educational context. Readers may recognise similar experiences within their own practice while reaching different conclusions appropriate to their settings.

Reflection is presented throughout as an ongoing process rather than a linear sequence of events. Looking across these experiences, we found that changes rarely occurred because a single solution was identified. More often, they emerged through questioning existing assumptions, testing

alternative approaches, observing unexpected outcomes, and gradually refining practice. It was through this continuing cycle of experience and reflection that the EAST framework eventually emerged—not as a predefined model, but as a practical way of making sense of the decisions we found ourselves making repeatedly.

THE TRIGGER: WHEN FAMILIAR PRACTICES BEGAN TO RAISE NEW QUESTIONS

Looking back, it would be inaccurate to say that generative AI suddenly transformed our teaching. Many of the teaching approaches discussed in this paper, including case-based learning, classroom discussion, authentic assessment, and experiential activities, were already part of our practice. Similarly, the programmes we taught had long emphasised analysis, evaluation, and application rather than simple knowledge recall. The arrival of AI did not replace these approaches; instead, it prompted us to look at them differently.

As educators, our initial concerns were similar to those expressed by many in higher education institutions. Conversations with colleagues often focused on academic integrity, assessment security, and whether students could produce assignment work using AI tools without demonstrating their own understanding. These concerns were understandable, particularly because many assessments relied on written submissions completed outside the classroom. Like many educators, we initially found ourselves asking how we could protect existing assessment practices.

However, as these discussions continued, a different set of questions began to emerge. Rather than asking how AI use could be prevented, we started asking whether our assessments were actually providing evidence of learning. If a student submitted a well-written report, how confident could we be that the report demonstrated the reasoning, judgement, and decision-making capabilities expected of a graduate? These questions were not entirely new, but AI made them much harder to ignore. Recent reviews have similarly suggested that generative AI is encouraging educators to reconsider how assessment provides evidence of learning, rather than simply how they might prevent inappropriate technology use (Weng et al., 2024; Xia et al., 2024).

Around the same time, our institution was placing greater emphasis on experiential learning and active participation across programmes. This encouraged us to redesign classroom activities so that students spent more time discussing authentic organisational problems, justifying decisions, and applying concepts in context. As these activities became more central to our teaching, we noticed that they often revealed aspects of student understanding that were less visible in traditional written assignments. Students could explain their reasoning, challenge one another's assumptions, defend their recommendations, and adapt their thinking as discussions unfolded. These observations gradually shifted our attention away from the final product towards the learning process itself.

This change did not occur through a single redesign initiative. Instead, it developed gradually through numerous small decisions made across different courses and teaching periods. Some ideas worked well immediately, while others required refinement after observing how students responded. In many cases, classroom experience challenged assumptions that had previously gone unquestioned. What initially appeared to be a discussion about AI increasingly became a broader reflection on assessment, learning design, and the kinds of evidence that best demonstrate meaningful learning.

REFLECTION-IN-ACTION: REFINING TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT THROUGH PRACTICE

The questions described in the previous section prompted an ongoing process of experimentation in which classroom activities, assessment tasks, and feedback practices were gradually refined over successive course deliveries. Consistent with Schön's (2017) concept of reflection-in-action, many decisions were made while teaching rather than through advance planning. Experiences in one class often influenced adjustments in the next, creating an iterative process of refinement rather than a single programme redesign.

One noticeable change involved how classroom time was used. Earlier teaching already incorporated discussion and application activities, but these gradually became the primary focus of many sessions. Greater emphasis was placed on organisational scenarios, collaborative problem-solving, structured debates, and classroom conversations where students were required to explain and justify their thinking. These activities did not replace theoretical learning; instead, they created opportunities for students to demonstrate how they interpreted and applied theoretical concepts in authentic contexts. This approach reflects the growing recognition that active engagement and contextual application remain important components of learning within AI-enabled educational environments (Salinas-Navarro et al., 2024).

Assessment practices also evolved through this reflective process. Rather than fundamentally changing programme learning outcomes, attention shifted towards how evidence of those outcomes was generated. Within the Implementing Sustainable Practice course, for example, students had always been expected to analyse stakeholder perspectives and evaluate organisational sustainability practices. During the redesign process, additional emphasis was placed on stakeholder evidence logs, structured organisational process evaluation, and clearer links between evidence, analysis, and recommendations. These refinements made students' reasoning more visible throughout the assessment process while maintaining alignment with the original learning outcomes.

Across other courses, similar principles guided assessment refinement. Greater use was made of staged activities, formative checkpoints, classroom discussions, and opportunities for students to explain the decisions underlying their work. These changes reflected a gradual shift in emphasis from evaluating completed written products towards examining how students developed, justified, and communicated their thinking. Recent literature similarly suggests that effective responses to generative AI depend less on detection technologies and more on assessment designs that encourage authentic demonstration of learning and professional judgement (Balducci et al., 2025; Chan, 2023).

Perhaps the most significant change, however, was not procedural but conceptual. Our conversations gradually moved away from asking how AI could be controlled towards asking how students could be supported to use AI responsibly while continuing to develop independent judgement. We found that discussions about ethical AI use, critical evaluation of AI-generated outputs, and transparency in learning often proved more valuable than attempts to discourage AI use altogether. This shift aligns with growing calls for the development of AI literacy as an essential graduate capability within higher education (Biagini et al., 2025; Walter, 2024).

Area of practice	Earlier approach	Revised approach	Reflection on change
Implementing Sustainable Practice (Level 7)	Students analysed stakeholder perspectives, organisational sustainability practices, and SDG implications through a structured written assessment.	Assessment tasks were refined to incorporate stakeholder evidence logs, structured organisational process evaluation, and stronger requirements for evidencing how stakeholder perceptions informed sustainability analysis and recommendations.	The revised design made students' reasoning and evidence use more visible throughout the assessment process, generating stronger evidence of critical thinking, contextual analysis, and applied judgement.
Organisational Research Design (Level 7)	Students developed research proposals that included research questions, methodology, and project planning components.	Greater emphasis was placed on iterative supervision, observation-based inquiry, project management milestones, and staged development of research components.	Learning became more visible throughout the research process, allowing students to receive feedback and refine their thinking before submission of the final proposal.
Contemporary Issues in Organisations (Level 7)	Students examined contemporary organisational issues through discussion, research, and analysis of current business challenges.	Increased use of live organisational cases, AI-related dilemmas, global risk scenarios, and future-focused decision-making activities linked directly to classroom discussions.	Students appeared to engage more deeply when concepts were connected to emerging and uncertain organisational contexts.
Assessment Design	Assessments were generally aligned with learning outcomes and required students to analyse, evaluate, and apply concepts within written submissions.	Greater use was made of staged submissions, contextualised tasks, formative checkpoints, presentations, and activities that required students to explain and justify their thinking throughout the learning process.	The focus expanded from evaluating final outputs to examining how students developed, applied, and communicated their reasoning.
Response to AI	Early discussions primarily focused on academic integrity, appropriate use, and the potential risks associated with generative AI.	Increased emphasis was placed on AI literacy, responsible use, critical evaluation of AI outputs, and assessment designs that required contextual judgement and reflection.	The conversation gradually shifted from managing risk towards supporting learning, capability development, and ethical engagement with technology.
Experiential Learning	Experiential learning activities were already incorporated within courses to support application of concepts and student engagement.	Experiential learning became more intentionally integrated through authentic organisational scenarios, collaborative problem-solving, reflective activities, and assessment-linked learning experiences.	These approaches often generated richer opportunities for students to demonstrate understanding while supporting engagement and participation.

Table 1. Examples of revised teaching and assessment practices.

These refinements did not emerge because we identified a single best practice. They emerged because each adjustment prompted new observations, new questions, and further refinement. Reflection therefore became less about evaluating isolated teaching techniques and more about continuously reconsidering how learning could be made visible, meaningful, and authentic within a rapidly changing educational environment. Table 1 presents selected examples of how teaching and assessment practices were refined through this reflective process. The examples in Table 1 are intended as illustrations rather than evidence of effectiveness. They represent practical changes that emerged through reflection on teaching experience and show how relatively small adjustments to learning activities and assessment design gradually shaped a broader reconsideration of teaching practice.

MAKING SENSE OF THE EXPERIENCE: THE EAST FRAMEWORK

Looking back across the reflections presented in this paper, one observation became increasingly clear. Although the changes described occurred across different courses, assessments, and classroom situations, the questions guiding our decisions were surprisingly consistent. We repeatedly found ourselves asking similar questions whenever we considered changes to teaching or assessment:

- What evidence tells us this change is actually needed?
- Does this change remain aligned with the learning outcomes and purpose of the course?
- Can this approach be sustained across future deliveries and different teaching contexts?
- Will students clearly understand what is expected of them, and can they trust the assessment process?

These questions eventually became the basis for the EAST framework, representing Evidence, Alignment, Scalability and Sustainability, and Trust and Transparency. Rather than being designed before the changes described in this article, the framework emerged afterwards as a way of organising and making sense of our reflective decision-making.

The EAST framework is therefore not intended to be a prescriptive model or a sequence of steps. Instead, it functions as a reflective tool that encourages educators to consider multiple dimensions simultaneously when making decisions about learning design and assessment. In practice, the four elements are interconnected, and changes in one area often influence the others.

Evidence

The first consideration is evidence. During the assessment redesign process, it became apparent that assumptions about what worked were not always supported by experience and evidence from practice. Before making changes to teaching or assessment, we found it important to ask what observations or experiences were prompting those changes. In our own context, evidence did not come from formal research data. Instead, it emerged through repeated classroom experiences, discussions with colleagues, observations of student engagement, assessment outcomes, and the practical challenges encountered during course delivery.

This emphasis on evidence helped avoid making changes simply because new technologies had emerged. Instead, it encouraged decisions that responded to identifiable issues within teaching practice. Looking back, the introduction of AI often acted as the catalyst for questioning existing

practices, but the evidence informing subsequent changes came largely from ongoing teaching experiences rather than from the technology itself.

Alignment

The second consideration is alignment between learning outcomes, teaching activities, and assessment tasks. Throughout the reflective process, we found ourselves returning repeatedly to the intended learning outcomes rather than to the assessment task itself. This prompted a subtle but important shift in thinking. Rather than asking whether an assessment was resistant to AI, we began asking whether it genuinely enabled students to demonstrate the capabilities the programme intended to develop.

This often resulted in relatively small changes rather than complete redesigns. Existing assessments were refined so that students were required to explain their reasoning, justify decisions, and apply concepts within authentic organisational contexts. These refinements strengthened the connection between learning activities, assessment tasks, and programme expectations while remaining consistent with the original educational purpose.

Scalability and sustainability

The third consideration recognises that effective educational ideas must also be practical. Throughout this reflection, many teaching innovations appeared promising when implemented in individual classes. However, further reflection required consideration of whether these approaches could be sustained across future course deliveries, different class sizes, and changing teaching teams.

This perspective encouraged decisions that balanced educational value with practical feasibility. Rather than pursuing increasingly complex assessment designs, we found greater value in making purposeful refinements that could be implemented consistently over time. Sustainability therefore became an important criterion alongside pedagogical innovation.

Trust and transparency

The final consideration focuses on the relationships that underpin learning and assessment. As conversations about AI became more common, we recognised that uncertainty often arose not because students wished to misuse technology, but because expectations were unclear. Questions frequently concerned what constituted acceptable AI use, how assessments would be evaluated, and what forms of support were appropriate.

These concerns highlighted the importance of transparency. Rather than relying primarily on surveillance or restriction, we found that clearer conversations about assessment purpose, responsible AI use, and expectations often resulted in more constructive engagement. Trust therefore became an important part of assessment design rather than simply an outcome of it.

Using the EAST framework as a reflective tool

The EAST framework is intended to support reflection rather than prescribe solutions. The four dimensions are not applied sequentially, nor is any one dimension considered more important than another. Instead, they are considered together as complementary questions that inform professional judgement.

For example, when refining an assessment task, an educator might first consider the evidence prompting the change and then examine whether the proposed refinement remains aligned with learning outcomes, whether it can be implemented sustainably across future deliveries, and whether expectations will remain transparent for students. In practice, these questions often overlap, requiring educators to balance competing considerations rather than optimise a single dimension.

The framework therefore reflects the central lesson emerging from this article: responding to AI is rarely about finding one correct solution. More often, it involves making thoughtful, context-sensitive decisions while remaining open to further reflection and refinement. EAST provides a simple structure for supporting those ongoing conversations.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Reflecting on the experiences presented in this paper, several practical implications have emerged. These are not intended as recommendations that apply universally across higher education. Rather, they represent considerations that may be useful for educators who are navigating similar questions about learning design, assessment, and the increasing presence of AI in teaching.

One implication is the importance of beginning with learning rather than technology. Throughout this reflection, we found that many of the questions initially raised by AI were, in fact, questions about assessment design and evidence of learning. Focusing first on the capabilities that students are expected to demonstrate provided a more productive starting point than focusing on the technology itself. Recent literature similarly suggests that responses to generative AI are most effective when they are grounded in educational purpose rather than technological capability (Chan, 2023; Weng et al., 2024).

A second implication concerns the value of making student thinking more visible. Across several course redesigns, relatively modest changes to learning activities and assessment requirements often provided richer opportunities for students to explain their reasoning, justify decisions, and demonstrate professional judgement. These refinements did not fundamentally change programme learning outcomes. Instead, they strengthened the connection between intended learning outcomes, classroom activities, and assessment evidence.

The reflections also reinforced the importance of treating AI as part of the contemporary learning environment rather than as an external problem to be managed. Conversations with students became more constructive when the emphasis shifted from avoiding AI towards using it responsibly and critically. Developing AI literacy alongside disciplinary knowledge appears increasingly important if higher education is to prepare graduates for professional environments where AI is becoming commonplace (Biagini et al., 2025; Walter, 2024).

Finally, this experience highlighted the continuing value of reflective practice itself. Many of the changes described in this article developed gradually through teaching, observation, discussion, and repeated refinement across different course deliveries. On reflection, the most valuable outcome was not a single assessment redesign or teaching strategy, but the habit of continually questioning how learning is experienced and how student capability is demonstrated. In this respect, the EAST framework is best understood as a reflective aid that supports ongoing professional judgement.

CONCLUSION

When this reflective journey began, our attention was largely focused on the challenges that generative AI appeared to present for assessment. Looking back, however, the experience led us towards a different conclusion. AI did not fundamentally change what we believed students should learn. Instead, it prompted us to reconsider how learning could be demonstrated and how assessment could provide more convincing evidence of student capability.

The reflections presented throughout this paper illustrate that meaningful changes often emerged through small refinements rather than major redesigns. Classroom discussions became more purposeful, assessment tasks made students' reasoning more visible, and conversations about AI gradually shifted from prevention towards responsible and transparent use. None of these developments occurred because a single solution was identified. Rather, they evolved through ongoing reflection, experimentation, and collaboration.

The EAST framework emerged from this process as a way of capturing the questions that repeatedly shaped our decision-making. It is not intended as a universal model or a checklist for redesigning courses. Instead, it offers a simple reflective structure that encourages educators to consider evidence, alignment, sustainability, and trust when making decisions about learning and assessment. Its value lies less in providing answers than in supporting thoughtful professional conversations.

This paper does not claim that the experiences described will be replicated in every educational context. Different disciplines, institutions, and student cohorts will inevitably require different responses. However, we hope that the reflections shared here encourage other educators to view AI not only as a technological challenge but also as an opportunity to reconsider longstanding assumptions about teaching, assessment, and learning.

Ultimately, the most significant outcome of this reflection was not the development of a framework or a revised assessment strategy. It was a renewed appreciation that effective teaching depends on continual reflection, willingness to adapt, and careful attention to the learning experiences of students. Those principles are unlikely to change, regardless of how rapidly educational technologies continue to evolve.

AI statement

Generative AI tools were used to support early drafting, structuring, language refinement, and editing. The reflective experiences, conceptual interpretation, examples of teaching practice, EAST framework, final analysis, and author judgement are the work of the authors. The authors reviewed, revised, and take full responsibility for the content, originality, and integrity of the submission.

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