

# Authentic teachers: Student criteria perceiving authenticity of teachers

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## STUDENT LEARNING, CHILDHOOD & VOICES | RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Authentic teachers: Student criteria perceiving authenticity of teachers

Pedro De Bruyckere<sup>1\*</sup> and Paul A. Kirschner<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** Authenticity is seen by many as a key for good learning and education. There is talk of authentic instruction, authentic learning, authentic problems, authentic assessment, authentic tools and authentic teachers. The problem is that while authenticity is an often-used adjective describing almost all aspects of teaching and learning, the concept itself is not very well researched. This qualitative study examines—based on data collected via interviews and focus groups—which criteria students in secondary education use when determining if their teachers are authentic. It yielded four criteria learners use: Expertise, Passion, Unicity and Distance.

**Subjects:** Teacher Education & Training; Secondary Education; Teacher Training; Teachers & Teacher Education; Teaching & Learning

**Keywords:** authenticity; teacher–student relationship; perception; secondary education

### 1. Introduction

Authenticity everywhere and for everything is “in” (Potter, 2010). Brands must create authentic experiences for consumers/users (Gilmore & Pine, 2007); musicians only survive if they are perceived as being true (Peterson, 1997), and even in political elections, being authentic is an important issue (Williams, Pillai, Deptula, & Lowe, 2012). In education, researchers stress the importance of authenticity (for an overview see, Kreber, Klampfleitner, McCune, Bayne, & Knottenbelt, 2007) for optimal learning, assessment and even teacher–student relationships. In teacher training

### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Pedro De Bruyckere (1974) is a teacher trainer and educational scientist at the Teacher Training Department for Secondary Education at the Arteveldehogeschool University College in Ghent, Belgium and PhD student at the Open University of the Netherlands. His past and present focus in educational research is on the role of authenticity in the relationship between teachers and pupils.

Paul A. Kirschner (1951) is Distinguished University Professor at the Open University of the Netherlands and Visiting Professor of Education at the University of Oulu, Finland. He was formerly the director of two research programmes, namely Learning & Cognition and Fostering Effective, Efficient and Enjoyable Learning. He is an internationally recognised expert in the fields of educational psychology and instructional design. The role of authenticity—with respect to learning materials, assessment and the transmission medium which includes the teacher—is imperative in the design of effective, efficient and enjoyable education.

### PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Does a teacher need to be authentic? The concept of authenticity has been discussed for decades, but what it actually means to be authentic as a teacher seldom progresses past the realm of philosophy. To get a better grip on this concept, we asked students in secondary education what—in their eyes—an authentic teacher is. Based on their responses, we distilled four criteria. Teachers are perceived as authentic when they know what they are talking about and can translate subject matter to the students’ knowledge level (expertise). Second, authentic teachers are passionate about what they teach (passion). Third, authentic teachers give students the feeling that each student and each class is different (uniqueness). Finally, authentic teachers aren’t friends with their students but have an interest in them (distance). By describing these student perceptions, this study helps us to understand and build better relations between students and teachers.