

Authentic Learning by Ina Lynn McClain

What Is Authentic Learning

“Students of any age who are novices need a period of exploration and a phase of apprenticeship before they can enter more formal learning environments that deal with disjunction’s among ways of knowing” (Gardner, 1991, pg. 204).

Authentic learning provides tasks that afford the learner to approximate mature practice. Evaluation should provide the learner information on how close this approximation was to mature practice. Authority for mature practice should be shifted from the instructor to learner via modeling, coaching providing scaffolding to support the learner’s performance and then fading of the instruction’s scaffolding as the student demonstrates mastery.

Authentic Learning Methods of 4-H Youth Development

The Community Club

The community club model of 4-H Youth Development incorporates monthly business meetings where youth and adults participants learn how to run a meeting and an organization by setting goals and carrying out activities to meet these goals. 4-H Youth Development Programs “Standards For Club Seals” (See the 4-H Secretary’s Book) suggests that a *Blue Seal* club has on an annual basis 10 business meetings, 2 social gatherings, and plans and conducts an activity designed for all members in health, recreation and community service. The business meetings approximate business meetings that youth will encounter throughout their life time. This is example of what Lave would describe as “knowledge in practice” and approximation of mature practice (1988) in her theory of Situated Learning.

4-H Project Work

“Some students – old as well as young – learn best with a hands-on approach, dealing directly with materials that embody or convey the concept.”

“...teachers must serve as role models of the most important skills and attitudes and must in a sense embody the practices that are sought; and that meaningful projects taking place over time and involving various forms of individual and group activity are the most promising vehicles for learning (pg. 204)

The Unschooled Mind by Howard Gardner.

4-H Projects are selected by 4-H members based on their interest. This is an example of what Lave would phrase as the problem being owned by the learner (1988). Carl Rogers would say that “learning goes on best and lasts best when it is about the focused interest of the learner.” 4-H Projects are sequential learning units in subject matter areas such as woodworking, food and nutrition, animal science including large animals (beef, sheep, hogs and horses) and small animals (dogs, cats, cavies, rabbits), clothing and textiles, shooting sports, computer science, environmental stewardship, etc. There are 44 different curriculum areas offered. 4-H Projects are examples of situated cognition as described by Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989; CGTV, 1993).

Authentic assessment strategies accompany the 4-H project work. *Project Records* provide a portfolio for the member to demonstrate setting goals, developing a plan of action and self-assessment of learning. *Project Judging* provides an opportunity to demonstrate knowledge of industry standards by placing products or case situations in ranked order according to criteria. In addition, 4-H members provide oral reasons to a judge to defend their rank order. Members are provided feedback by an official providing the correct placing and then models their critical thinking by giving their reasons for the official ranked order. 4-H members *Exhibit* products or artifacts produced in their project learning experience. Authentic feedback is provided in through *Conference Judging*. A judge and member confer on the project exhibit item. This exchange should yield what the member did, how the member completed the project, what the member would differently and plans for next year. The judge provides the member feedback on approximation of mature practice. Another authentic assessment tool is *Skill-A-Thons* (CGTV, 1993; Collins, Brown, Duguid, 1989; Wiggins, 1993). Problem situations are presented to members and they actually demonstrate fixing the problem or describe their problem-solving approach. Feedback is provided to the member on their demonstration of mastery.

“Exhibiting the capacity to use skills and concepts in an appropriate way --- that is the hallmark of an emerging understanding (Gardner, 1991, pg. 204).”

References

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