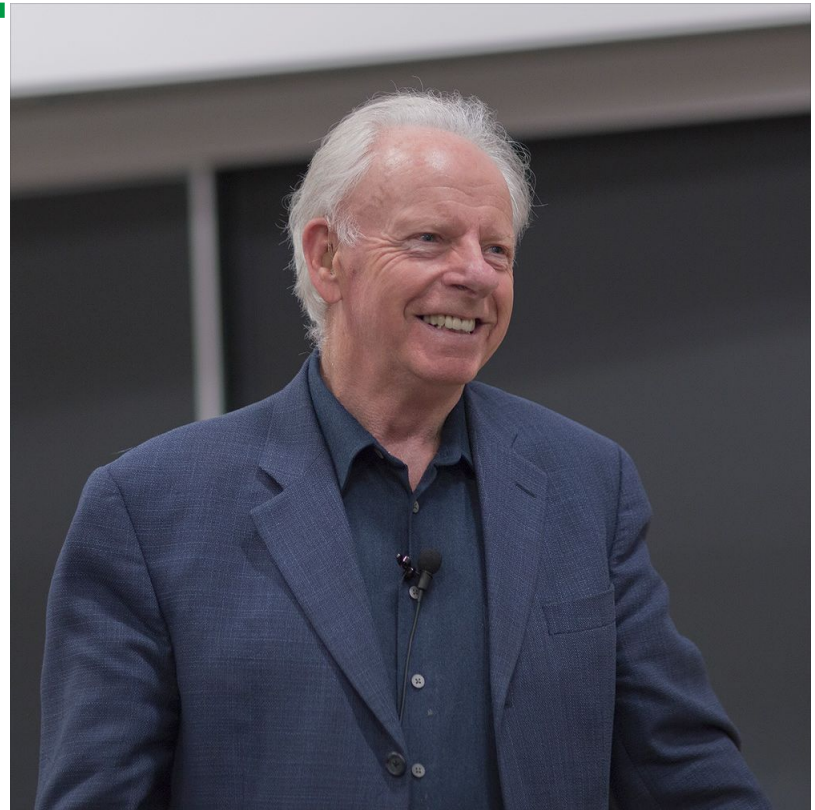# How to Engage Online Learners in Authentic Assessment

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Rudimentary online learning questions include:

What's all the fuss?
How do I start?
When should I do this?
What's different from f2f teaching and learning?
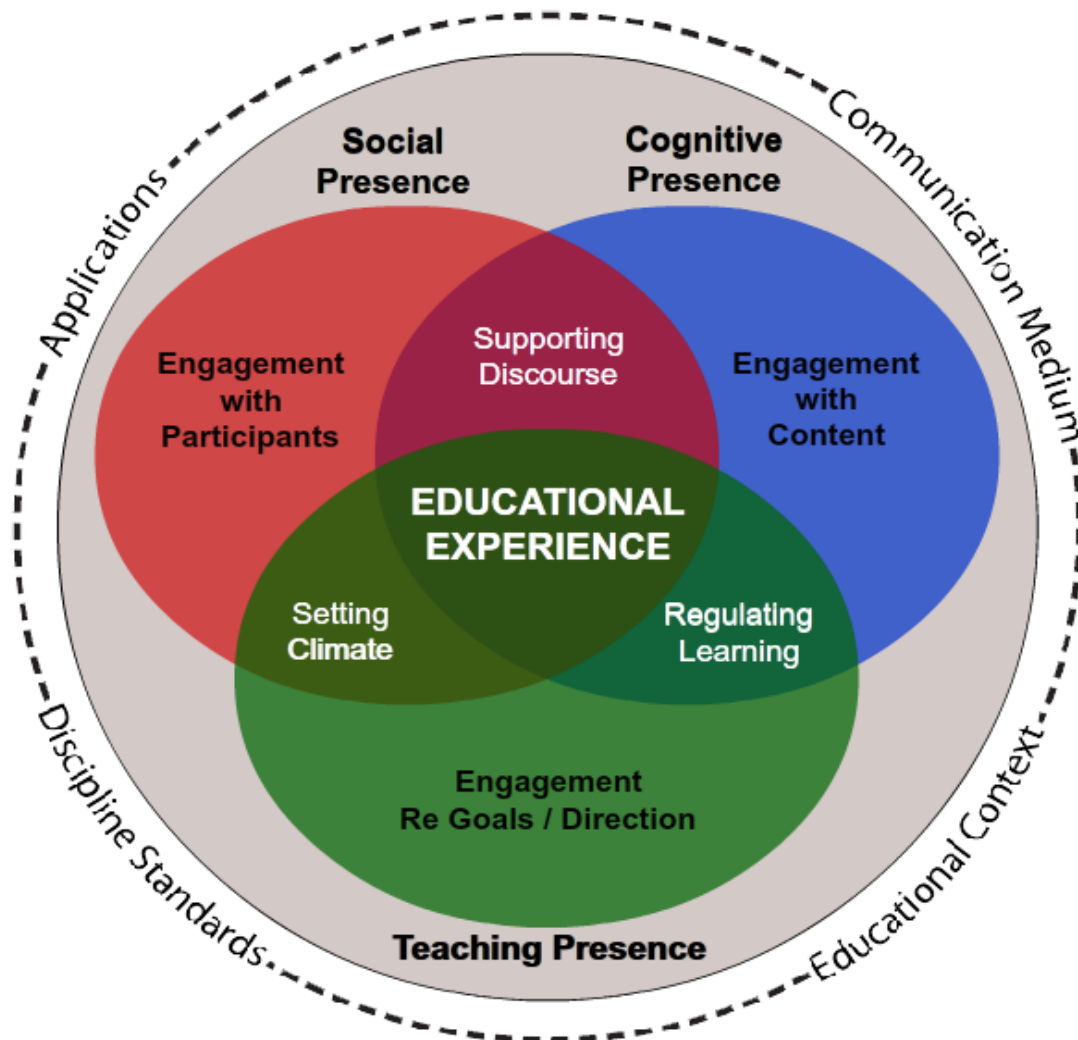**Is it more work?**
How to design Technology

Assessment Strategies for Online Learning

Engagement and Authenticity

Dianne Conrad and Jason Openo

Creating an Educational Experience

Content: Where does it come from?

Readings

Discussion (topic driven, instructor-led)

External content (discovery & import)

Co-created content

YOU (video, podcast, pdf, lecturette (live or written, eg synchronous or asynchronous)

AND....

Flipped Classroom

Learners work OFF-line with teacher-driven resources to prepare for ONLINE engagement and interaction with teacher and peers

- Pre-work vs homework

- Readings, videos, podcasts

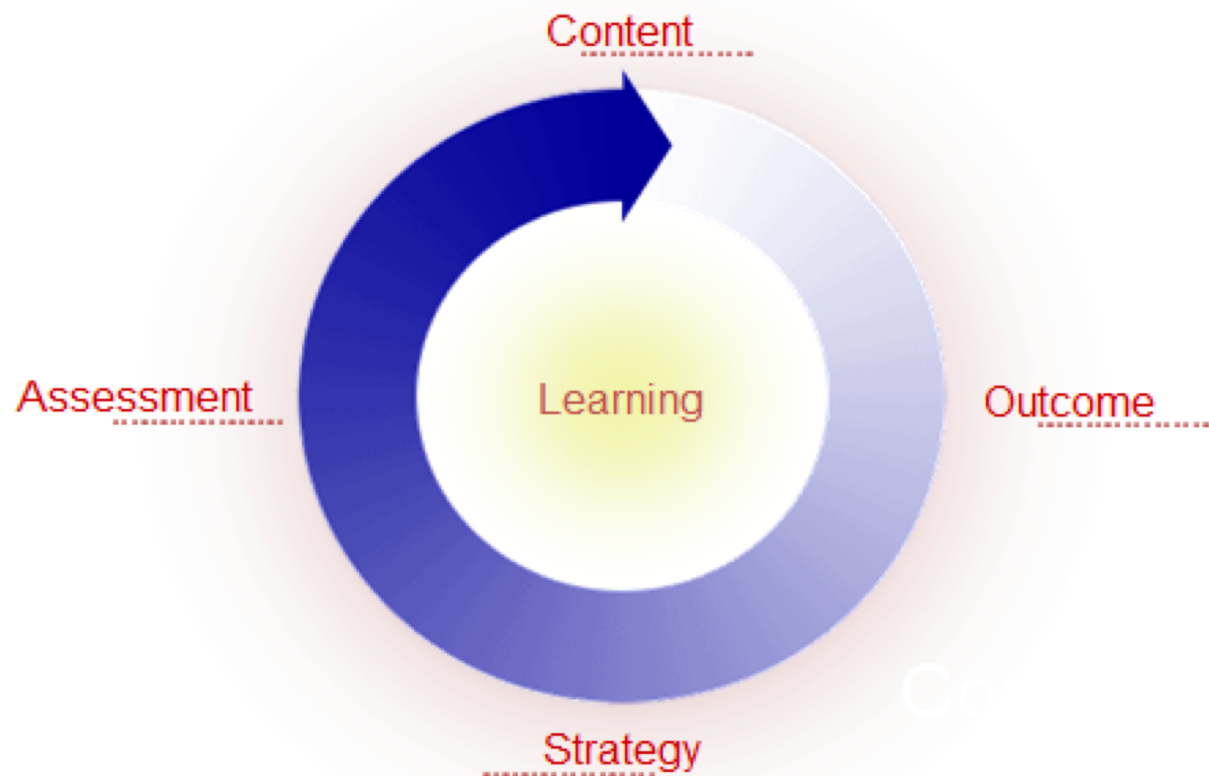- Can work together or individually or as directed

What is assessment? What is evaluation?

Formative vs summative

Where do grades fit in?

Framing Assessment

Authentic Assessment 1

Incorporates authenticity, stressing:

- Critical thinking
- Connectedness (learning to reality/life)
- Collaboration
- Communication

Authentic Assessment 2

- Grounded in real-world relevance
- Ill-defined problems allow for latitude and diverse perspectives
- Engaging
- Supports higher level thinking

Authentic Assessment 3

- Encourages learners to play a more active role in their learning (unlike rote)

- Has a social, interactive component

- Promotes dialogue and collaboration

- Develops cognitive skills, shared understanding, task negotiation

Authentic Assessment 4

- Is based on social constructivism and collaborative constructivism theory

- Creates meaning from experience

- Fits within the Community of Inquiry model

- Promotes reflection
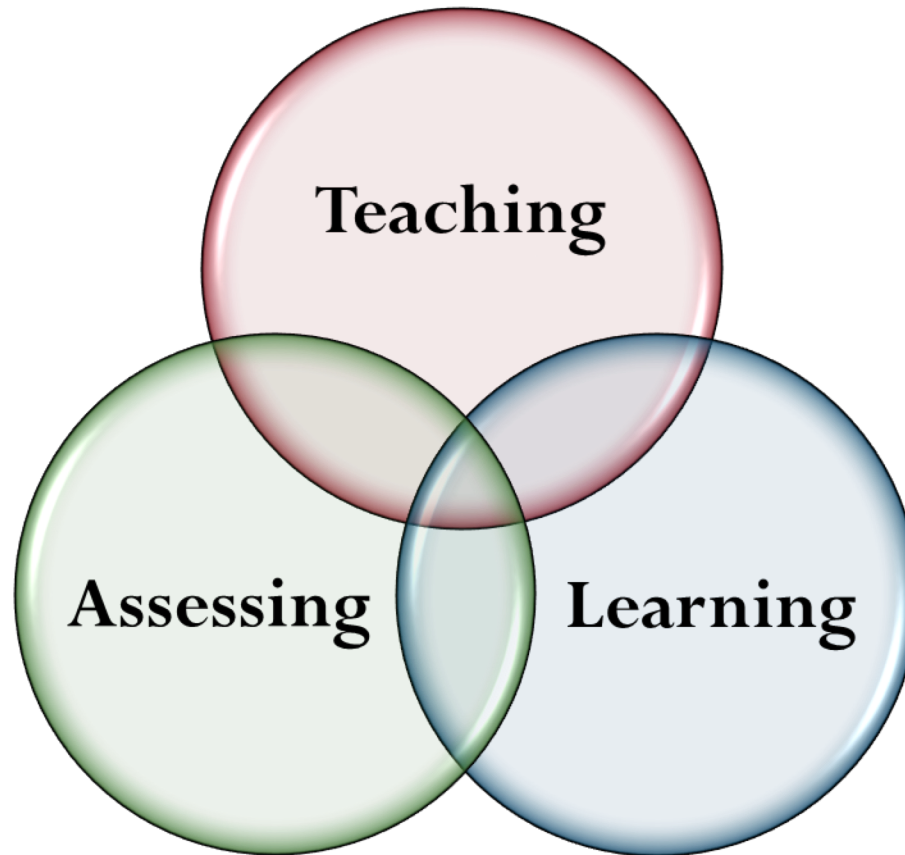
Authentic assessment: NOT THIS WAY!

Assessment Strategies and Tools

Purpose

Engage students in learning

Conduct an evaluation

How

Creatively

Collaboratively

Fairly

Formative Assessment

Activities: Create engagement, collaboration

- Self-quiz

- Journal

- Reflection

- Forum discussions

- Peer-to Peer, dyads, triads, groups

Illustrations

Summative Assignments

Essay/paper

Project, individual or group

Reflection paper

Presentation, individual or group

Learner response to presentation

Learner-led seminar

Weighting Assessments 1

You have ultimate control in determining where your learners will "end up," via weighting

Ensure it's fair and reflects course outcomes and their relative importance

Bad idea: Lots of small tasks with 5 or 10% weightings

Weighting Assessments 2

Ask these questions of yourself:

- Where do these skills place on the Taxonomy (high, low?)

- How much effort/time is required by learners?

- What is the relative importance of the outcomes reflected in this assignment/activity?

Forming Groups

Why? They are a sound management and pedagogical tool

Importance of group dynamics

Group size....manageable?

Random or purposeful?

One-off or permanent?

Purpose

Rules/rubric

20

Assessing Group Product

Groups present many challenges:

- Learner antipathy

- Lack of group skills, different personalities

- "free riders"

- Inequality of learners' abilities

- Withdrawal of learners

Presentations

- Work very well
- Require lots of pre-planning, when, who,etc
- Set up a presentation schedule early
- Allow learners to pick their topic (topics aligned with units/outcomes)
- Work in pairs or triads
- Build in online discussion time post-presentation - asynchronous

Submitting Assignments

Even this is different online:

- Clear instructions must be given, ie word count, font, pagination, titling
- Individually written essays/papers are simple to receive
- Handling of uploaded assignments in Moodle is not difficult but can be picky
- Group projects can be uploaded into a forum space where discussion can occur following
- Moodle provides several ways to handle feedback
- Moodle records and manages the grades

Good Hint!

I create an "Assignment Shoppe" forum to encourage assignment-related questions to be posted there. Then everyone can see the concern and the response. Otherwise, you are inundated with one-on-one questions. Be sure to specify that no grade complaints are handled here.

Peer Assessment
...a good idea but....

- **Jury is still out on how and when**
- **Plan this well, not just to cut your workload**
- **Instructions must be clear**
- **Students can learn while assessing**
- **Peer assessment can create engagement**
- **Students can learn from others' mistakes**
- **Constructive outcomes must be pre-planned and organized**

"Don't relegate yourself to becoming a gatekeeper!" (Brookfield, 1990)

Participation...a touchy topic

Guide it, define it, so that your assessment is fair and well-grounded.

Tell them what you want.

PLEASE encourage them NOT to write mini-essays; online discussion is not the place for this and it is a great inhibitor.

Keep discussion informal but relevant, on-topic, and timely.

Assessing Participation

- Students WANT their participation noted

- Quality not quantity

- A clear rubric

- Critical thinking stressed

- Not "niceties," although social behaviour is appreciated

WHAT?...no final exam????

How will I assess their overall performance:

- You have been doing so throughout the course.

- It's not an all-or-nothing, not a race to the finish. Learning has been accrued, ingested, incremental.

At the end of the course 1

Design your last assignment to be as sweeping as you see fit.

Weight it appropriately (not all eggs in one basket!)

Learners should have a good idea where they stand by this time, based on previous work and your excellent feedback.

At the end of the course 2

What works well (depending on relevance to course/outcomes)...

1. A research paper that reflects previous work done or specific issues that arose from the course (prevents plagiarism).
2. An individual or group project.
3. A reflective document that allows learners to pull their learning moments together, in narrative or media form.

At the end of the course 3

4. A learning journal (with summary*)

5. Anything creative (ie, learners create a script where the dialogue is a commentary on the course content or some aspect of it)

6. A detailed self-assessment, with clear expectations so that it is just not a "happy sheet." Weighting must be appropriate.

General Suggestions 1

- Give learners a choice when possible: in topic, in media. Mix it up.

- Change "static" assignments regularly from offering to offering.

- Take advantage of the Internet: scavenger hunts, finding resources, building repositories.

General Suggestions 2

- Have all schedules and information front-end loaded before course start date.

- Double check due dates and other important information for correctness.

- Consider holidays and long weekends when less online work will be done.

- A calendar will be your best friend.

Me, happy to have done this. Thank you!