Emulating 'Real World' practices in assessing professional and clinical skills: Why are we asking students to write when real professionals demonstrate?

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In 2015 a new Medical Imaging course was launched at an Australian University with an inaugural enrolment of 80 students. The structure of the curriculum was based on a novice to expert pedagogical model, with student learning experiences and assessments designed to scaffold the development of clinical competency and professional skills, knowledge and attributes across the course as required by the professional accrediting body. Course and unit learning outcomes reflected this progression and from the first semester students were expected to begin developing professionally relevant competencies and were subsequently assessed on these. One such assessment was an image critique in a clinical skills unit. As part of a 2000-word reflective writing assessment, students were required to produce a written critique of a radiographic image using a set radiograph evaluation protocol. Anecdotal feedback suggested that students found this task challenging. Further, although using an analytic rubric, lecturers also found the critique difficult to mark. Of more concern was the feeling that students were able to 'hide' misconceptions behind jargon, thus lecturers were concerned that students were not grasping the threshold concepts and skills required to competently complete this task and progress to more complex concepts in future units. This presentation will highlight the critical review and redesign process of the assessment task and the strategies undertaken to better align the assessment with authentic practice of a radiographer including the development of digital technology skills. It will also address the challenges of student collusion when moving away from traditional assessment methods and share strategies to manage this. The new assessment design provides students with the opportunity to create an artefact that is useful for inclusion in an e-Portfolio or interview, thus enhancing their employability in the sector.