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Authentic Learning in Adult Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of teaching practices for developing authentic learning through the process of initial teacher education. Starting from the assumption that authentic learning experiences are those that are personally relevant from the learner's perspective and situated within appropriate social contexts, this study presents five ways university teachers can support authentic learning. The five ways authentic learning can be implemented are related to how to provide students with the opportunity to reflect or how to provide students with coaching and scaffolding at critical times, also promoting articulation to encourage students to verbalize their knowledge and thinking. Also, teachers have to enable students to use technology and to provide the opportunity to collaborate in order to have an authentic learning environment. The study focuses on the implications for higher education and its pedagogical practice for cultivating authentic learning in adult education with a continuous commitment to constructing self-based, authentic futures.

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1. Introduction

Aligning 21st century learning with 21st century learners is a main problem teachers face nowadays. The 21st century learning focuses on the idea that students are more likely to be interested in what they are learning, more motivated to learn new concepts and skills, and better prepared to succeed in different situations and addresses topics that are relevant and applicable to their lives outside academia.

Authentic learning is defined as learning that is seamlessly integrated or implanted into meaningful, “real-life” situations (Jonassen, Howland, Marra, & Crismond, 2008). Also, it is stated that in authentic learning, learners

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are presented with realistic problems or projects that have realistic purposes and given the opportunity to investigate and converse about these problems and projects in manners that are applicable to them and their lives (Carlson, 2002; Mims, 2003).

Moreover, author, Audrey C. Rule, designed four principles state that define authentic learning experiences. These principles refer to: 1) focus on practical, lifelike problems that imitate the trade of experts in the field with communication of results to individuals outside the classroom; 2) be inquiry-based with an emphasis on metacognitive skills; 3) encourage learners to participate in active conversations in a social learning environment, and 4) allow learners make choices and guide their own learning in meaningful, task-oriented work (Rule, 2006).

In an article entitled “Authentic Learning for the 21st Century”, it is introduced to readers the basic elements of an authentic learning experience, such as: (Lombardi, 2007).

- Instructors are encouraged to design activities for their students that match as nearly as possible the real-world tasks of professionals in the field.
- The challenges students are asked to undertake should be complex, ambiguous, and multifaceted in nature, requiring sustained investigation.
- Reflection, self-assessment, and performance review are fully integrated into the exercise. The real-world challenge comes with its own criteria for success. Students are held accountable for achieving the milestones that practitioners would have to meet under genuine working conditions.
- Teamwork is as essential to the authentic learning experience as it is likely to be in modern workplace settings. Groups of students have to draw on multiple sources and negotiate among multiple perspectives—including those of the stakeholders (business partners, clients, customers, citizens) who will be impacted by their performance.
- An authentic learning exercise highlights a student’s capacity to affect the world beyond the classroom and to make contributions that are

2. Teachers role in the classroom

The roles of teachers vary, starting from a resource provider, instructional and curriculum specialist, learning facilitator, but a teacher can be seen as a catalyst for change. Teacher leaders can also be catalysts for change, visionaries who are “never content with the status quo but rather always looking for a better way” (Larner, 2004). Teachers who take on the catalyst role feel secure in their own work and have a strong commitment to continual improvement. They pose questions to generate analysis of student learning (Killion & Harrison, 2006).

Teachers, in order to support authentic learning can adopt the roles of guides, scaffolders, and problem or task presenters. This does not mean that teachers cannot continue to provide students with information—the difference is that students determine the time and sequence in which information is given. Mainly, the role of the teacher focuses on creating environments where students are encouraged to think and explore, having access and being invited to make use of various information, such as databases, reference materials, video libraries, and also internet sources.

Teacher’s main goal is to create authentic tasks that provide students with reasons and rationales for learning. According to Wagner (2008), students are motivated to learn when their “learning is hands-on and more personalized with the result that students perform real-world tasks and produce public products that reflect who they are and what they believe and care about”.

3. Pathways towards Authentic Teaching and Learning

Authentic learning is related to strategies such as personalized learning, community-based learning, and project-based learning, among others. In addition, instructional strategies such as demonstrations of learning,

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