Supporting the evolution of assessment: authentic assessment, accessibility, and deepened course alignment

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Abstract

Traditional assessment is not always well-aligned with intended learning outcomes at the course and program level.

At Waterloo, we co-designed and piloted an advanced workshop for alumni of a week-long course design academy. Using accessibility and authentic assessment as conceptual tools, participants deepened the course alignment that they had previously worked on.

An assessment is authentic if it invites learners to engage in disciplinary or "real world" practices. In addition to providing students with excellent practical training, authentic assessments can increase accessibility by reducing distractors that are irrelevant to the capacities being taught and learned. Moreover, emphasizing authentic assessments in course design support deeper alignment between intended learning outcomes, learning activities, and assessments.

In this session, we describe the UWaterloo workshop so that attendees can consider its applicability at their home institutions. Participants will experience short versions of the activities we use, and explore the relationships between authentic assessment, accessibility, and alignment.

Outcomes

By engaging in this session, participants will be able to…

1. Explore the relations between authentic assessment, accessibility, and alignment in course design
2. Consider how to apply this deepening of course design to the assessment of learning outcomes at their home campuses

Key concepts

Authentic Assessment, Accessibility, Universal Design of Instruction, Alignment, Constructive Alignment, Intended Learning Outcomes, Formative and Summative Assessment

Authentic Assessment Audit

Take an assessment from your own course, or consider one of the ones from a course outline we provided, and decide where it falls – it might be at one end of the spectrum or the other, or in between poles. Draw a dot where it falls on each relevant row. Use a second colour of dot, or a different shape of the same colour, for another assignment, and so on, if you have time.

Course name:

Assignment / Assessment:

Grade weighting:

Assessment Attributes

Traditional		Authentic
Selecting a response	....	Performing a task
Contrived	....	Real-life
Recall/Recognition	....	Construction/Application
Instructor-structured	....	Learner-structured
Indirect evidence	....	Direct evidence

Source: http://openbadges.tumblr.com/post/78130197990/openbadgesmooc-session-8-assessment-strategies

Questions for reflection: To what extent is the course you are considering using authentic assessment? Consider where the assessments fall as well as their weighting in the grade scheme. Is there one assignment, test, or other assessment that could or should be revised? Any that might be replaced? Is authenticity inherently more valuable than so-called tradition? What is the connection, if any, between authentic assessment and accessibility?

Accessibility Avatar Exercise

In preparation for the section on accessibility, we showed a video about designing for a particular difference (deaf culture), and also discussed universal design of instruction (UDI). We cautioned people about the issues around "adopting" a disability or identity for a brief time and suggested that the avatars in this case are meant as a means of analyzing a syllabus differently, rather than gaining a deep understanding of particular identity differences or particular disabilities.

- Take 5 minutes to familiarize self with syllabus provided (or your own syllabus).
- Select an avatar.
- Try to adopt the perspective of that avatar as you read again through the syllabus you're considering.
- What affordances does the course offer you?
- What possible obstacles might the course pose for you, in light of your avatar's "positionality"?

Questions for reflection

If you audited own course, how are you doing with regard to authenticity? What is keeping you where you are (assuming you wish to move one or another slider to the right)? What would help you to move on this? How likely would you be to recommend this kind of process to people on your own campus?

If you did the avatar exercise, how did the experience of perspective-taking help or not help your thinking about a course outline (your own or one that was provided)? What are some of the issues or opportunities involved?

What needs to happen back at your home institution for you to encourage authenticity and accessibility in aligned courses?

So, who will you call or email when you get home?