Incorporating authentic learning experiences within a university course

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Current approaches to understanding learning imply that authentic learning experiences assist students to develop appropriate and effective understandings. Authentic learning experiences are those that are personally relevant from the learner’s perspective and situated within appropriate social contexts. In planning for authentic learning to occur, tensions can emerge between providing real-world ‘natural’ experiences and the nature of experiences that are possible to offer within institutions, which can often be ‘artificial’ or ‘staged’, and seen as inauthentic by students. Bridging the gap between the learning taking place within formal institutions and learning within real-life communities of practice can be difficult for university teachers. This article reports the efforts of a university teacher who, through a one-semester course, endeavoured to bridge this gap between university study and learning about the world of business management. Data sources included the teacher’s plans, diary and written reflections on his activities related to his teaching during the semester; course materials; teacher and student interviews; and classroom observations undertaken by the researchers. The various strategies the teacher used to develop authenticity in students’ learning experiences are discussed, as well as the teacher’s reflections on how he tried to capitalize on the formal structures possible in a university setting to support his students as they developed their understandings about what it is like to be practising members of the business management community. Implications for teaching and learning in general, and for university staff development, are outlined.

Theoretical underpinnings

The word ‘authenticity’ is used in a number of ways in current literature about learning and curriculum. While all uses refer in some way to certain aspects of reality, be it reality in terms of what it is like in the world of work, or how real workers understand and perform their various practices, each is used in the context of the need to explore the nature of learning in order to assist students to become independent contributors to some field or discipline.

Brown et al. (1988) describe authentic activities as ‘the ordinary practices of the culture’ (p. 34), that is, the culture in which a domain of knowledge is practised or situated. In explicit teaching and learning situations, such as those that occur in educational institutions, the authenticity of classroom practice is often gauged by the

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degree to which the activities undertaken by students are like those activities undertaken by practising communities in the 'adult' world beyond the learning institution. Learning activities are designed to give students 'real-world' experiences but protect them from harmful or irrelevant elements that could impede, rather than support, their learning. The focus of this view on authenticity is the realities of the practices of the culture. Learners can become independent contributors to the culture by gaining first-hand experiences of practitioners within that culture.

Similarly, Lave and Wenger's (1991) legitimate, peripheral participation equates authentic learning with participation within real communities of practice. The focus of this view, however, shifts to the learners who take on apprentice-type roles under the guidance and mentoring of experienced and contributing members of the particular community of practice. The role of the guide or mentor is to ease the learner into the community, providing opportunities for the learner to engage in the real activities and use the real language of the community, but without expectation of full participation. In this way, learners are given 'space' to make sense of what it means to be part of a community of practice. The environment is authentic in that it is a real community of practice in which the learning takes place, and the learning opportunity is authentic because the 'space' and support provided allows the experience to be a personally real one for the learner. Clearly, a learning situation that is authentic in the Lave and Wenger (1991) sense is also authentic in the Brown et al. (1988) sense.

Defining authenticity according to how well a learning activity matches a student's personal goal structures (Heath & McLaughlin, 1994), or the degree to which the learners themselves problematize the elements which make up a context (Hiebert et al., 1996), means focusing upon a more learner-centred approach. While the personal student learning element and the contextual element of 'real-world' communities of practice exist in this perspective, there is a subtle yet important shift. Student learning is given similar emphasis to that of the 'real-world' context and community of practice. From this perspective, learning experiences are perceived as authentic when they engage students' lived experience, and students can find meaningful connections with their current views, understandings and experiences and 'newer' views, understandings and experiences they meet as they learn in and about a 'real-world' or authentic community of practice. Such learning situations may not be regarded as authentic in the Lave and Wenger (1991) and the Brown et al. (1988) sense.

This more explicit view of learners and context is highlighted in Tochon's (2000) model of authentic learning situations. This model describes authenticity as an intersection of the situated (lived) experience (of the students) and the disciplinary 'mind', expressed through planned and enacted pedagogical context and events. Intentions about what is important in a discipline, field or topic are actualized within pedagogical experience. The 'mind' of the discipline is historic (it is 'held' within the community of practice) and it is integrated with the here and now of pedagogical experience (the learner's experience of learning, supported and guided by the more experienced member of the community of practice). Tochon (2000) argues that planning and enacting curricula is a process of 'enminding' classroom action with
the historic ‘mind’ of the discipline. This enminding becomes evident through the particular genre and discourse of the subject matter.

In the existing education system in Australia and in many other countries in the world, learners are, in essence, removed from communities of practice related to their post-study lives and are taught in what can easily become inauthentic contexts. However, educational institutions can be places that support and promote authenticity, both from the learner’s perspective and from the perspective of the discipline or community of practice. From Bruner’s perspective (Van Oers & Wardekker, 1999), educational institutions are not just places where subject matter is passed on and learning is supported and scaffolded, but places where the culture is refreshed, renewed and reinvented. By participating in cultural activities in learning institutions, students also renew the activities in which they participate. Cultures (communities of practice) are not static; and students are participating members of various cultures and therefore influence the nature of those cultures. This means that learning in educational institutions has the potential to be simultaneously related to personal interest (authentic on a personal learning level) and have cultural significance (authenticity on a community of practice or disciplinary level) (Bruner, 1996).

Authentic learning from this perspective means learning to participate from a personal sense within culturally bound, often pre-set, meaning structures (Leont’ev, 1978). The learner and the pre-set structures of a community of practice, or, indeed, the ‘mind’ of discipline (Tochon, 2000), are intricately bound together and one influences and determines the other. The person and the culture are also intimately bound together and the reinvention and reconstruction of person and culture emerge through learners (and, presumably, teachers) being able to analyse and reflect upon events and experiences (Van Oers & Wardekker, 1999). Through that reflection and analysis, the culture is renewed and refreshed.

Authentic learning is the dynamic relation between a personality-under-construction and cultural practices-being-reconstructed, which is aimed at developing an authentic and autonomous person able to participate in a competent, yet critical way in cultural practices. (Van Oers & Wardekker, 1999, p. 231)

In this article, we use the word authentic in association with student learning in general, with classroom environments (face-to-face, online, distance and so on), with learning opportunities, with activities, and in relation to the nature of the ‘real’ world beyond the classroom, as well as in relation to student personal meaning making. Our view is that authenticity, like Tochon’s (2000) description, is the intersection of the ‘mind’ of the discipline with the here and now of the pedagogical moment. Authentic classroom practice is, therefore, that which reflects, for the students, a combination of personal meaning and purposefulness within an appropriate social and disciplinary framework. The learning experience is authentic for the learner while simultaneously being authentic to a community of practice.

University teachers are, in many instances, somewhat removed from communities of practice; they may find it difficult to establish authentic contexts effectively, because school life can be very different to life outside in relation to cognition
(Resnick, 1987). However, the university classroom life is real life for the university student and, consequently, the activities students experience are personally meaningful and purposeful nonetheless. Challenges for curriculum designers, developers and implementers come in finding the balance between what is meaningful to students, and, at the same time, purposeful and appropriate for the discipline or community of practice context. There is a constant challenge to bridge the gap between the university learning experience and experience of the world beyond the university to prepare students to become competent and critical persons able to contribute meaningfully to ever-evolving communities of practice.

One of our interests in undertaking this research was to explore the notion of authenticity from the perspective described above in the context of a university course. The main questions the research reported in this article seeks to answer are: (a) How can authentic learning opportunities be provided to bridge the gap between the university environment and the world of the communities of practice beyond the university setting? and (b) What implications does this have for the way we understand the teachers' knowledge about communities of practice and the importance of that knowledge within curricula?

We were also interested in the development of university teachers and the support that could be provided for them in their efforts to develop, design and implement authentic programmes and courses. Therefore, our more specific objectives of the study were:

1. to describe opportunities for authentic learning capitalized upon by a university teacher in the planning and implementation of a one-semester university course;
2. to develop a theoretical model about the place of teacher knowledge of the nature of communities of practice in the design and development of authentic learning experiences.

**Design and methods**

An interpretive approach (Erickson, 1986) was utilized in this research. The aim of an interpretive research methodology is to describe the understandings and perspectives of the participants from their points of view. In this type of research the researcher views himself or herself as a participant observer, aiming to understand the human meaning in the social life being lived. Meanings, embodied in action and word within social settings, are sought, and the researcher's task is to make clear the process of meaning construction (Schwandt, 1994). A major advantage of these types of studies is that a rich data set can be gathered when investigating a single situation involving few participants. Results and implications from these types of studies are claimed to be pertinent for the participants and context from which they were drawn. It is up to the reader to decide the relevance for other contexts and situations.

An assumption of interpretivist research approaches is that, in order for meanings to be understood, the observed (the subject/s under investigation) and the observer (the researcher/evaluator seeking to understand) need to be linked in an interactive
relationship. It is through this relationship and the interchanges that occur within it that different constructions or voices (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994) are given the opportunity to come to light and be exposed in a variety of ways. Together, the observer and the observed generate a consensual construction about the experiences of the observed (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Processes used to generate this consensus involve comparison and contrast, through the testing of perspectives by discussion and logical disputation of various and varying perceptions and ideas. In essence, the relationship is hermeneutical and dialectical (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), in which there is continual exploration (comparison and contrast) by all parties of the various individuals’ constructions and reconstructions of experiences and concepts throughout the period of data collection and analysis. The process is facilitated as a variety of data sources are collected and due concern is given to the issues of providing opportunities and ways of representing the voices of the participants (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994).

The criteria for judging the quality of fourth generation research proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1989) were, therefore, followed. These criteria relate to trustworthiness (similar to construct validity), authenticity (referring to the educational and ontological fairness—shared understandings; educationally advantaging—of the approach and process of the study), and the nature of the hermeneutic process.

Trustworthiness and authenticity were enhanced by prolonged engagement and persistent observation (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The study took place over the course of 13 weeks during which more than half of the classes implemented by a university teacher were observed by researchers. Member checks—a continuous process of sharing ideas, observations and conclusions with those who are being studied—were carried out regularly to stimulate discussion about past actions and words, and to provide opportunities for the teacher to confirm, clarify, extend or alter the researchers’ understandings of the teacher’s perceived intentions or meanings of what he had done or said. Peer debriefing also occurred, during which the researchers met frequently to discuss their observations and their developing assertions in terms of the objectives of the study. Assertions were presented to the teacher for comment and discussion, and they were either confirmed or reviewed in the light of these discussions. In this way, both the teacher and researchers entered into a hermeneutical dialectical relationship (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) as they attempted to reach a consensual interpretation of events and experiences.

Towards the end of the study, a case study was assembled to describe the teacher’s motivations for the actions that he undertook during his teaching of the course that semester. The case study was returned to the teacher for checking and further comments. The thick description (Geertz, 1973) that resulted enhanced the transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) of the findings of the study.

**Participant and setting**

The focal participant in the study was a university teacher, Donald (a pseudonym), who designed, developed, then implemented, a second year level, one semester
business management course. The university had three main campuses, and Donald taught this course at the newest of the campuses (it was 2 years old at the time of this study), located approximately 40 kilometres away from the main capital city-based campus. The course was one subject within a 3-year Bachelor of Business programme, about one-twelfth of the programme. There were 15 students in Donald’s class.

Data sources

Multiple data sources were used. In combination, these data provided insights into the participant and the events from a number of perspectives/voices and through a number of modes and means (triangulation).

- Two semi-structured interviews with the teacher were held. The first occurred early in the semester, and the second after the course had been completed at the end of the semester. Questions in the first interview were designed to ascertain Donald’s beliefs about teaching and learning, and his motivations for taking the actions that he did during the planning and implementation of his teaching sessions. Stimulated recall of classroom events was used during the second interview to focus Donald’s thoughts, and to stimulate reflection on his classroom practices and how they matched his beliefs about teaching and learning. In addition, assertions about the researchers’ understandings of the implementation of the course and the classroom interactions that were observed were put to Donald and he was invited to confirm or refute them. Each interview was transcribed and the transcriptions were returned to Donald for comments and checking.

- The researchers made field notes of their observations of the classroom interactions.

- Donald kept a weekly diary. The entries he made in his diary included records of times he spent in preparation for his teaching, the nature of his teaching preparation tasks and reflections on his teaching experiences during each week.

- Course materials Donald distributed to students during the semester, such as teaching materials, worksheets, course outlines and assessment tasks, were collected.

- A focus group interview was held with a group of volunteer students at the end of the semester. The questions probed the students’ reflections on their learning, for example, What aspects of this subject best helped you to learn?; How might this subject be changed to make your learning better?; How did the way you learned in this subject compare with the way you learned at high school or immediately prior to coming to this university? It should be noted that, as the students participating in the interview were volunteers, their responses could not be viewed as representative of the whole of the cohort.

Analysis

Consistent with an interpretive approach, analysis of the data was ongoing through
out the semester, as the researchers developed assertions about the beliefs and practices of the teacher and the learning of the students and explored them further through discussion, further observations and new data to confirm or refute developing theories (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Ways in which Donald was demonstrating his beliefs about education through his practices, including the degree and nature of authenticity of the learning opportunities he provided for his students, was a key influence on the analysis of the data. After all the data had been collected and reviewed, a final statement describing the practices and beliefs of the teacher in relation to the events that had occurred across the semester was written by the researchers and given to Donald for comment, alteration and addition. A case study of Donald as the designer, developer and implementer of the business management course was then written.

Results and discussion

The results, drawn from the case study of Donald, are presented in the form of descriptions of three key features of the course, which seemed to highlight the authenticity of learning opportunities provided for the students (first specific objective). After a brief description of the course Donald implemented during the study, Donald’s background, and his beliefs about education, each of the key features is discussed in the light of the theoretical underpinnings offered at the start of this article, that is, the degree of authenticity in terms of personal relevance for students, within an appropriate social and disciplinary context. References to the data sources, listed above, drawn upon as evidence to support the results, appear in parentheses at relevant points within the discussion. Obviously the results and discussion here apply specifically to the case under study. Nonetheless, they do serve to highlight the varieties of authenticity in student learning experiences at university and the role of the teacher in creating authentic learning opportunities. Readers will be able to determine for themselves from the detailed descriptions given here the extent to which the study is relevant to their own contexts.

The university course

Donald implemented a business management course that consisted of weekly face-to-face sessions. This course was about change management: understanding the processes of change and how change affects the way organizations are designed and function (course materials). Specific issues dealt with across the semester were related to technology, particularly communications technology (course materials), because ‘it’s pretty difficult to go and look at an organization that’s doing some sort of major change and not talk about technology being involved’ (Donald, interview 1).

The first half of the semester was made up of eight modules, which covered
theoretical frameworks and conceptual ideas related to management and technological change within business environments. Students read, discussed and wrote about issues and ideas drawn from a variety of sources, including research journals (course materials). During preparation before the class sessions each week, students were expected to read the necessary materials and write responses to set questions, then, during class time, engage in small group discussions about the questions and the readings. Donald would draw from the whole group the students' perspectives on set particular issues and ideas presented. The students were encouraged to question, critique and analyse the theoretical ideas. Donald encouraged the students to synthesize their thoughts, and to integrate their understandings into their current (personal) ways of thinking about change management.

During the second half of the semester, the focus of the sessions was on the students' industry projects. The industry project was a major project conducted in groups and Donald saw the class sessions as 'group meetings' during which he would 'come around and ... talk about how they've done and what sort of data they [were] gathering from the field and how I can help them make sense of that' (Donald, interview 1). The industry project involved student groups interviewing managers in the field about a significant, recent change within their organizations and the planning and implementation of that change. The students were to investigate why the managers did what they did, the consequences of their actions and their reflections on how successful or otherwise the actions were. The students then had to analyse the data they had collected in the light of the theoretical ideas they had met in the first half of the semester, and draw conclusions about why they thought the outcomes of the change management occurred, and how and why they believed the change management process could have been undertaken differently. Each group developed a written report, which was presented orally to the rest of the class. This project was an assessment task, as was a short written examination (short answer, essay-type) and a written assignment on a description and explanation of their personal views and understandings about business communication and change management (course materials).

In addition, throughout the semester, the students developed learning journals. In these journals, each student wrote his or her reflections on the weekly activities, discussions and readings and on the group industry investigation/report. The development of the learning journal was a task that was assessed at the end of the semester, and its intention was to help students to understand that reflection, aided and stimulated by recording thoughts in a journal, can help learners to value and make sense of their learning. The learning journal was intended to contribute to the final, written assignment and the short answer questions included in the final examination.

*Donald's background and his perspectives on the nature of business management*

After completing a Bachelor of Arts majoring in history, Donald began a teacher education course, as he had always wanted to be a teacher. However, he did not complete his teaching qualification, becoming disillusioned by his early experiences
of teaching in a school system, and decided to take a job in business instead. He eventually ran his own business and, later, after some time away from work, undertook study towards a Doctor of Philosophy in history. During that time, he gained a position as a lecturer in management and has continued teaching in that area because he believed that he could make a difference to the way management is thought about and enacted in Australia. His research interests at the time of the study, allied to management, lay in the area of the nature of knowledge, its creation and diffusion, and related issues. Donald taught a second year, undergraduate business communications subject during the time of the study. His experiences before teaching at the university included participation as a member of the community of practice (Brown et al., 1988) of business managers, and his continuing research and interest was as a participating member of the same community of practice, but as an academic.

Donald’s idea that education is the key to ensuring change in the way things are done in the business world lay at the heart of his perceptions about teaching and learning. He believed that knowledge is developed when theoretical ideas are melded with ideas gleaned from practice, and vice versa. ‘You can’t do any practice without some sort of conceptual framework to do it with’ (Donald, interview 2). Good management decisions, in Donald’s view, are not made in response to what is ‘trendy’ or the latest innovation. On the other hand, he believed that the best decisions are made when individuals and groups work from well-developed personal and theoretical frameworks, consider all parts of a system, draw upon a thorough knowledge of the context, and, thereby, develop clear notions of why and how a change will be managed. In other words, Donald believed that it was important for managers to have clear, well-founded theoretical and practical reasons for making decisions and introducing and managing change. These ideas were expressed in terms of his hopes for the students he taught and were a major driver of his educational practice.

I want to contribute towards producing graduates who can be intellectual leaders in their workplaces ... confident about the world of ideas, confident that they can work better and understand it and that they can switch between very applied day-to-day business issues and then go back and look at research which has been going on. (Donald, interview 1)

Donald felt that education is an important medium for change, had clear ideas about the changes he wanted and taught accordingly. He believed that to be confident in management situations it was important to develop one’s own set of values, because values and beliefs influence and underpin actions: ‘So I would like to allow students to develop through their own experience at university, a set of values ... and that they can believe in their own intuition or believe that their own intuition has some value’ (Donald, interview 1).

Donald’s approach to his teaching was underpinned by explicit beliefs he was able to express about knowledge and knowledge development and about managers and management. Arguably, Donald’s views about teaching and learning were more clearly articulated and consistent than those of a ‘typical’ university lecturer. He may
be seen as towards one extreme end of a continuum. Where knowledge was concerned, Donald believed that ‘Knowledge is a process. It’s not tangible; you can’t touch it. You can’t see it; you can’t physically manipulate knowledge. All you can do is manipulate the environment in which knowledge is operating and that’s what I’m trying to do’ (Donald, interview 1).

According to Donald, codified knowledge has always been taught at universities, but it was the teaching of tacit knowledge, ‘the know-how ... basic value systems and belief systems’ (Donald, interview 1), that was the challenge for universities. In the world of business management, Donald believed that it was tacit knowledge that gave people the ‘ability to make judgements on the spot’ (Donald, interview 1). Where business management as a field of practice was concerned, Donald believed that there exists a cultural gap between the theory promoted by academics and the practice, valued by business managers in the world beyond the university. Thus, through his teaching, Donald aimed to

produce graduates ... that are going to work across that gap and close it. So I want [students] to be able to work independently and be able to use their intellects in ways they use them in their private lives, their non-working lives. And I want [them] to be able to analyze and criticize ... I’m trying to create an environment in which students can acquire a certain amount of tacit knowledge to take out into the workforce. (Donald, interview 1)

Donald wished to change (future) authentic behaviour through the education of future practitioners.

Thus, knowledge to Donald may be conceptualized as being both tacit and explicit (declarative). He explained, however, that the separation was only a conceptual one and that, in reality, explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge cannot be separated. Yet, he believed that universities promoted this false dichotomy: ‘If you were ... able to take a piece of knowledge and ... put it under a microscope, you would find that it was made up of small pieces of explicit and tacit knowledge and if you pulled them apart then it would be nothing’ (Donald, interview 1).

Likewise, Donald believed the same held true for the theory and practice of management: ‘You can’t do any practice without some sort of conceptual framework to do it with. The two things are not separate ... if you pulled theory and practice apart, there would actually be nothing’ (Donald, interview 1).

Overlaid onto his ideas about knowledge, its development and the links between theory and practice of management were Donald’s views on teacher–student relationships. He believed that learning occurred best when there was a personal connection between teacher and student.

The amount of expert knowledge you have is secondary to building those [teacher–student] relationships ... And it’s more [than] know[ing] ... all my students’ names ... you’ve got to know about their life, and who they are as a person. And you have to bring that with you to the conversation in the classroom ... it’s a high risk business, teaching that way. (Donald, interview 1)

Donald acknowledged, however, that such relationships did not happen quickly.

Yes relationships are important but the difficult [thing] is that it probably took a year
to develop the relationship ... but that in a sense they're developing a relationship [with] the other people teaching in the programme, and you know that they feel comfortable with the academics that are here. (Donald, interview 1)

Thus, Donald was very interested in supporting the development of the business management community of practice expressed through his views on how it could advance. That is, he had a sense of cultural practices being reconstructed (Van Oers & Wardekker, 1999) through his teaching. He was also interested in supporting the learning needs of his students, and indeed, had pursued research in the area of learning within a business management context. For the purposes of this study, then (even though we acknowledge that he was not a typical university teacher), Donald's case was a useful one to help us in our investigation of how, within a learning institution, learning experiences and learning opportunities could be made authentic for both the learner and for the community of practice or discipline (Tochon, 2000).

**Key features contributing to the authenticity of the learning environment**

Three features of the course have been selected to exemplify how we believe Donald's business management course represented an authentic learning opportunity for the students, that is, there was personal relevance for the students within an appropriate social and discipline context. Each feature is discussed in terms of how elements of the discipline were enminded (Tochon, 2000) into the pedagogical structures of the course.

**(a) Group interactions: contextual authenticity for learning and for the discipline.** The timetabled weekly sessions were like informal meetings, with discussion centring on key readings and questions in the first half of the semester, and on the industry projects in the second half. As described earlier, there were no formal lectures presented within Donald's course. These group interactions provided the students with opportunities to wrestle with theoretical ideas and frameworks of understanding, to analyse and critique, and to synthesize ideas to make them their own. The specific classroom environment was not a real business management environment. However, Donald was a knowledgeable (former) member of a community of practising business managers and a (current) member of the business management academic research community. This meant that students were provided with the chance to interact with real business management ideas, authentic to business management practitioners and to business management researchers, and use/develop/be exposed to an appropriate discourse—all within the assumptions about the nature of them, as determined by Donald, of course.

Donald's beliefs, as already mentioned, focused on the need for business managers in Australia to be able to take more notice of research and to be able to critique new ideas and thus make better informed decisions: 'People in business ... don’t keep up to date with the current state of knowledge in their field ... they're afraid of it because they don't understand it' (Donald, interview 1).

Donald hoped that the new business managers educated in courses such as his
would help make significant positive changes to business management in Australia in the future: ‘it’s just the way [Australians have] constructed our business culture that really keeps us at the bottom of the international league ladder of managerial competence’ (Donald, interview 2).

The learning environment was a low-risk one for the students because, as they wrestled with ideas, they were allowed to make mistakes and encouraged to make links between the new ideas and their developing understandings. As well as the discipline area authenticity, personal relevance for the students was also in evidence as well. One student noted, ‘there’s been this culture formed in between us where we’re all comfortable with each other ... people feel free to say anything and are not worried about the other people’ (student group interview). Donald’s aim was for students to be in charge of their own learning: ‘I’m trying to figure out a process that allows [the students] to be in charge and to chart their own courses, and with me just in the background’ (Interview 1); ‘If it’s about learning rather than teaching, then it’s the students who really should at least be sharing control over where the conversation goes’ (Interview 2).

Researcher observations of Donald’s classes indicated that Donald had not reached his goal of being in the background. He was often observed talking to the students, providing information and offering suggestions. For example, the following excerpt from the researcher’s field notes of the last class session for the semester indicates that there were times when Donald took a very central position in the classroom and even gave mini lectures.

[Donald] speaks off-the-cuff, but it’s a mini lecture. Students ask questions during it. One question develops into a multi-way discussion.

Comments: This was not a typical class: it was the last for the semester and [Donald] wanted to go through the exam. However, [Donald’s] seemingly preferred process (discussion in the full group and breaking into small groups for discussion) were subverted in the first place by [Donald’s] need to talk and in the second by students electing to stay in the full group. (Field notes)

On the other hand, Donald believed that, like the ideas behind legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991), students needed scaffolded support to assist them to understand what it means to be an independent learner and thinker in a discipline area. For him a course or programme of study was ‘a process of empowering people to do things for themselves ... and that involves periods of holding hands and not holding hands’ (Interview 1). Thus, he provided information at times, through such means as his occasional mini lectures, but also provided plenty of opportunity for independent and group thought and interaction. One student concurred, ‘He walks around and throws a few suggestions up and asks a few questions and tries to get people talking about it ... Quite a few times, he’d bring out, you know, main points that he wanted to reiterate’ (student group interview).

Donald sought to provide experiences of the business world beyond the university within the ‘safe’ learning environment of the classroom. He wanted the classroom culture to reflect and represent the real-world culture he wanted to achieve. It could be suggested that it is partly because of this that his course, in practice, was
somewhat lacking in authenticity. It is our belief that the students may not have had sufficient time both to observe the current culture and to endorse the new one that Donald tried to achieve. However, this was only one course within a 3-year programme of study.

(b) The industry project: an authentic project; an authentic learning experience. The major industry project described earlier provided opportunities for authentic learning, because through it the students interacted with business managers in the field, and gathered data about a real change management project. The students were given the opportunity to engage with a real community of practice to gain first-hand knowledge (Brown et al., 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991). In addition, the students applied theoretical principles drawn from management research, and critiqued and analysed by them in the early part of the semester, to the change management project they were undertaking. It was through the industry project that students faced the connection between the theory and practice of business management. One student noted that ‘The assignments worked in well ... because we actually had to go into a business and use the theory that we had been learning, throughout the semester. It was a good practical way of putting those theories together’ (student group interview).

The project provided a chance for students to respond to their analyses and to synthesize their own ideas in relation to the real-life event and theoretical analysis. They were thus given the opportunity to make the experience personally meaningful by problematizing the change management situation they met for themselves (Hiebert et al., 1996). At the same time, Donald and group peers provided structure and guidance.

It could be suggested that the project was not authentic to the real practice of business management, as the students did not engage in management practices themselves. Rather, they looked on ‘from the outside’ and critiqued the situation using theoretical principles, frameworks and ideas. Donald’s view was that students learn better ‘if you can get [them] to actually do it, rather than just read about it and write about it and talk about it, but to actually have some real experience, work out what it feels like’ (Donald, interview 1). However, Donald acknowledged, ‘Nobody’s going to allow a bunch of second year students to go into some company and instigate some sort of change process’ (Donald, interview 1). Even though the students were only ‘looking in from the outside’ at a business management environment, opportunities for them to actually engage in other management practices were incorporated into the project. This occurred through the planning and implementation of the industry project by each group. The groups were provided with some guidance and structure from Donald, and they were expected to use project management computer software to help them. Donald noted in his diary in week 9, ‘[Industry] projects are running well, with some groups already having done some interviews. The project management plans seem to have imposed good discipline on the groups’. The students also reported their progress at times, verbally and in written progress reports, to Donald and to the rest of the class.
They're also learning the formal part of their subjects, how to manage group work and how to do project management and other sorts of things like that, little skills like that that come in and will help them to, as individuals, to cope at a formal level. (Donald, interview 2)

Thus, not only were the students gaining insights into authentic business management environments, they were also gaining authentic first-hand experience of managing and considering how to manage a project themselves. The project management software and the plans and reports they had to produce were authentic tasks, authentic on a personal learning level, for their own personal learning, and at the same time were authentic to the discipline of business management in that they were real management tasks. We believe that this was a very good example of how Donald had enminded the discipline into the pedagogical moment (Tochon, 2000).

(c) Reflective tasks: personalities-under-construction; reconstruction of cultural practices. The reflective tasks included the learning journal, the final essay assignment and a question in the final examination, which required a short, essay-type answer. In these activities, the students were asked to reflect on the course, the readings, the discussions and the major project, and to make connections with their own understandings. The activities, dealing with the theory and practice of business management, encouraged, and indeed required, students to formulate their own views, to explicate ideas about business management in terms of their own beliefs and values, but also in the light of their own experience of practice and theoretical frameworks and ideas.

The reflective journal was an ongoing activity to which the students contributed ideas across the semester, and which encouraged review and reflection. Reflection was a practice Donald believed would help his students to learn, and was a practice which he believed business managers should engage in to bring together theory and practice and to learn from experience. He was trying to develop in students 'what people in common-sense language call know-how ... it's basic value systems and belief systems and people's ability to make judgements on the spot' (Donald, interview 1).

During the last class session of the semester, Donald discussed the aims of the learning journal in connection with the short answer essay question. The following excerpt, taken from the researcher's field notes, recorded Donald's expression of the purpose of the learning journal in this way:

[Donald] places stress upon the importance of the knowledge the students themselves have generated and recorded in their learning journals. He tells them to value those learnings because they have been generated out of the students' own reflections and experiences and will probably stay with them longer anyway. (Field notes)

Donald's reason for the learning journals was to 'force' (his word) the students to notice the knowledge they were developing; to empower them to be able to talk about what they know, to become metacognitive about their own learning and about their learning about change in management. These activities, then, were designed to
present authentic learning opportunities (personal relevance within an appropriate social and disciplinary context) for the students.

Yet, authenticity was not easy to achieve in Donald’s view, as he acknowledged in his diary in week 9: ‘Talk about the individual assignment. It is a confronting one because they have to reflect on what they have been learning and how it will help them to do management. They seem a little afraid of it’. On the other hand, he believed that the challenge would help the students to recognize how they were developing their own perspectives and understandings in the light of their (short) industry experience and of the theoretical ideas with which they had grappled during the semester. Once again, Donald was trying to assist students to make connections between their own meaning making and making sense of the pre-set cultural frameworks within business management theory and practice. He was conscious of the role of universities to refresh and renew cultures (Bruner, 1996) and his incorporation of the reflective activities was a way he believed would encourage the development of autonomous, able and competent practitioners (personalities-under-construction) who will move the business management community on in the future (cultural practices being reconstructed).

One student described the reflective aspect of the activities as being worthwhile: ‘There’s a focus on taking what you’re learning and applying it to yourself ... to take the theory ... and apply it to what you’ve actually seen in practice ... you’re encouraged not just to accept what’s written in the literature’ (Student group interview).

A theoretical model

In this section we address specific objective 2. Based on the examination of the background issues summarized at the start of the article, while not claiming that the outcomes of this study are necessarily relevant beyond the participants and the context described, we would argue that the themes identified above might apply to many teachers grappling with how to make learning experiences authentic both for their students and for a field of knowledge and practice (i.e. the discipline) itself. Donald brought the real world into the classroom and tried to make the classroom culture reflect the real-world culture he wanted to achieve. That is, he saw education as a medium for change. In addition, he recognized the need for authenticity of student experience, even within what may be an inauthentic or artificial university classroom situation. We observed how Donald tried to enmind the discipline within the teaching and learning environment (Tochon, 2000).

The implication of this study is that there is a need to conceptualize and describe curriculum and teaching in a way that takes account of the complexities that are revealed through viewing authenticity in ways that highlight the discipline and student perspective. Donald demonstrated that effective teaching is more than assembling curriculum aims, transmitting knowledge, assessing student knowledge and evaluating effectiveness of instructional modes (Healey, 2000), and more than aligning aims, learning activities and assessment (Biggs, 1999). Similarly, authenticity that focuses only on learning experiences undertaken within and as part of communities of practice beyond a university setting is also limited. This study, as
illustrated through Donald’s case, has shown that authenticity is about communities of practice and about learner experience as well.

With these ideas in mind, from our perspective as staff developers within an academic staff development unit at a university, we suggest that there is a need for models of curriculum and teaching that take account of the complexity that is involved in developing learning experiences that encourage deep learning, legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and induction into communities of practice (Brown et al., 1988). Simultaneously, such models should also recognize and acknowledge the authenticity of student perspective (Hiebert et al., 1996). While there already exist a number of models to represent curriculum (e.g. Posner & Rudnitsky, 1994; Brady, 1995; Posner, 1995; Biggs, 1999), and models which delineate aspects of scholarship of teaching in higher education settings (e.g. Glassick et al., 1997; Healey, 2000; Kreber, 2002), we believe that they do not go far enough in teasing out key elements involved in planning, designing, developing and implementing courses of study. The examples of curriculum and scholarship listed above can reduce the complex integration of ideas that make up authentic teaching practice into something formulaic and simplistic. Our reflection on Donald’s case has led us, therefore, to develop a theoretical model to represent curriculum, to focus attention on the elements of curriculum that contribute to the enhancement of authenticity and to highlight some of the complexities of thought and understanding that tend to be glossed over in other curriculum and teaching conceptualizations or representations.

The model shown in Figure 1 provides a structure for university teachers to conceptualize the elements of curriculum in a way that may assist them to enhance the authenticity of learning opportunities in the curricula they plan, implement and review. Such learning opportunities will be authentic in the sense that they are personally meaningful and relevant to students, socially relevant to the field and in harmony with the nature of the discipline (Brown et al., 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Tochon, 2000). The model in Figure 1 includes elements that are either not included in other models, or not given the prominence our study suggests is necessary. We believe our model represents a shift in emphasis from the teaching strategies and resources, which are often the focus of attention for curriculum planners/developers/implementers, or even the students (e.g. in Biggs’ 1999 3Ps Model). Rather, the focus in this model is upon the assumptions about students and learning, learning in a discipline and the ‘idea’ (conceptualization/philosophy/perspectives on the nature) of the discipline held by the curriculum planners/developers/implementers. The assumptions made about these elements influence how a curriculum is planned and implemented, and the degree of authenticity of a curriculum is then revealed through the use of the teaching strategies and other resources. The model is a reflection of our thoughts regarding how various elements, which contribute to making a curriculum ‘real life’ in terms of student learning as well as in terms of the ‘real life’ of communities of practice or disciplines, can be represented and conceptualized. We believe the model may be useful to support university teachers in their efforts to conceptualize, design, develop and implement curricula.
The central feature of the model in Figure 1 is the linked triangles labelled *nature of learners and learning*, *nature of the discipline*, and *nature of learning in the discipline*. These three elements represent the underpinning assumptions held by designers/developers/implementers. They represent fundamental considerations that can alter as knowledge about learners and learning in general, about specific groups of learners, and about the discipline, is gained and developed. In the study reported in this article, Donald revealed that he placed great effort in thinking about his students, as well as the nature of his discipline. He was also concerned to recreate his discipline through the way he portrayed business management to the students and in the types of skills he exposed them to. While curriculum designers, developers and implementers alter and develop any or all of these assumptions over time, the model indicates: that these assumptions are central (they appear at the heart of the model); the ‘fixedness’ of their fundamental nature (indicated by the solid, straight outlines of the shapes used); and their linkage, indicated by the triangles’ intersection point, in the *authentic learning* triangle, at the very centre of the diagram.

In response to, and as a reflection of, consideration of the assumptions triangles, a curriculum designer/developer/implementer draws upon and utilizes a number of tools, techniques, strategies and resources to plan for and support student learning. These elements appear as the ‘soft-edged’ grey circles in the model in Figure 1. The
scope of desired learning is developed as an act of ‘fencing off’ the breadth and depth of skills, knowledge, attributes and thinking processes from the possible extent of skills, knowledge attributes and thinking processes within a discipline suitable for a planned group of learners and the nature of their learning. This ‘fencing off’ results in a set of goals, aims and learning objectives. In order to create an appropriate learning environment for students, particular teaching and learning strategies, activities and resources are selected and assembled into an appropriate sequence or grouping by the curriculum designer/developer/implementer. These teaching and learning activities, strategies and resources are brought together in such a way as to help students achieve the ‘fenced off’ goals, aims, and learning objectives. The assessment programme is formulated from appropriate teaching and learning strategies, resources and activities, and forms another integral part of the learning environment. Donald utilized various types of learning and assessment activities, such as the reading and analysis of journal articles around questions he had posed; reflective journals/diaries and essay tasks; and structured classroom interactions he called ‘meetings’. He drew from the myriad of teaching strategies and approaches in his repertoire that he believed, together, in a particular sequence and combination, would represent his aims and intentions for learning and for his discipline (current and future), according to his expressed assumptions.

As already mentioned, these three elements, scope of desired learning, teaching and learning strategies, activities and resources and assessment programme, are shown as ‘soft-edged’ circles in Figure 1, surrounding, and also alongside, the three assumptions triangles. The circles’ positioning indicates that, in the curriculum design, development and implementation process, the three ‘soft-edged’ circle elements emerge as a reflection of, and a response to, the three assumption triangles. The circles are ‘soft-edged’ because they are curriculum elements that are manipulated by curriculum designers/developers/implementers as they make selections to create what they believe to be the most appropriate and authentic learning environment to meet needs determined through consideration of the three assumption triangles, that is, authentic on a student learning, meaning-making level and authentic on a discipline and social context level. This was shown in the study reported in this article, as Donald drew from his past teaching experience a selection of teaching strategies, with which and through which he could represent to his students the scope of learning he had chosen as desirable. His assessment programme was formulated in a similar way. He manipulated the tools of teaching to suit his desired ends, so that the learners, the discipline and the nature of learning in the discipline were the focus of his attention rather than any one teaching strategy.

Review of appropriateness of the three circle elements and review of the degree of certainty (accuracy and appropriateness) of the three triangle assumptions occur continuously throughout the design, development and implementation of curricula. Checks are made and alterations occur in response. This continuous checking of all elements, their fit and their appropriateness, is indicated in Figure 1 by the circling evaluation ring. Evaluation of programmes takes place before, during and after curriculum implementation and results in planned and enacted curricula which designers/developers/implementers believe best match (are more authentic) both
learner and discipline needs. For example, in the study described, Donald engaged in such evaluative-type reflections as he pondered about the nature of the tasks he had set his students, how they were coping with them, and learning about the nature of business management. His class meetings, while being focused upon particular topics, were always open-ended enough to allow him to respond to needs as they arose, that is, to change ‘midstream’ to attend to the learning needs of students and to the way the discipline was being represented and conceptualized through the discussion.

In summary, in Figure 1, the black triangles represent the theoretical and epistemological level of thinking that occurs, or we argue should occur, during the design, development, implementation and review of curricula. The grey soft-edged shapes house the implementation aspects of the curriculum. Finally, the central triangle represents the integration of all the elements to produce the outcomes of which are opportunities for authentic learning.

**Conclusion**

This article has reported the actions and beliefs of a university teacher who attempted, through his teaching, to bridge the gap between the institutional educational experiences and the ‘real-life’ worlds of the business management environment. Taking a definition of authenticity that balanced the meaning made of learning from the students’ perspective with the ‘real-world’ community or practice or discipline life, we examined how the university teacher supported and enhanced authenticity. From our reflections on his semester’s work, we devised a theoretical model that we believe is a way to represent the elements of curriculum in a way that can enhance authenticity. We suggest that it may be a useful model to focus teachers’ attention upon the underlying assumptions they make about the nature of learners, of learning and of their discipline or field, and from those assumptions assemble a worthwhile, appropriate and effective set of learning experiences, that are authentic not only to learners but to the community of practice as well.

**References**


