

Innovating Assessment in Media Studies: A Case Study of Bee Hughes' "Mediating Diversity" Module

In the ever-evolving landscape of higher education, educators are constantly seeking innovative ways to engage students and prepare them for the professional world. This case study explores how Bee Hughes reimaged assessment in a level 6 option module called "Mediating Diversity" for the Media Culture and Communication degree programme.

The Challenge: Bee faced a common dilemma in higher education: how to make assessments more engaging, relevant, and reflective of real-world skills while still maintaining academic rigor. Traditional essays, while valuable, didn't fully capture the diverse skills students would need in their future careers in media and communications.

The Innovation: Hughes' solution was to introduce a social media artifact assessment, worth 30% of the module grade. Students were tasked with creating a 10-minute (or equivalent) piece of content on a social media platform of their choice, addressing a topic from the module.

Implementation: The module covered a wide range of topics over 12 weeks, including queer theory, neoliberal feminisms, bodily autonomy, and representations of war and climate change in media. Each week included content warnings, seminar activities, and suggested readings.

To support students in this novel assessment, Hughes provided:

1. Access to digital studios and vlogger kits
2. Templates and planning documents
3. Embedded resources from Sage Research Methods
4. Examples of different social media styles
5. A dedicated workshop for planning
6. A comprehensive checklist

Importantly, Hughes addressed potential ethical concerns by allowing students to create dummy accounts or submit work privately, ensuring they weren't required to use personal social media profiles.

Outcomes: The results were impressive. Students engaged deeply with the material, producing diverse content across platforms like TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and podcasts. Hughes noticed an unexpected benefit: "Some of the students did really effective YouTube videos... It was really surprising. Like these students have been very quiet in class and [now] sort of becoming YouTubers."

Challenges and Considerations: While the assessment was largely successful, Hughes acknowledges it required significant preparation. "Although there has been an increased workload in generating the activities and recording lectures, I'm very happy with the levels of engagement". Another consideration was ensuring students had equal opportunities regardless of their familiarity with different platforms. Hughes addressed this by allowing students to choose their platform from a list that includes YouTube, TikTok and Instagram and providing extensive support resources.

Other challenges include ensuring a balance between structured guidance and creative freedom in the assignment brief and providing parity between the type of work that can be produced across different platforms. This led to developing timing guidance for audio visual responses, and equivalent word count and image instructions for image or text-based platforms (e.g. producing Instagram grid posts). It was also important to ensure assessment criteria and expectation setting are calibrated to reflect that while creative use of social media platform functions should be included, as this is ultimately an assessment about communicating ideas rather than production values.

Looking Forward: Encouraged by the success of this module, Hughes is considering implementing similar approaches in other courses. "I'm hoping to add some change, do something similar for a Level 4 module that I've taken over," they say.

Conclusion: This case study demonstrates how innovative assessment methods can increase student engagement, foster creativity, and develop professional skills. By aligning academic work with real-world media practices, Hughes has created a model that could be adapted across various disciplines. As universities continue to evolve in response to changing student needs and industry demands, Bee Hughes' approach offers valuable insights into creating assessments that are both academically rigorous and professionally relevant.