



Unresolved issues about 'authentic' online learning: Interpretations, assumptions and challenges

Associate Professor Barney Dalgarno
Charles Sturt University

Associate Professor Gregor E. Kennedy
University of Melbourne

Dr Helen Farley
University of Southern Queensland

Mr Mark J.W. Lee
Charles Sturt University

Abstract and Symposium Plan

The focus of the symposium will be a critical exploration and examination of the notion of 'authentic' learning, leading to a discussion of implications and consequences for the design of online learning resources and environments. The symposium will begin with a 5-10 minute overview presented by Barney Dalgarno, in which he will outline a framework containing three specific interpretations of 'authentic' learning, as a precursor to a 5-10 minute presentation by each of the other panel members.

Gregor Kennedy will argue that the concept of authentic learning, although typically operationalised by presenting students with online approximations of 'real-world' tasks and activities designed to promote certain kinds of cognitive processing, reasoning and understanding, often involves the use of media-rich 'skins' as a prelude to the main educational task. Gregor will specifically critique the use of these media skins.

Helen Farley will discuss the potential of 3D virtual worlds as sites for authentic learning, arguing that despite the fanfare, significant shortcomings need to be addressed in order to reliably harness that potential. Helen will examine limitations of virtual worlds including their lack of haptic feedback, inappropriate sensory feedback, and difficulties associated with movement mediated through a keyboard and mouse.

Mark J.W. Lee will discuss authentic learning in open and distance education, arguing that many learners are situated in professional environments offering highly meaningful contexts for learning yet educators often favour fictional scenarios and artificial simulations. Mark will maintain that, in striving to promote learning that is meaningful and relevant to students in their professional lives, the notion of 'creating' an authentic

environment is something of a contradiction in terms.

Finally, **Barney Dalgarno** will draw together these ideas, relating them back to the framework introduced at the outset, before opening the symposium to the floor for 30 minutes of questions, comments and debate.

Please cite as: Dalgarno, B., Kennedy, G. E., Farley, H., & Lee, M.J.W. (2011). Unresolved issues about 'authentic' online learning: Interpretations, assumptions and challenges In G. Williams, P. Statham, N. Brown & B. Cleland (Eds.), *Changing Demands, Changing Directions. Proceedings ascilite Hobart 2011*. (pp314-315). <https://doi.org/10.14742/apubs.2011.1896>

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