



Book review: Elkington, S. and Irons, A. (eds.) (2025) *Formative assessment and feedback in post-digital learning environments: disciplinary case studies in higher education*. New York: Routledge.

Moving beyond binary thinking in complex learning environments: a postdigital perspective on formative assessment and feedback practice

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Feedback during formative assessment is a powerful driver of student learning and educational change, yet its potential is often underutilised in higher education (HE) practice. The level of feedback literacies among students remains a barrier (Carless and Boud, 2018). The role of the teacher in the feedback process and the development of their feedback literacy has been underexplored (Carless and Winstone, 2020). *Formative assessment and feedback in post-digital learning environments* offers some insightful contributions to our understanding about formative assessment and feedback practice, and the changing educational landscape provides the editors with a compelling justification to revisit this topic. The focus on the postdigital learning environment is fitting given the impact digital technologies, including generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), have had on HE and the complexities and contradictions they bring as both enablers and barriers. The postdigital framing offers a useful lens for this international collection of case studies that explore formative assessment and feedback from a range of disciplinary perspectives. This edited collection will be of interest to educators in HE who want to better understand the ways digital technologies might influence assessment and feedback practices.

The editors provide a helpful introduction to postdigital education citing authors who have contributed to postdigital thinking to date. The introductory chapter includes familiar

components of postdigital education: the constant adaptation and change; hybrid and flexible learning; moving beyond binary thinking; and recognising the need to integrate the complexities of the social and material elements in digitally mediated learning. This framing takes a holistic approach, recognising that technology and pedagogy are entangled. It is a valuable way to explore assessment and feedback practice. The editors provide some insight into their focus on formative assessment and see this as a key enabler in diverse educational settings.

The book's twenty-seven chapters comprise a collection of case studies. This format contextualises the disciplinary areas and assessment approaches shared by the authors. The editors acknowledge the case studies include some recurring (and familiar) themes such as student involvement in the feedback process, the purpose of formative assessment, the purpose of feedback, timely and constructive feedback, and the role of technology and diverse digital environments. Through the sharing of 'this mosaic of practice' (p.7), it is the editors' intention to help us critically explore diverse perspectives and the complexities of a changing HE landscape. This edited collection contributes rich, contextualised perspectives to this complex topic.

The editors provide an overview of the contemporary HE assessment and feedback landscape from a postdigital lens (Chapter 2). This enables them to unpack the diverse components involved in the relationship between digital technologies and assessment and feedback practice, providing an accessible entry point for those unfamiliar with the postdigital perspective. The collection of chapters then allows the reader to explore this in a contextualised manner by offering a range of disciplinary perspectives that include the Social Sciences, Education, Finance, Medicine, Biological Sciences, and Computer Science. Familiar teaching and assessment approaches are also explored including the role of assessment rubrics (Chapter 9), ipsative feedback (Chapter 10), reflection using e-portfolios (Chapter 17), multimodal assessment (Chapter 16), plus gamification and peer assessment (Chapter 22). The case studies also explore the adoption of frameworks (Chapters 13 and 24), as well as relevant topics such as employability (Chapter 5), sustainability (Chapter 7), the international context (Chapter 8), and modes of learning (Chapters 11 and 14). Notably, the authors of several chapters reflect on how their experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic have informed their current practice.

Many of the chapters focus on approach and context rather than specific digital tools, which demonstrates the authors' nuanced understanding of digital pedagogy. The postdigital lens offers the collection's contributors the opportunity to consider more than the functional use of digital technologies and move beyond the binary thinking of digital versus pedagogy. Some authors do focus on a particular tool, such as Microsoft Class Notebooks in Chapter 21. But while a short description of the functionality of the tool is provided here, the focus is on sharing practice in context using three different scenarios to highlight formative assessment approaches in Engineering. The tool is integrated into the teaching approach as a mechanism to provide dialogue and feedback. The case study did not present the tool as a solution, instead other elements were unpacked such as the importance of developing trust and supporting students to enable them to engage with formative feedback. Microsoft Office tools were also explored in Chapter 12 where Microsoft Forms was used to capture student feedback and offer flexible learning opportunities building on practice developed during the pandemic. This case study provides useful examples of how this approach has been used in a Business School context and the reflection points offer insights into the complexities educators face when adopting digital approaches even when they do integrate them into their teaching.

The current hot topic of artificial intelligence is included in the collection, with GenAI being explored in several chapters. Chapter 15 introduces an AI-generated teaching assistant (the chatbot Zara) who 'guides students' to encourage self-regulated learning. The authors emphasise they were the educators and the chatbot enabled the creation of AI-generated text-to-video content to engage and motivate their students. Formative assessment activities were embedded in the video content. The potential of this technology is shared in the key learning, and some barriers are briefly mentioned. This case study moves the narrative beyond concerns about academic integrity and instead demonstrates an innovative application of AI technology. The postdigital lens offers readers the opportunity to consider the concept of augmenting machine and human interactions in the hybrid learning environment which has the potential to open conversations about possibilities as well as the ethical implications of AI.

In sum, this edited book shares a helpful collection of perspectives and experiences, making it a worthwhile contribution to the emerging postdigital literature. The book will be relevant to HE educators and professionals, including academic developers or learning

developers, who want to explore and better understand how a postdigital lens might frame the substantial body of work on assessment and feedback.

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The authors did not use generative AI technologies in the creation of this manuscript.

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