



### 4.3 Personalise and connect learning: Apply and assess learning in authentic contexts

**Essence >**  
The teacher structures the curriculum so that students apply their learning in real-world/authentic contexts.

#### Presentation or demonstration: how to make learning relevant

In the SACE Stage 1 English course, an oral presentation is one requirement. My group of students struggled with their learning—in fact, encouraging them to stay in school was a challenge in itself. They made it quite clear that talking in front of the class was not going to happen. As I wanted them to complete the requirement, I had to reconsider the activity.

Perhaps they'd relate better to an oral 'demonstration'? In this way, students could speak on any topic that interested them and bring along whatever props they needed to complete the task.

As I sat discussing the new approach with them, the body language began to change—the enthusiasm was building. Ideas were flooding in. Preparation was underway. We worked together to negotiate the criteria by which oral demonstrations would be assessed. We negotiated what makes a good oral demonstration and we specified the success criteria in a rubric. Their commitment was unprecedented.

We had students energetically demonstrating and talking explicitly about their interests. One student showed us how to decorate biscuits for a child's party and we joined in. Another brought in a complete car brake system to demonstrate how it worked. Later, we all found ourselves down in the student car park with a student

earnestly demonstrating the under-the-bonnet workings of all the engine parts. We learnt how to make scones, use eBay, play a guitar, and on and on it went.

I discovered that these students had vast background knowledge to share; they could speak with ease and confidence when they were sharing their passions. They addressed the class competently, spoke clearly, used expressive body language, and they were interesting to listen to. Many of the demonstrations called for active class participation, with students listening attentively to instructions and keenly following the student lead.

The peer audience rewarded the students' efforts; they were highly supportive of each other, and were very honest in their appraisal of the oral demonstration as they used the assessment rubric to guide their feedback.

What had started off as a bit of a gamble had quickly become one of the best moves I could have made. The students made real connections, our class dialogue became much more meaningful, they provided constructive, targeted and useful feedback and, above all, these students experienced success.

*Senior secondary English teacher*

#### Key actions: Teachers

- Build connections with my students, align curriculum outcomes with real-world settings and model lifelong learning where school is part of the wider community
- Develop topics and assessment through issues and projects that are real to my students and use assessment criteria relevant to these
- Use digital resources and *Scootle* learning objects to simulate real-life situations and assessment scenarios
- Incorporate deliberate and impromptu self and peer evaluation into everyday class activities, focusing on the quality of performance demonstrated in learning skills, understandings and knowledge
- Teach the skills of self and peer assessment
- Scaffold learners' efforts to conduct their own inquiry processes, experimentation and problem solving
- Allocate time for students to share their work with peers, to discuss their thinking and their plans
- Ensure my students learn about their own thinking processes (the metacognitive work of learning) to develop self-monitoring skills
- Negotiate with students how they will demonstrate their learning by directly linking to the intended learning outcomes
- Involve students in local community initiatives to 'make a difference' in contexts that matter to them
- Connect students with authentic audiences face-to-face and online
- Develop students' skills and confidence to take on advocacy roles within the school and the community
- Provide scaffolds for students to participate in authentic contexts (eg coordinate mentor partnerships across year levels)
- Give 'just in time', relevant developmental feedback

#### Key actions: Students

- Use different situations to show what I know, can do and understand
- Develop projects about issues that matter to me
- Assess whether I achieved what I set out to do
- Give feedback to others and accept it from people who are helping me
- Make sure I check with others to see how I'm going and to get new ideas



*Teachers need to see assessment data as saying something about them, what they are doing and what they need to do. Our eventual success depends on our ferreting out student responses and adjusting our performance, not just theirs, in light of results.*  
Grant Wiggins

#### Justice alert

Do the dominant assessment practices regularly exclude certain ways of demonstrating understanding?

#### Ways to apply and assess learning in authentic contexts

**Learning shots:** Students use digital cameras to capture 'learning moments' throughout a unit of work. Students develop captions for each shot that describe their thinking and progress made at each stage. Post these on the wall to create a 'Learning moments' wall collage. (Ensure that permission for photographs to be taken has been obtained from parents/guardians.)

**Hamburger rubric:** Three students are to do a well known task—constructing hamburgers. Three other students write a confidential set of criteria that they think a good hamburger should have. Stars can be used to indicate the quality of the hamburger on a rubric; for example:

☆☆	Superb job of placing burger in bun
☆☆	All parts in respective places
	Used sauce to draw a smiley face on the patty
	Wrapped neatly in a folded origami swan
☆☆	Burger in bun
☆	Lettuce piled neatly on patty
	Sauce on inside of bun
	Pickle centred
	Wrapped nicely
☆☆	Burger in bun
	Lettuce in bun
	Sauce on inside of bun
	Pickle in bun, but a little off centre
☆	Burger hanging out of bun
	Lettuce hanging out
	Sauce all over the bun
	Pickle on floor

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Hamburgers are then assessed against those criteria. This evokes discussion on how important it is to know the criteria for success when working on any task (eg 'If I knew you wanted me to put the pickle right in the centre, then I would have!').

**Learning expo:** Students organise an expo to showcase their learning, inviting other classes, parents and community members.

An example of such an expo is provided by a class that studied local marine environments. Students consulted with experts and reported outcomes, interviewed local residents and participated in learning programs with the Maritime Museum and conservation groups. They gave mini-presentations with interactive tasks to demonstrate issues of human impact. They displayed photographs of their learning journeys, including processes and end products.

**Getting communities online:** Set up blogs for community members. Students can make photo stories to share online and get feedback. They can link with other schools and participate in online challenges, both nationally and globally. (Ensure school cyber-safety policy is adhered to.)

**Round table conference:** This is a forum for students to immerse themselves in their heart, hand and mind interests and share their passion with others. Each student plans and gives a presentation/demonstration on an issue/activity in which they feel knowledgeable and confident. The panel members can be peers and/or adults, from within the school or across the broader community. Dialogue is question-driven and spontaneous.

*When implemented well, formative assessment can double the speed of students' learning.*

Dylan Wiliam



## Language that teachers can use to apply and assess learning in authentic contexts

- What could you do next? Do you know other ways to do this? Which might you choose and why?
- Who feels confident enough to teach this to others?
- Where else could you use these skills and ideas?
- Where have you seen them used before? How could you use what you learnt last week to help you now?
- What were you thinking while you were doing this?
- If this didn't work, why do you think it didn't and what else can you do?
- What are you doing? Why are you doing it? How might you use this in your life?
- Who would you like to invite to this forum?
- How are you intending to report on your findings?

## This element is not demonstrated if:

- The links to real life are talked about, rather than experienced, by students
- Teachers plan authentic learning activities, but assessment is linked to final product only
- Assessment is teacher-driven and students feel unsure of the marking criteria or their relevance to intended learning outcomes
- Teachers always determine the audience for specific learning presentations
- Assessment is always summative, not formative

## Practice check

- Am I giving ongoing opportunities for my students to apply their learning in real-life contexts?
- Do I know my community and what it has to offer?
- How does the assessment align with the learning intention? Do I ask my students to show the processes and not just the end product?
- Do I consider my students' cultural backgrounds, interests, skills and attitudes when I plan assessment tasks?
- Are my students receiving constructive feedback and advice from a range of people?



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## Notes:

*Effective, healthy learning occurs in relationship to community rather than in isolation. Learning is not restricted to educational institutions, it occurs in communities and workplaces just as frequently. Thus, if a person has the skills to navigate the relational elements of the learning experience, he or she can carry those skills from classroom to classroom, to non-traditional learning environments, to work, and to the larger community with success and confidence as well as the ability to function in the current world of increasing change and challenge.*

George Otero

ongoing assessment informs learning