

Chapter 10

Designing for Authenticity

ABSTRACT

Designing for authenticity is supported by learner-centric theoretical and pedagogical approaches. Technological advancements in digitally mediated communications now make it more feasible than ever to ensure the authenticity of online learning environments. Activities and assessments must be authentic to the learner and should provide choice, engagement, and opportunity for reflection. Authentic activities and assessments require the learner to use higher order thinking skills, collaborate, and co-construct knowledge within the learning community. Departing from traditional assessment methods minimizes academic integrity issues because learners must be able to produce tangible evidence of learning and apply real-world skills in a variety of scenarios. Authentic assessment measures learning gains by assessing the thought process behind the product and not just the product itself.

OBJECTIVES

- Define authenticity versus authentication.
- Explore the different theoretical and pedagogical approaches that support authenticity in online learning environments.

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- Identify the distinctiveness of authentic assessments and activities.
- Discuss the dangers of pre-authenticating activities and assessments.
- Discuss strategies for embedding authenticity in the online learning environment.

INTRODUCTION

Online education continues to expand at a rapid rate with more teachers and learners joining online programs and companies conducting more web-based trainings than in years past. Online learning is now more established and widely recognized as a valid and reputable form of instruction. This expansion, however, exposes the issues of trust and authenticity in cyber education, issues that were always present in all forms of distance education. Trust is directly influenced by authenticity of learning in both synchronous and asynchronous digitally mediated communications. While it is appealing to think that technologies can provide a reliable means for delivering learning materials and assessing learning, some doubts remain in the minds of the most well-intentioned cyber educators. Many of these doubts are centered on the issue of assessment and the validity of results. Educators who transfer outdated methods of assessment, such as multiple-choice tests, to online learning programs are, in essence, designing a program that is deficient; they should, therefore, employ alternate methods of authentic assessments that are administered in a secure, trustworthy learning environment.

Traditional forms of face-to-face assessment do not work in the online environment and increase the risk of plagiarism and other forms of academic integrity breaches as discussed in Chapter 7 of this publication. Traditional types of assessments are part of an old paradigm of educating the masses that has proven inefficient over the decades. A lack of confidence in the results of assessments already plagues many face-to-face environments and is amplified in online learning. Assessing learners in a face-to-face environment typically requires proctors, which costs time and money. This form of assessment also requires control of materials and their administration. Though administration of assessments may be simplified in the online world (Rowe, 2004) through the use of digitally mediated communications, the challenge of cyber educators is compounded by the lack of consistent focus for authenticity of design and authentication concerns.

Authenticity and authentication are terms with different meanings. Authenticity involves using types of activities and assessments that require the learner to apply real-world skills, while authentication is the process of establishing the validity of a person's identity. Authenticity is not possible without authentication. Although much attention has been given to plagiarism in the online environment because of

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