

Authentic Learning



What is Authentic Learning?

Authentic learning refers to learning which happens by actually participating and working on real-world problems, engaging learners by giving them the opportunity of solving real-world complex problems and finding out solutions. In this way learners practice skills and knowledge that are relevant and real to workplace situations and learn it at the same time. Authentic learning activities include role-playing exercises, problem-based activities, case studies, and participation in virtual communities of practice. The learning environment of authentic learning is multidisciplinary in nature, for example: designing a container for specific purpose, setting rules, planning a budget, and handling a crisis. Authentic approach of learning differs greatly from traditional “lecture” classes, where teachers give students information and content of a subject discipline that students are expected to memorize and repeat in tests. It promotes understanding through discovery and doing.

Authentic learning is recommended as the best way of learning for students. It is solidly grounded in theories of learning and cognition, in a batch of theories called constructivist learning, which refers to the theory of cognitive development by Jean Piaget (1986-1980), discovery learning by Jerome Seymour Bruner (1915-), and constructivist learning by Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1896-1934).

The History of Authenticity

The history of authentic learning could be dated back as early as 16th century, when Descartes proposed the idea of authenticity as following a moral inner voice. Under this circumstance, he asserted that individuals had to think and act responsibly under this voice. This is in contrast with previous idea that an individual's morality was developed through their social status.



Soon after years, Philosopher Rousseau further supported Descartes' idea and elaborated that moral sense and authenticity should be regarded as a voice of nature within our own selves. Measures of existence, as argued by Herder, should be taken based on creativity, authenticity, and originality - and this has been taken as the definition of authentic learning. Our identity is simply based on experiences and our own interpretations towards them.

What differs between these three philosophers is that the definitions and roles of authenticity change from an external force to an inner force developed through experience. In a compromise between these definitions, Grimmett defines authenticity as "to draw on a 'body' of knowledge and to speak and act from those moral spaces with a confidence that is rooted in a conscious, collective understanding." This definition explicitly states that knowledge is formed based on consciousness, experience, and reflection; and has been taken as the major definition after his introduction of such theory.

Why Authenticity Matters?

★ Authentic learning boosts motivation.

It is suggested that children have a natural drive to learn from the world that they are living in. They are strongly motivated to understand, interact with and even to change the world.

★ Students learn better in authentic learning environment.

Research has concluded that authentic learning best suits students' assorted learning styles in a large group and they learn with high effectiveness through environment approach, in which students make use of real tools with real purposes and to make real products.

★ Authentic learning prepares students for future career.

Today's changing world requires students to understand the global economy and thus the school should provide students with meaning context in which students can learn to solve problems using different information sources as if they are in the real world.

★ Authentic learning makes concepts easier to assimilated.

When new concepts or models are learned, they are compared spontaneously with the concepts that learned before and the connections to life experience are drawn. So, it is easier for students to learn when they are encouraged to investigate the topic on a personal level and more related to the social life of the students.

★ Authentic learning blends theories with practice.

Students can be forgetful if they do not apply the knowledge they learn from time to time. With exposure to new contexts, application of the concepts in new settings and participation in assorted learning activities, students can remember concepts in mind firmly.

Characteristics of Authentic Learning

- 1. Real-world relevance:** Activities match as nearly as possible the real-world tasks of professionals in practice, contextualized and situated.
- 2. Teacher as Facilitator:** teacher provides a motivational challenge, nurtures and provides the necessary criteria, timelines, resources and support to accommodate student success.
- 3. Engages all the Senses of learners:** opportunities to motivate learners to sense, think, conceptualize and act to find out solutions
- 4. Interdisciplinary:** Activities encourage interdisciplinary perspectives and enable learners to play diverse roles and build expertise that is applicable beyond a single well-defined field or domain.
- 5. Complex, sustained tasks:** Activities require significant investment of time and intellectual resources
- 6. Higher order thinking Development:** Provides opportunities for students to examine the task from different perspectives using a variety of resources, separate relevant from irrelevant information, exercise judgment and make decision
- 7. Collaborative:** Collaboration is integral and required for task completion.
- 8. Value laden:** Provide the opportunity to reflect and involve students' beliefs and values
- 9. Tangible and Authentic Products:** aim at creating tangible, useful products to be readily shared with the community and the real world for use
- 10. Authentically assessed:** Assessment is seamlessly integrated with learning in a manner that reflects how quality is judged in the real world

11. Creative outcomes: Activities allow a range and diversity of outcomes open to multiple solutions of an original nature, rather than a single correct response obtained by the application of predefined rules and procedures.

Different Stages in an Authentic Learning episode

I) Setting the Scenario

First of all, the teacher explains the scenario (context) of the whole task to the students and highlights the requirements or the goals of the tasks.

II) Re-defining the tasks and Inquiry

Then, students form groups and start to examine the main task. They need to divide the main task into smaller parts or sub-tasks through discussion on the topic. Soon afterwards, students search for related information and try to solve the problems.

III) Accomplishing the task

After investigation on relevant topics and collection of information, students work on the main task. They need to reproduce the knowledge they learned from the previous stage and transform it into a product. New skills, apart from information, are acquired in this stage as students are asked to create a product for presentation. Communication is also a key element in this stage as peer support is essential when students are not very confident in working on new topics.

IV) Presentation

Last but not least, students share their product within their class or even with the community. This allows students to learn from other groups or to get constructive feedback from the teacher and other community members.

Examples

Creating young museum docents

In the American Museum of Natural History, there was a group of young docents answering questions from the public. They were as young as primary school students. Regardless of their age, they explained very clearly and in great detail. They were taught in a programme organised by a local primary school (Shelter Rock School). As explained by the school librarian, Pat Lynch, the whole programme started with research on different topics that the students can learn and present. After that they contacted the docents in the museums, the initial reply being that the teachers needed to teach the students how to interview and be interviewed first. Then, the teachers showed students how to organize the teachers' research into structures that the public can understand. The teachers also rehearsed students' oral presentation with them using rubrics they developed. Later, the students got a chance to talk to the docents in the museum and eventually became one themselves.

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