Unlocking the Power of Authentic Assessment

Dr Lydia Arnold
EdD, PFHEA, NTF
@HarperEdDev
lydiaarnold.net
About me

• Educational Developer, Head of eLearning & Principal Lecturer

• Curriculum, eLearning, PgC, internal assessment and feedback consultant, staff development, action research supervisor, inclusive practice

• Realist (or so I hope!)
This session

• Explore the **concept** of authentic assessment
• Identify some of the **benefits and challenges**
• **Share examples** of authentic assessment
• Consider the **implications** for teaching
• Consider the **factors which enable** authentic assessment
What is authentic learning?

Authentic – real and true

1. Authentic to employability (real, like work)

2. Authentic to discipline (growing in discipline)

3. Authentic to self (as I wish to become)

Relevant to me, us and them
Different perspectives on ‘authentic’

- Authentic assessment mirrors practice in the profession or discipline so that students see how knowledge is created within their field” (Jessop, 2018).
- Like communities of practice (Stein et al. 2004)
- Emphasis on problem solving, meta-learning, self regulation (not training).

- How well does an activity match the student’s goals and aspirations? How well does the student connect and see meaning in the knowledge? (Stein et al., 2004)
- “Authentic learning experiences are those that are personally relevant from the learner’s perspective and situated within appropriate social contexts” (Stein, Isaacs and Andrews, 2004, p239).
- “Worthwhile, relevant and offering students some level of control over their work” (Brown, 2018)
What authentic learning is not.

‘Students and teachers are seen to focus on completing assessment tasks and attaining good marks to the detriment of real engagement with learning’ (McDowell, Sambell and Davison on Ecclestone, 2009)

“Students are strategic as never before” (Gibbs, 2019)

“achievement without understanding” (Torrance 2007)

What else would you have done in your research project Adam?
Assessment for Learning
(see McDowell, Sambell and Davison, 2009)

- “If you want to change student learning then change the methods of assessment” (Brown, Bull and Pendlebury, 1997, p.7)
- Assessment creates a backwash on learning and teaching (Watkins, Dahlin and Ekholm, 2015)
- It models the learning process
- You just can’t do authentic assessment without learning!
Eight features of authentic assessment

1. Challenge to the student
2. Performance or product
3. Transfer of learning (between contexts or combinations)
4. Metacognition (reflection, self-assessment and evaluation)
5. Recognisable as authentic by a stakeholder (e.g., industry)
6. Fitting of environment and tools
7. Discussion and feedback
8. Collaboration

(Summarised from Ashford-Rowe, Herrington and Brown, 2014)
Authentic assessment at its core

Authentic assessment is characterised by realism, cognitive challenge and evaluative judgment with relevance to self, discipline community or professional community'.
A strategy for design

**STEP ONE**
Workplace Context
- Graduation Profile
- Work requirements

**STEP TWO**
Design Assessment
- Drafting a rich context.
- Creating a worthwhile task
- Requiring higher order skills

**STEP THREE**
Judgement
- Assessment criteria and rubrics
- Engage students with criteria
- Engage the students in judgement

**STEP FOUR**
Feedback
- Formative feedback
- Summative feedback
- Sustainable feedback

*Figure 1. Model to build authentic assessment.*

Source: Villaroel et al. (2018)
Backwards design methodology

(Wiggins and McTighe, 2006)

(Find out more about this exercise at Arnold, 2016)
Example: Project management and video creation

- Student projects
- Pair with local organisations
- Create and manage video products
- Team function (team problems)
- The pedagogy of facilitation
- Marked by process and product and meta-reflection
- Exhibition and prizes
What are the challenges of authentic assessment?
Benefits and challenges

- Assessment FOR learning
- Motivating for students
- Higher order cognitive skills
- Develops a wide range of skills
- Interesting and rewarding for staff
- Helps fight cheating*
- Can feed in to real world challenges when paired with industry

- Risk of utilitarian narrative (remember self)
- Time in preparation
- Not all subjects align with a career area (more impetus?)
- Support needs to be aligned
- Facilities can be limiting
Perceived impact on cheating

- Cheating/Plagiarism (see Bretag et al, 2019)
- Authentic assessment perceived to assist
- Little evidence – beyond ‘common sense’
- Students still perceive cheating and possible and likely
- Less likely when: Viva, in-class tasks, personalised and unique, and reflections.
- More about support, satisfaction and pressure.

50,000 cases in 3 years: 17,000 per year = 0.7% (Mostorous & Kenber in King, 2019)

“Hardly the student cheating crisis that the media headline purported” (King, 2019)
Undermining authenticity

- Misalignment
- Relevance to self and future self
- Risk of misalignment (Ajjawi et al, 2019) – university practices and tasks that don’t capture learning
- Risk of ‘glossing’ – trivialising (Cumming and Maxwell, 1999)
- Ornamental information (Villarroel et al. 2019)
A spectrum of authentic activity (My Work in Progress)

Exhibition

Live projects with stakeholders

Single problem e.g. A set problem for all to solve

Controlled e.g. Adapted real world case studies or simulations

Formative engagement e.g. Feedback on an initial idea or response

Occasional input e.g. Guest talks or specific activities

Audience

Perceived risk

Authenticity

Tutor Control
Example: Volunteering and networking

“As a course team we’d recognised that our students engage widely outside their studies...We wanted a way to recognise this had a value professionally so created a ‘networking and volunteering’ requirement in ...taken by all the Business students in their first year. It offered a fun way for them to demonstrate their wider interests as the criteria are broad and subject to negotiation. .. Students also give a very short talk on one of their activities with very limited notes to their tutorial group. These are varied and engaging and offer good practice for interviews” (Jane Headley, Principal Lecturer).
Example: Volunteering and networking

I learnt a lot more than I otherwise would have done, for example I could use aspects from the Amazon talk in my logistics and distribution module to further my learning of the course.

Menu

- An external speaker event;
- Acting as a student ambassador for two events;
- Attending a business visit;
- Volunteer work in a Harper farm session;
- Acting as a committee member for a club or society (at Harper or elsewhere);
- Representing an organisation in an event;
- Working on a show stand or similar;
- Attending an international student event.
Example: Designing for feedback

- The Food Spectacular (0.34)
- Audience
- Industry
- Feedback
- Real
- Enthusiasm
Example: The action research project

- Action research as an authentic project model (Maxwell, 2012) for the professions
- Negotiated focus (stakeholders); facilitative pedagogy
- Action oriented (practice development)
- Knowledge about and knowledge of ‘me’
- Authentic: real world, self, cognitive demand, evaluative
- Librarians, farmers, teachers, administrators, marketing, lecturers.
- An example of an authentic, real word output through a playful learning guide
- Led to a dissemination requirement for all Master’s students
- See Arnold & Norton (2018)
Example: The media patchwork portfolio

- Based on Richard Winter’s Patchwork Text, extended by Arnold, Thompson and Williams (2009)
- Artefacts - built up
- Collated by a narrative (stitching)
- Mixed media (prescribed or selected)
- Peer feedback
- Balance professional and academic
And what about exams?

- Can exams be authentic too?
- Viva
- Triple jump
- Open book (reduces anxiety)
- Simulation
- Multiple choices*
- Clinical examinations

1st year vivas give students an opportunity to excel at a different kind of assessment. I find they often reflect on their learning and development more maturely and with richer examples and ideas when they can do this verbally, face-to-face.
Enablers of authentic assessment

Course design
- Backwards engineering (Outcomes driven)
- Programmatic thinking
- Preparatory support

Pedagogic outlook
- Alignment of approach
- Technology
- Feedback

Development of evaluative judgment
- Criteria
- Exemplars
- Dialogue

Institutional alignment
- Enabling regulations and processes
- Supportive colleagues
- Appetite for enhancement (CoPs, external engagement)
- Staff base may include dual professionals
Programmatic thinking for pedagogy

Programmatic design ‘involves team decisions about assessment’

It builds ‘more integration between assessment tasks, so that students see the connections between knowledge and learning on one module and another’ (Jessop 2019, p43).

No surprises please!
Preparative support

The biggest issue is overcoming students natural preference of the more passive lecture/tutorial model, where they are not challenged about their learning as frequently. I now have data which clearly illustrates that engagement equals success, so will be incorporating this regularly next year. Business Lecturer, after introducing Team Based Learning.
Aligned pedagogy

- Facilitative, advisory
- Risk taking, risk managing
- Trusting, encouraging independence
- Anticipatory, shift in effort
- Dialogic
- Feedback enabling
- Exposed (I don’t know)
- Context aware – engagement beyond the academy
- Sensitive, but fostering robustness
The pedagogy of letting go

I’m not sure how this is going to go, how students will react and whether they will learn all of the content that we usually cover.

I always used to worry that students wouldn’t do a good job, that they won’t get what is required. But they always do better than I could imagine! You need a lot of trust and you need know when to step back. It’s like students are in a fog. You have to be confident it will lift.

I enjoyed the teaching style but others thought I was selling the students short, they thought it was high risk – but we need to give it time.
It really is so much more enjoyable having a module where it is possible to engage directly with groups and individuals, as you get to know many more students as people rather than passive faces in a lecture theatre, with the benefit that those who were struggling were identified and supported at a much earlier stage.
Digital Skills (presentation media and communication tools)

• **Model** use of appropriate technology

• Negotiate? What **skills** do students want to develop?

• What does the **audience need**?

• Be clear what **support** you can offer.

• **Be honest** if something may not work.

• Take care not to be **wowed** by the media.

• Decide how it will be **marked** (audience appropriate).

• Deal with the **thorny issue** of word count.
Strategies to develop evaluative judgment

“It is not until students apply criteria and standards to judge their own work … that their own work will improve (Gibbs, 2019, p. 27)."

‘Providing feedback rendered the students more active and involved in their learning, enhanced their responsibility and commitment to the task’ (Ion, Sánchez Martí and Morell, 2019)
Clear criteria

The Rubric Menu

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific, generic or hybrid?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student created, staff created or co-created?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared with students or between staff?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How many quality levels?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Who will be using the rubric and how?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With or without exemplars?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytical or holistic judgment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital or paper?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Task focussed or skill focussed?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How prescriptive? (headroom)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presented as a grid, a table or something else?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(drawing on and adding to Dawson, 2017)
Consider exemplars

- Clarify assessment requirements
- Surface tacit assumptions about assessment
- Increase students' self-direction.
- Prompt activities that generate feedback.
- Bring about greater confidence in standards.
- Pro-actively provide feedback
- Improve dialogue around assessment

(Arnold and Headley, 2019 Forthcoming)
Enablers of authentic assessment

Institutional alignment

- Enabling regulations and processes
- Supportive colleagues
- Appetite for enhancement (CoPs, external engagement)
- Dual professionals
Going forward

• Benefits outweigh limitations
• Join it up! – think as a programme to make the biggest impact
• Institutional conditions matter – make each other brave
• Be brave, be bold! Grow confidence.
• Beyond utility – the outside world changes, fast!
• Lots of research outstanding – cheating, planning and exemplars.


