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A heuristic framework for the determination of the critical elements in authentic assessment

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**A HEURISTIC FRAMEWORK FOR THE DETERMINATION OF
THE CRITICAL ELEMENTS IN AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the
degree**

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

FROM

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

BY

**KEVIN HUGH ASHFORD-ROWE, BACHELOR OF ARTS
(HONOURS), POST GRADUATE CERTIFICATE IN EDUCATION,
GRADUATE DIPLOMA IN MULTIMEDIA, MASTER OF
PROFESSIONAL STUDIES, MASTER OF EDUCATION**

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

2009

DECLARATION

I, Kevin H. Ashford-Rowe, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Education, in the Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Kevin H. Ashford-Rowe

23 January 2009.

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ABSTRACT

Higher Education is currently undergoing a period of significant challenge and transformation. It is likely that these challenges will, in a comparatively short period of time, lead to changes in the ways in which the higher education experience is both mediated and accessed. These changes have arisen as a result of a number of factors, including the information revolution, and the consequent pace of technological innovation, the increased demand from both employers and government for a more highly skilled workforce and the desire to increase and make more accessible the higher education experience to an increasing proportion of the overall population.

All of this has impacted upon the ways in which the higher education experience is represented, and in turn, by which students gain access to the knowledge and skills that will underpin their ability to both learn and perform. Higher education is increasingly being challenged to demonstrate its continued value to the broader community, especially employers, by ensuring that it provides capable, competent and informed citizens adequate to the challenges of a twenty-first century lifetime. If these principles are considered drivers for change, then it is important that the higher education sector can continue to demonstrate its ongoing value to the students who undertake it.

It is against this background that this study was developed with the purpose of identifying from the literature, and then to codify into an applicable framework, the critical elements that would determine an assessment as being authentic. The study took as its starting point the importance, in the current educational context, of being able to determine the elements that define an educational experience as being an authentic one. The research commenced with a review of the literature to identify and collate those elements that had been identified by previous researchers in the field. Next these elements, once refined iteratively in practice, were developed into a framework that could be applied by the designer of instruction and assessment, in order to ascertain whether such a framework could be used to support the design of a more authentic assessment experience. This framework was then applied in practice and the student's response to the learning and assessment designed according to these elements was evaluated, and the elements were further reviewed and revised upon the basis of this data. Thus the study was conducted in four phases, in the first of which the researcher explored the problem, in the second the researcher sought the development of a solution, and in the third phase this solution was implemented and evaluated, the findings were presented in the final phase.

The findings of this study suggest that not only is it possible to codify those elements critical to the determination of authenticity into such a framework, but moreover, it is possible to systematically apply them in the design of assessment activity. Thus the implication of this research for educators and educational designers who seek to meet a requirement for workplace relevance in the design of their education and assessment activities is that they will have a better opportunity to both identify and then apply specific design principles that will assist them in the better development of assessment outcomes with a clearer workplace applicability.

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'Then said a teacher, Speak to us of Teaching.

And he said:

No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lies half asleep in the dawning of your knowledge.

The teacher who walks in the shadow of the temple, among his followers, gives not of his wisdom but rather of his faith and his lovingness.

If he is indeed wise he does not bid you to enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind.' (Khalil Gibran, 1923, p. 74)