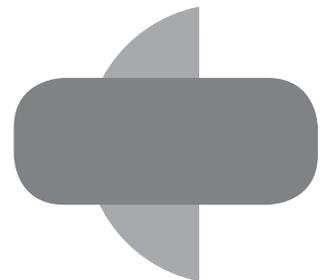


great
performances

Creating Classroom-Based
Assessment Tasks

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chapter 1

Great Performances: Our Journey Begins

1

Do You Recognize This Place?

Betty's Sad Story

As someone who takes pride in my oral reading skills, I attempt to read in a dramatic way that engages the entire class with the text. On this occasion, I was reading *Charlotte's Web* (White, 1952) to my combined 1st and 2nd grade class. As I neared the end of this popular book, my voice deepened and my words became dignified:

Suddenly a voice was heard on the loud-speaker. "Attention, please!" it said. "Will Mr. Homer Zuckerman bring his famous pig to the judges' booth in front of the grandstand. A special award will be made there in twenty minutes."

One of my freckle-faced 1st graders looked quizzically at me and asked, "You mean *Wilbur's* the pig? I thought Charlotte was the pig!"

Larry's Sadder Story

During the debriefing of our three-week in-depth study of Jamestown Colony, an 8th grader in my U.S. history/language arts class raised her hand and stated:

I feel like I really get it all now, about Jamestown, and the English colonists coming over on the ships, and trying to survive during the "Starving Time." And the Pocahontas–John Smith thing—you know, the argument over if they had a romance and if she really saved his life. I get all that, but one thing: was Lincoln still the president back then?

Betty's Saddest Story

A few years ago I was concerned that my 4th and 5th graders were consistently using stereotypical language to refer to people of color. This concern led me to develop and teach a six-week unit with the goal of unlearning stereotypes about Native Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanics/Latinos.

Students read widely from multiple perspectives, analyzed representations of people of color in the media, and interacted with Asian, Hispanic/Latino, and Native American guests in the classroom. At the end of the unit, we invited a local Native American community leader to class. “What do you know about Native Americans?” this leader asked students. One 10-year-old politely raised her hand, was called on, and earnestly replied, “They kill people.”

We would like to begin this book by telling you that the above stories are true: we were there. We recognize this place. This is a place some of you may recognize also. It is a place where teachers are sometimes astounded by how little we know about what our students don’t know. From here we set out on a journey. This journey has led us to embrace an integrated approach to curriculum and assessment that makes sense and works for us in the classroom. But let us not get ahead of ourselves: first things first.

Our Journey Begins

We began our journey by looking for a better way to assess our students’ acquisition of content knowledge. In the past we typically conducted our assessments at the end of our units or courses. We used mostly paper-and-pencil kinds of assessments found in the teachers’ guides of adopted textbooks. We also incorporated culminating projects into our units, but generally as celebratory events for students to showcase their work with little evaluation. We all felt really good about them, but did we really know who learned what? So when we were honest with ourselves, we admitted that we operated under the maxim “I taught; therefore, they learned!”

The more we talked about what we wanted to do, the more we began to develop our own notions that challenged the prevailing teaching and learning practices of which we had become a part. These ideas can be summarized as follows:

1. Instead of short “canned” units, we want to teach “meaty” units, where in-depth study takes place and students gain a grasp of major conceptual ideas.
2. In spite of our best attempts, we still have trouble helping students comprehend basic core knowledge facts, concepts, and generalizations. We want to teach in such a way that students really “get it.”
3. We cannot assume that all students coming into our classes have the skills needed to process the important content information we are teaching.
4. We are concerned that moving to a standards-based system will compel teachers to teach to a narrow band of targets and will compel students to produce the answers they think teachers want.
5. We want to incorporate the newer, more time-consuming performance assessment methods (while continuing to use some traditional methods), but we wrestle with how to pull off the logistics in the classroom.
6. We must expand the opportunities for our students to show what they have learned through various modes, not exclusively through paper-and-pencil activities.
7. Our repertoire of assessment strategies needs to include a range of evaluations—from short and specific to lengthy and substantive.
8. Our assessments must arise naturally out of our teaching. They cannot be awkward add-ons to the units or, even worse, irrelevant assessments imposed from the outside.

9. We want to have confidence that how we teach students and assess their work actually contributes to their achievement.

10. We want to embrace methods that assess student work not only at the end of the unit, but also at the beginning and middle.

We know that we are not alone. Many of our colleagues also share these beliefs. Using these ideas as guideposts, we will lead you on a journey through the world of classroom-based assessments. We will share what we've learned about developing performance tasks that measure students' understandings of the content matter we teach them daily in our classrooms. And we promise to be honest with you. Our focus is on the practical, the doable. You can learn from our mistakes. When we as colleagues share with one another, we all improve our abilities to design and elicit great performances from our students.

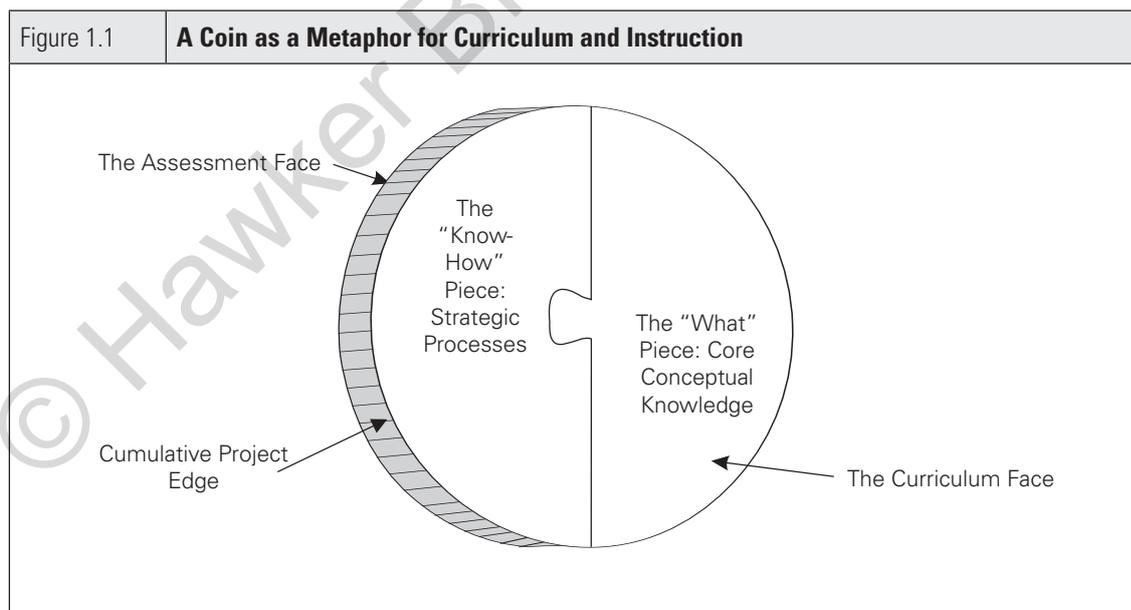
To help you better understand the assessment procedures we will be describing in

this book, let's briefly look at the integrative model from which they come.

The Coin Model: What Do We Teach?

It doesn't matter whether we teach kindergarten or high school, science or language arts, in urban or rural environments. We all teach two things: knowledge and know-how—sometimes called content and skills. We teach core knowledge content to our students, such as the seasons as a cycle, the separation of powers in the U.S. Constitution, and facts about the cardiovascular system. And we also teach them key skills, strategies, and processes such as how to read, write, and problem solve.

To help you understand this idea of teaching and assessing these two different kinds of knowledge, we use the metaphor of a coin (Shoemaker & Lewin, 1993). (See Figure 1.1.)



One face of the coin represents curriculum and the other face assessment. Curriculum and assessment, like the two faces of a coin, are inseparably fused and directly related to each other.

Visualize a coin cut down the center into two interlocking puzzle pieces. One piece describes the “what” of the curriculum—core conceptual knowledge—which most folks call “content.” The other piece describes the “know-how” of the curriculum—strategic processes—which most folks simply call “skills.” In our model, we define core knowledge, sometimes referred to as declarative knowledge (Marzano, 1994), as “meaty” conceptual ideas, as opposed to rote factual knowledge. A strategic process, sometimes called procedural knowledge, is a set or a series of interconnected actions that combine skills or strategies to produce a particular result or condition—such as comprehending a difficult passage of a book or problem solving to construct a toothpick bridge.

We teach and assess both pieces of the coin, the acquisition and application of core conceptual knowledge and strategic processes. And in the same way that we model, shape, and routinize the use of any given process, we also help students tap their existing knowledge, refine it, and extend it. Thus, teachers need to assess students’ core knowledge understandings at the beginning of the unit, during the unit, and at the end of the unit.

Our coin is three-dimensional. Its edge holds the two pieces, content and process, together and melds the assessment face to the curriculum face. This edge represents cumulative projects that students complete at the end of a unit or course. As they complete these projects, students are expected to both demonstrate their understanding of key conceptual ideas (content) and apply the

strategic processes (skills) taught in the unit or course. Culminating projects are orchestrated efforts to apply core conceptual understandings and strategic processes to create personally meaningful new knowledge.

Let’s look closer at the assessment face.

An Introduction to Assessment

Strong assessment systems incorporate four critical elements:

1. *Validations* emerge from adult judgments about whether a student has met, not yet met, or exceeded the performance standard. They are based on a number of data sources, including direct observations, performances on tasks, student self-assessments, tests, and traditional classroom work. They reflect performance over time.

2. *Secured assessments* are administered under controlled conditions (during a certain window of time), where no help is given. They may include traditional selected-response items and open-ended tasks and are scored outside the classroom environment. Nationally normed standardized tests and state assessment tests are examples of secured assessments.

3. *Classroom-embedded assessments* arise out of instructional units or courses of study and are administered in the classroom. The four basic types are selected response, essay, performance tasks, and assessments involving direct personal communication with students (Stiggins, 1997). They incorporate the use of uniform, overt scoring systems.

4. *Composite records* provide evidence of a student’s knowledge, skills, and growth over time. They may include actual work samples, scoring guides, self-assessments—or, instead, representations of the work, summaries of scores assigned, and validations, for example.

Classroom Assessments with Overt Scoring Systems

As teachers we use all four of the assessment elements just described. However, it is the third for which we are most directly responsible. We create classroom assessments. We rely upon them far more than the other elements. And we know that we need to do a better job working with them.

As just noted, Stiggins (1997) suggests that classroom assessments take four basic forms. Here's how we understand the four types:

1. *Selected-response assessments* are traditional paper-and-pencil tasks in which the teacher selects the questions and students must respond. A student picks from multiple choices or true/false items, matches items, and fills in short answers.
2. *Essay assessments* require a student to produce a longer written response to a teacher prompt.
3. *Performance assessments* call for the student to construct a response within a context. Popular performance tasks include story writing, science lab experiments, and debates. Evaluation criteria are clearly identified in the form of dimensions or traits, and the focus of evaluation is on both the product and the process used to produce it.
4. *Personal communications as assessment* include substantive dialogue between the teacher and students during instruction, interviews, conferences, conversations, and oral examinations.

In this book we are going to zero in on the third type, performance assessments. Why? Because they work for us. They allow us to assess content and process simultaneously. They are more engaging for students. They

give us feedback that helps us improve our instruction.

And now the big question: Just what exactly are *performance assessments*? Performance assessments encompass a range from short and specific to lengthy and substantive; from *mini*, which open a window into a student's developmental thinking early in a unit, to *maxi*, which paint a picture of a student's overall thinking at the end of the unit. Performance tasks fall within this broad range.

In our definition, a performance *task* has the following key characteristics:

1. Students have some choice in selecting or shaping the task.
2. The task requires both the elaboration of core knowledge content and the use of key processes.
3. The task has an explicit scoring system.
4. The task is designed for an audience larger than the teacher; others outside the classroom would find value in the work.
5. The task is carefully crafted to measure what it purports to measure.

In summary, a performance task can be completed in different lengths of time: in one class period—a *mini*; in two or three class periods—a *midi*; in a week or more—a *maxi*.

A Snapshot of Chapter 1

In this chapter, we provided a big-picture overview of why we set out on our assessment journey. We shared with you the 10 key notions we used to develop our new assessments, as well as the central elements of our integrative “coin” model: content, process, and product. We also explored the four essential elements of a strong assessment

program and four types of classroom-based assessments.

We are interested in a continuing dialogue with teachers on this journey. Please share your thoughts and reactions with us.

A Preview of Coming Attractions

In the chapters that follow, we offer a close-up look at our view of classroom-based assessments—the assessment face of our coin.

In Chapter 2, we provide you with background on how students acquire content knowledge—*Info In*—using the key learning processes of reading, listening, manipulating, and viewing. We also introduce the *Prepare, First Dare, Repair, and Share* approach to teaching these key processes. In addition, we examine the four modes that *Info Out* can take—graphic, written, oral, and constructions. Students use these vehicles to make their content understanding explicit to teachers and other adults for evaluation.

In Chapter 3, we will explore the first Info Out mode, *visual representations*, in which students share their content knowledge through graphic organizers, comic strips, electronic slide shows, and the like.

In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, we examine three additional Info Out modes: *writing* (for example, a historical persuasive letter and

a parent advisory brochure); *oral presentations* (such as round-robin mini-speeches and debates); and *large-scale substantive projects/performances* (including museum exhibits and models and prototypes).

In Chapter 7, a new chapter in this edition, we zero in on classroom-based reading assessments. We explore a number of currently available schoolwide or districtwide assessment measures that districts and states are encouraging teachers to use and provide some of our insights into their use. We reference RTI (Response to Intervention) in relationship to these reading assessments, helping teachers understand how RTI fits into the bigger scheme of classroom assessment.

In the final chapter, we summarize several strengths and weaknesses of classroom-based performance assessments. And in this new edition, we address the daunting issue of how to convert performance assessment scores into traditional letter grades.

Also in this second edition, we have tried to update the examples and streamline the scoring guides throughout the chapters. In particular, we want to share performance tasks that we have designed and used with students as an integral part of an existing unit or course of study. These tasks vary in length and complexity and take various forms. They can be used as assessments at the beginning of the unit, during the unit, and at the end of the unit.

Figure A.20	Peer Evaluation Scoring Guide				
Name _____ Date _____					
<p>As an individual, complete this chart. First, list the names of those persons in your group on the left. Then, assign each person a score from 1 to 4 in each area identified. The score should reflect your perception of that person's contribution to the group work. Be sure to include yourself on the chart. Your individual responses will not be revealed to the others in your group.</p> <p>I will take the charts from all group members and summarize the results before I conference with you as a group. At that time, we will review the ChecBric scores from yourself and others, along with this Peer Evaluation Scoring Guide, and agree on an appropriate grade for each team member.</p> <p>Use the following scoring guide to assign points:</p> <p>4 = Was very helpful, had great ideas, made important contributions, readily volunteered to do work, and always carried through with the work.</p> <p>3 = Was helpful, had good ideas, made helpful contributions, volunteered to do work, and consistently carried through with the work.</p> <p>2 = Was a little helpful, contributed some ideas, and did some work.</p> <p>1 = Was not helpful, did not share ideas, made no contribution, did not carry through with work.</p>					
Name	Brainstorming Discussions	Research	Development of a Work Plan	Written Report	Debate

Appendix

Thinking Strategies and Questioning Prompts	
Thinking Strategy	Question Prompts
<p>Focusing Strategies are used to selectively attend to information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What subject/topic will we be discussing? • Did you identify any problems? • What is most important to understand about your topic? • What are the key points about your topic?
<p>Remembering/Retrieving/Summarizing Strategies are used to store and retrieve information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your own words, what did you learn? • What can you remember about ___? • How would you describe ___? • If you could use three or four sentences to pull this all together, what would you say? • Overall, what is the situation?
<p>Analyzing Strategies are used to examine parts and relationships, compare and contrast, and facilitate perspective taking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is ___ like or different from ___? • What are the attributes of ___? • How is ___ an example of ___? • What evidence can you list for ___? • What is your point of view about this? • Are there other points of view about this subject?
<p>Generating Strategies are used to produce new information, meanings, or ideas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would you create/design a new ___? • What solutions would you suggest for ___? • What ideas do you have to ___? • If you were ___, how would you have handled ___?
<p>Evaluating Strategies are used to assess the reasonableness and quality of something.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think about ___? Why? • Which ___ is most significant and why? • What are your sources? • How do you know they are credible? • Did you detect any biases? • What criteria did you use to come to this conclusion?