Evaluating Authentic Assessments

As teachers design units of instruction they need to focus on assessment of student learning as well as planning for and implementation of teaching. Busy teachers often prioritize selecting content and creating engaging lessons. However, curriculum researchers such as Wiggins and McTighe advocate starting to plan by focusing on assessment and asking, “What should students know and be able to do at the end of the unit?” Most classroom teachers use a combination of traditional tests and authentic/performance assessments to measure student learning. In this activity you will compare traditional tests and authentic assessment and examine examples of authentic assessments.

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d. provide students with multiple and varied formative and summative assessments aligned with content and technology standards and use resulting data to inform learning and teaching

Comparing Traditional Tests and Authentic Assessments

The terms authentic assessment and performance assessment, often used synonymously, were popularized by educational researchers such as Grant Wiggins, Fred Newmann, and Richard Stiggens. In contrast to traditional tests of learning that measure student knowledge in specific subject areas, and are generally administered using paper and pencil tests at the end of a unit, authentic or performance assessments are designed to examine students’ performance on real-world tasks related to the content and process of the subject matter.

Authentic assessments require active learning and involvement on the part of students who construct their own understanding and meaning and apply what they have learned. These assessments promote higher order thinking and often require students to organize, interpret, evaluate complex information and/or consider alternative solutions and multiple perspectives in addressing problems connected to the world beyond the classroom. By contrast, traditional tests emphasize lower order thinking and require students to select or recall information to answer multiple-choice, true-false, matching or fill-in-the-blank questions.

Authentic assessments provide an opportunity for students to use ideas and methods of inquiry that are central to the subject area, i.e., doing the work of authors, speakers, mathematicians, scientists, musicians, artists, policy makers, or historians. For example, students write stories or reports, orate in plays or debates, solve math problems, conduct scientific experiments, perform music, create art, investigate and propose policies, and conduct historical inquiry. Questions on traditional tests focus on knowledge and skills out of context and do not encourage reasoned and creative responses to real world situations.

Authentic tasks are open-ended and allow for divergent thinking so different students may use multiple strategies to arrive at multiple conclusions or products. Authentic or performance assessments accommodate a variety of student learning styles and abilities. Traditional tests are designed for one right answer and frequently reward the student who memorizes well and can figure out what the question is asking.

Traditional tests are separated from teaching and learning; students are expected to learn the subject matter and then take the test. Usually only the teacher and the student know how the student performed. However, authentic assessments encourage students to share their findings through in-depth communication to an audience beyond the classroom when possible. Students may work on an authentic or performance assessment throughout the unit of instruction, and submit work for feedback and revision multiple times. Such assessment encourages student self-evaluation and requires judgment to score, using established public criteria to evaluate the degrees of proficiency. Authentic or performance assessment requires prior planning to make sure the task is achievable in terms of resources, viable in terms of time available, and possible in terms of student abilities. Scoring rubrics or student performance rubrics are designed to provide specific criteria by which students’ work will be evaluated.

References:

Newmann, F. M., Secada, W.G., & Wehlage, G.G. (1995). A guide to authentic instruction and assessments: Vision, standards and scoring. Madison, WI: Wisconsin Center for Education Research.

Stiggins, R. J. (1994). Student-centered classroom assessment. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Wiggins, G. (1990). The case for authentic assessment. Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation, 2 (2). Retrieved April 5, 2011 from [http://PAREonline.net/getvn.asp?v=2&n=2](http://pareonline.net/getvn.asp?v=2&n=2)

Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (2005). Understanding by design. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

**Question 1: What are the key characteristics of authentic assessment?**

Helpful Suggestion: How does assessment relate to the subject matter and what are some examples of authentic assessment?

**Question 2: How do authentic assessments and traditional tests differ?**

Helpful Suggestion: Think about the differences in the purpose, format, and nature of the answers in authentic assessments versus traditional tests.

Classroom Based Assessments are designed for classroom teachers in Washington state to use in instruction with their K-12 students. These assessments incorporate the criteria of authentic assessment. These criteria include:

1. Active learning in which students construct their own understanding of the topic
2. Open-ended task with multiple opportunities to arrive at a conclusion
3. Relation of the assessment to the subject content or process
4. Student communication of learning through in-depth communication, i.e., orally, in writing, or in a product or performance
5. Sharing of learning by students with an audience beyond the classroom
6. Scoring rubric that provides specific criteria by which the student and/or teacher can evaluate the work.

**Question 3: Choose an example of an authentic assessment you find online that is appropriate to the subject and grade level you are observing or preparing to teach. Include the title and URL of the assessment. Evaluate the degree to which the assessment incorporates the six criteria of authentic assessment listed above.**

Helpful Suggestion: Washington State has created classroom-based assessments for elementary and secondary students in social studies, arts, health and fitness and educational technology.

Social Studies assessments can be found at:

<http://www.k12.wa.us/SocialStudies/Assessments/default.aspx>

Arts assessments can be found at: <http://www.k12.wa.us/Arts/PerformanceAssessments/default.aspx>

Health and fitness assessments can be found at:

<http://www.k12.wa.us/HealthFitness/Assessments.aspx>

Assessments incorporating educational technology can be found at:

<http://www.k12.wa.us/EdTech/Assessment/draftedtechcbaFieldTest.aspx>

Investigating Digital Portfolios

Technologist Helen Barrett believes E-Portfolios are essential for 21st century literacy because they give students the opportunity to build a positive digital identity and establish their online voice. She outlines dual purposes for electronic portfolios. Students create working portfolios to support learning and reflection; students also create presentation portfolios to document their achievement. Barrett suggests students can use blogs to support online reflective journaling and wikis to support collaborative feedback. She also believes the “boundaries are blurring between e-portfolios and social networks” and asks, “Are we beginning to see lifelong interactive portfolios as ‘mash-ups’ in the Web 2.0 cloud, using blogs or wikis or Twitter, Facebook, or Ning, Flickr or Picassa or You Tube?” [[1](http://gthy2011.wikispaces.com/home#_ftn1)]

Reference: Barrett, H.C. (2011). Balancing the Two Faces of E-Portfolios. in Hirtz, S. & Kelly, K. (eds). Education for a digital world 2.0 Innovations in education vol 2. Province of British Columbia. p. 294.

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b. develop technology-enriched learning experiences that enable all students to pursue their individual curiosities and become active participants in setting their own educational goals, managing their own learning, and assessing their own progress

In this activity you will analyze the diagram. “Balancing the Two Faces of E-Portfolios.” Click on the link: <http://electronicportfolios.org/balance/balancingarticle2.pdf>

**Question 4: Examine the diagram, Balancing the Two Faces of E-Portfolios. What are the two types of ePortfolios?**

Helpful Suggestion: Consider the purpose and audience for the two types of portfolios.

**Question 5: How are the two types of portfolios created?**

Helpful Suggestion: Consider the different functions each portfolio serves and how each portfolio is organized.

**Question 6: In what ways are the two portfolios similar?**

Helpful Suggestion: What are the key steps to create a digital portfolio?