

# The Top Ten Ways to Fake an Authentic Classroom

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The word authenticity is used in today's 21st century eduspeak with self-proclaimed gurus, ninjas, and experts frequently. Thus, we must be careful as to whose advice we follow. Since I've written several [books on authentic learning experiences](#), I would certainly consider myself as an authenticity expert. However, for years, I incorrectly thought I provided my students with authentic learning experiences. During this time, I was even featured as a model teacher on authentic learning in a professionally produced video. It was for use in an online graduate level course on authentic learning. However, in reflection, the authenticity that I thought I had mastered was really just a fake!

Review these reasons on how to fake an authentic learning experience and ask yourself some reflective questions about your practice.

1. **Simulations as Activities:** The word "activities" should be your first clue to the non-authentic nature of this endeavor. Simulations may be designed to replicate a real-life event, but we want more than replication. Replication doesn't produce anything new. Additionally, a simulation is better used as a scaffold for a much larger authentic learning experience, as the simulation itself tends to promote limited inquiry.
2. **Fake Scenarios:** Fake scenarios may set up a replication of a real-world experience, but it doesn't allow students to immerse themselves in the real world. These are typical of problem-based learning and while they are modeled after the real world, they don't have the power to effect change in the world. Thus, student engagement may be limited.
3. **Mock Letters:** Much like the fake scenario, a mock letter from a seemingly important person, may engage some students, but will certainly fall short on many occasions. In fact, a fake letter that a student initially perceives to be real may only serve as a disappointment in the long run. On the other hand, attempting to convince students that it is real may quickly disengage a group of savvy learners.
4. **Requiring Teamwork:** Simply by placing learners in groups and requiring collaboration does not create an authentic learning experience. Yes, students need to learn how to collaborate and this can be accomplished through carefully monitored teamwork. However, collaboration is best taught through working with experts and learning how to provide effective feedback. Simply put, not all work that is done in an authentic context needs to be done in a team!
5. **Webquests:** A webquest is designed to be an inquiry-based lesson in which students navigate the web to find answers. However, simply searching the web still keeps students in the mode of being consumers of information rather than producers of new information.
6. **Models:** Models generally bring to mind a science fair exhibit or a physics class design. We find learners simply either regurgitating information or designing something through the use of principles learned, but not designing something to be used in the real world. In most cases, students have followed a prescribed set of instructions in which they may make slight modifications. Materials are provided and general guidelines have been set, thus diminishing the authentic nature of the task and pushing it more toward replication.
7. **PSAs:** Public Service Announcements, by definition, should only last approximately 30 seconds. In a 30 second spot, how much true content can be assessed for student understanding?
8. **Video Documentary:** While there is more content than in a PSA, a documentary is what I have longed called a "research paper in disguise." While learners may be creating a documentary, which has an element of creativity, they are not producing any

new information. Unless students are truly positing a new theory, a documentary is not authentic.

9. **Implemented After the Unit is Complete:** When learners are told all of the information they need to know in a unit before providing the context for the authentic learning experience, there isn't an opportunity for true inquiry to occur. Students should begin the authentic learning experience asking questions and the continuation of the experience should lead to additional questions. This is the purpose of inquiry, which should be the basis for an authentic learning experience.
10. **A Non-Stakeholder Audience:** An audience for the sake of presenting new ideas to someone other than the teacher does not create an authentic experience. Parents may get excited about watching their children present, but parents are not an authentic audience. Nor is a class from down the hall. To truly bring an authentic learning experience full circle, you must provide an expert audience of stakeholders in the topic. This does not mean that all authentic learning experiences must end in a formal presentation. However, it does mean that the modality of presentation and the audience itself must match the goals, learning, and final product of the experience itself.

In reflection, how authentic are the experiences you provide your students?