**Authentic Assessment and Interactive Learning Environments**

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Over the last decade, interest in assessing learning through student activities which relate closely to the applied use of knowledge has grown. This interest in assessment of performance, known as authentic assessment, addresses a range of concerns primarily pedagogic challenges to an over reliance on exams and essays as a limited form of assessment focused on declarative learning (being able to repeat back what was taught). There has also been widespread policy emphasis in many economies globally to generate enhanced graduate employability and increase national skills and productivity. Interactive Learning Environments can play a part in this aspiration to improve assessment by focusing on performance rather than recall. There is a long tradition of computer-based teaching providing valuable, situated and authentic learning experiences. The practise of embedding assessment within interactive learning environments ranges from the earliest simulators, such as flight trainers, to spreadsheet-based modellers, which allow learner experimentation and demonstrate the result of changes, as happens with activity-based project planning tools or financial forecasting.

Authentic assessment has much to offer the learner, the teacher and potential employers. Biggs & Tang in their highly regarded guide **Teaching for Quality Learning** highlight authentic assessment as the “performance of understanding” in contrast to the declarative knowledge demonstrated by an essay (2011, p. 212). For the assessor this performance reduces the probability of reading repetitive answers and raises the possibility of students generating fresh insights, maybe even co-creating knowledge. In an extensive review of the literature of authentic assessment, Villarroel et al highlight many benefits for the student including the depth and quality of engagement, greater autonomy, motivation and a more reflective process of learning (2018). For the employer, and by proxy, for an economy, authentic assessment increases the prospect of learners experiencing problem solving, strategic planning and thus building transferable skills useable in the workplace (Villarroel *et al.*, 2018). Most employers want to recruit learners who have this new vocationalism, a “willingness and ability to learn”, which authentic assessment demonstrates (Bourner, Greener and Rospigliosi, 2011, p. 14).

**How does authentic assessment relate to interactive learning environments?**Interactive learning environments have the capacity to contribute to situated learning. When the case for authentic assessment was made by Grant Wiggins, an early advocate, he proposed it “primarily support the needs of learner” (1990, p. 1). This he suggested would generate “directly observable products and understandable evidence” (Wiggins, 1990, p. 3). It is in the ability for interactive learning environments to generate observable engagement that there is particular potential for more authentic measures of performance to be demonstrated in teaching, learning and assessment mediated through digital systems. The technologies we use to host, display and respond as learning environments all create detailed records of interactions. Learning analytics is a burgeoning science of sense making, allowing a wide range of student engagement to be quantified and thus assessed. As more aspects of student engagement with learning resources and activities are performed on interactive systems, the opportunities multiply to use the activities themselves to assesses learning rather than rely on contrived measures to recap understanding later.

This editorial is not suggesting that the role of the essay, the dissertation or the exam is redundant. As a means to demonstrate declarative knowledge, construct a logical argument and show familiarity with the conventions of the literature and academic practice in a field, the essay is a fine form. But it is worth considering the potential value to learners, teachers and society to not limiting assessment to what can be written about.

**References**

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