Reusable Resources

Resources

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Authentic Assessment Framework May 2021 version

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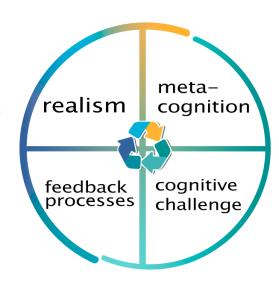*Technological University Dublin*, jen.harvey@tudublin.ie

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Authentic Assessment Redesign Framework

The Operation Transformation Authentic Assessment (AA) framework builds on the work of Gulikers et al, (2006) and Villerarroel et al (2020) and is structured across four dimensions: 'Realism', 'Cognitive challenge', 'metacognition', and 'feedback processes'. This AA initiative recognises that there are many different definitions of Authentic Assessment and that levels of authenticity are better viewed within a continuum (National Forum, 2017). In many cases, it will be appropriate to have a mix of authentic and traditional assessments and that a change towards 'more authentic' assessments will by necessity one that is achieved incrementally across a programme. As such, this is not intended as a prescriptive, linear blueprint for developing authentic assessment but a set of common dimensions to be used as a general guide.

Dimension 1 - Realism

Learn more

- *Is the assessment recognised as authentic by a stakeholder?*
- *Is there a high degree of fidelity of environment, tools-in-use, and product/performance to a relevant real-world situation/working context?*

Authentic assessments 'faithfully represent' a professional context in which graduates will be expected to learn and perform and prepare students to think, act, and behave in ways that resemble the practice of an expert in their discipline or field. As such, for an assessment to be authentic there should be some alignment or correspondence between the assessment method process and required end-product/performance *and* the real-world situation/working context that a student is being prepared for.

Authentic assessment should be designed to engage students in active learning processes, based on constructivist principles , with outcomes that focus on a performance or product likely to be encountered in a 'real-world' context. Authentic tasks or simulations of tasks are generally anchored within problematising contexts which resemble those encountered in real-world environments, including realistic time constraints, interpersonal dynamics, and materials and modes of communication and feedback. The use of culturally appropriate language, techniques

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and tools normally used within the professional context will help to situate the task and enhance authenticity and realism.

Building Realism into your Authentic Assessment

Design your authentic task collaboratively – where possible, engage with key stakeholders, including future employers or regulatory or professional bodies, to better align tasks with authentic practices. Where fully collaborative design is not possible, seeking stakeholder feedback at one or more draft stages may help to enhance the authenticity of your assessment.

Situate tasks within a professional/real-world context - locate your tasks in a context likely to be encountered by learners in professional life. Rather than an 'ornamental' backdrop for the assessment task, this context should be integral to it, providing a meaningful experience through which they can apply their knowledge and skills.

Identify appropriate professional tasks - an authentic assessment should comprise tasks necessitate personal and professional development and allow for the application of theory to practice, emphasising the importance of each. Authenticity can be enhanced by selecting and designing tasks that require complex and divergent responses from students, allowing for context-dependent knowledge construction and new understandings to develop. Check that any software, tools, language and artefacts/materials employed resemble those used within the equivalent professional tasks.

Position learners within the assessment task - situate students within realistic situations that require them to make decisions about what they need to do. In this way, they are not just reproducing course content but discriminating between the knowledge, skills, and aspects of their learning that they must draw on to complete the given task.

Dimension 2 - Cognitive Challenge

Learn more

- *To what extent does the activity actively challenge the student to engage their higher-order cognitive skills (e.g. evaluative thinking, knowledge application, problem-solving and decision-making)*
- *What performance or product is required as a final assessment outcome?*

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Authentic Assessments challenge students to think creatively and laterally, and to apply their repertoire of knowledge and skills to complex tasks in novel, realistic contexts. They support students' development of personal and professional competencies by giving them a level of agency within the learning process and presenting them with opportunities to make judgements about their approach to assessment. Whether in the production of a performance or a product, authentic assessment tasks should require learners to draw upon their higher-level cognitive skills by challenging them to integrate new ideas with prior knowledge, apply theory to practice, engage in thoughtful analysis, evaluation and decision-making, and solve novel problems. As students are encouraged to move out of their comfort zone and into situations where may not always initially succeed, these experiences can be affectively challenging and should be appropriately supported.

Building Cognitive Challenge into your Authentic Assessment

Align assessment tasks with high-level cognitive learning outcomes - assessment tasks should result in the application of theory or the creation of something new. Verbs used to describe learning outcomes should reflect higher-order cognitive skills, e.g. evaluate, critically analyse, synthesize, recommend, design, develop, devise, formulate, plan.

Embed your new authentic assessment within your programme - view your assessment within the context of the programme; how does this your approach align with the overall educational objectives and intended learning outcomes of the programme? How will it assist learners on their path to becoming a successful graduate?

Design tasks that require complex and divergent responses - rather than designing assessments that only require memorization and recall of information from the syllabus, provide students with opportunities to apply and construct knowledge with cognitively complex tasks. Authenticity can also be enhanced by giving learners choice over their approach to an assessment task, mirroring the complexity of real-world, professional performance and problem-solving.

Ensure that there are clearly defined end products or performances - Consider outputs that can provide direct evidence of learners' knowledge, skills and competencies and which resemble those likely to be encountered within a professional or 'real-world' context.

Make produce or performance assessment criteria available in advance - assessment criteria and expected standards of performance/quality should be aligned with assessment learning outcomes and communicated to learners in advance. Where possible, actively engage learners in discussions about the criteria to initiate dialogue around performance and standards. Asking students to mark assignments using assessment criteria and exemplar assignments can significantly improve their performance (O'Donovan, Price and Rust 2008) and assists in developing their self-evaluative skills

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Dimension 3 - Metacognition

Learn more

- *Does the assessment engage learners metacognitively (e.g. in reflection, self-assessment and evaluation)?*
- *Does the assessment activity require that transfer of learning (between contexts or combinations) has occurred?*

Assessment *as* Learning' or 'Sustainable assessment' Boud (2010) seeks to prepare students for what they will have to do - and know – in the world beyond higher education (Tai et al., 2017). Feedback within the professions often comes from professional judgements and an ability to self-assess and evaluate one's own performance relative to others can help to build a career understanding of what constitutes good professional practice. Authentic assessment methods should therefore encourage students to learn and work independently of the lecturer, make judgements about their own abilities and learning needs, and make decisions about how to draw appropriately upon different skillsets and knowledge when faced with complex problems or challenging tasks. In addition to encouraging students to evaluate their own learning, understandings and performances, metacognition can be facilitated through the provision of opportunities for learning transfer (students' selection and application of existing knowledge, skills, competencies and behaviours to different learning events).

Authentic assessments provide opportunities for students to utilise skills and/ or knowledge that might be drawn from totally unrelated areas. Metacognition, in particular the use of active critical reflection, can stimulate deep learning by helping students to make connections between these practices and different learning contexts. Building in regular opportunities for review can help learners to develop their self-regulation skills within professional practices and highlights the value of reflection as a means to enhance future performances.

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Building metacognitive engagement and evaluative judgement into authentic assessments

Provide opportunities for students to practice and modify their work – Before a final submission, ask students to reflect upon modifications made in response to feedback and to provide a justification for changes made. Offer opportunities where groups can work collaboratively to assess anonymised past student assignments.

Build in reflective points at different stages of an assessed process – ask students to write a reflective post, blog entry, or learning diary aligned to skills development. Link these with competencies required for recognition by professional bodies or success in real-world practice.

Use rubrics to help students to reflect upon and self-evaluate their skills development - provide examples of reflective writing to learners and review the wording of assessment rubrics with students to ensure a shared understanding. Ask them to identify skills that they would like to work on and to seek out opportunities for their development through co-curricular or curricular activities.

Design your assessment for transfer – provide students with opportunities to use what they know in a novel context and to practice the application of their learning in the 'real world'. As transfer is achieved when new knowledge is connected to what is already known, it is fruitful to engage students in investigate connections between the assessment task and their prior learning through explicit discussion of and reflection on knowledge, skills, and competencies.

Assess students learning or skills development through an evidence-based method – ask students to present in the form of a portfolio of evidence for a badge or other form of recognition (e.g. students might curate and present examples of their work in a 'snapshot' portfolio'). Direct students to select examples of their work that best align with specific learning outcomes and ask them to justify their decision.

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Dimension 4 - Feedback Processes

Learn more

- *Does the assessment activity require that students collaborate?*
- *Does the assessment provide opportunities for discussion and feedback?*

Workplace practices are often collaborative, and informed and guided through feedback from different sources at different stages to ensure appropriate standards and performance are achieved. Based on a constructivist approach to programme design and the creation of new knowledge, collaborative activities within assessment tasks can facilitate students' development of key transversal skills for cooperative problem-solving.

Feedback is a critical component of an assessment cycle that, in addition to enhancing learning outcomes, can provide a means for students to develop personally and professionally, and grow their skills in evaluative judgement. Transparency within assessment processes through use of explicit criteria and guidelines enables feedback to be aligned with desired learning outcomes and skills development *and* can assist in engaging the learner in supportive, critical dialogue about the work of oneself and others. Tasks that require students to engage with timely peer feedback through dialogic processes, at different stages of the assessment activity, can also help students to develop effective communication, intrapersonal and interpersonal skills. Generating internal feedback using information from multiple sources will also support self and co-regulated learning.

The enactment of feedback within authentic assessment (feedback literacy) involves both the informal processes used by professionals to make sense of feedback, as well as the more formal products of feedback enactment and the modification of practices. These processes of enactment may need to be explicitly taught and where, for example, there are differing power relations operating within a working situation, carefully scaffolded (such as in the relationship between health professionals and patients).

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Building the enactment of feedback into authentic assessment processes

Build collaborative activities into authentic assessment processes – design activities that require students to work together on a complex problem, task or case study over a number of weeks. Recognise different contributions to group work, and model and monitor teamworking dynamics, trough assessment processes and grading criteria. Consider the use of a group learning agreement and the setting up of 'ground rules'.

Design exercises where students have opportunities to collaborate with external communities – these might include live client projects, community-based learning activities, or feedback form industry professionals. Depending on your activities position along the 'continuum of authenticity', this might be simulated by requiring learners to adopt different stakeholder roles in a case study or real-life scenario.

Provide structure within collaborative activities – for first year students, consider providing support for effective working strategies including planning, organising meetings, taking minutes etc. Build in reflective points where learners discuss and evaluate group processes and their own contributions.

Design peer assessment strategies incrementally across a programme - Move from the provision of feedback on presentations, e.g. strengths and areas for development in class, to the provision of written holistic feedback to members of a group. Provide opportunities for students to peer-review each other's work to enable a better understanding of standards of performance

Make feedback an active process - Require students to demonstrate how they have addressed feedback from their lecturer(s) or peers. Ask them to request different types of feedback from a menu of options and follow up with a short meeting to discuss actions based on this information. Consider involving a final reflective assessment where individual students self-assess their own contributions towards a final group project.

Incorporate opportunities for students to receive and respond to feedback from different sources – This could include peer assessment activities in class, the involvement of colleagues from within the school/department providing feedback on student presentations, or industry contacts setting and then providing feedback on collaborative, real-world problems.

References

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