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Authentic Assessment

Just One Kind of Performance Assessment

Carol A. Meyer wrote in the May, 1992 issue of *Educational Leadership* that we must be clear about the differences between authentic assessment and performance assessment if we are to support one another in developing improved assessment tools. A direct writing assessment in which students generate original writing samples under standardized conditions is a performance assessment, but it is not an authentic assessment because the context is contrived or staged. Samples chosen from a student's portfolio of work developed during the year constitute an assessment that is both a performance assessment and an authentic assessment because the writing was produced in a process more like that of real life and was — or should have been — reflected upon by the student. Meyer says that the significant factor in determining the authenticity of a writing assignment is that the focus of control remains with the student in areas such as choice of topic, time allocation, and writing conditions.

An example of this difference would look like this: You as a teacher want to assess your students' ability to write a persuasive letter. If you contrive a writing assignment in which you ask your students to write letters to the editor of a community newspaper that has commented on some community issue, you have created a tool for performance assessment. If you clip the article from the paper, bring it to class, and read it aloud with so much emotion that the

students all say, "We will write a letter to that newspaper to persuade the editor that he or she is wrong," you have created a tool for authentic performance assessment.

These same criteria apply to performance assessments in other areas of the curriculum. For example, a science investigation that is dictated by a prompt may be a performance assessment, but it is not an authentic assessment. A science investigation that grows out of a student's interest, is developed as an individual (or group) project, and is documented by observations recorded with a system devised by the student (or students) would be both an authentic and a performance assessment.

None of this is meant to suggest in any way that there is anything wrong with a performance assessment that is not "authentic." An excellent teacher might wait for years poised to perform an authentic assessment before even one student developed a project based purely on individual and original interest. It is perfectly all right to stage a performance assessment choosing a topic, allocating the time, and outlining the criteria for success. Just don't call it "authentic" in the purest meaning of the word.

(Interestingly enough, Grant Wiggins, the man who coined the term "authentic assessment," defined it as the performance of a task in a situation that most closely matches the standards and challenges of real life. According to him, it is up to educators to recreate this climate in the classroom.)

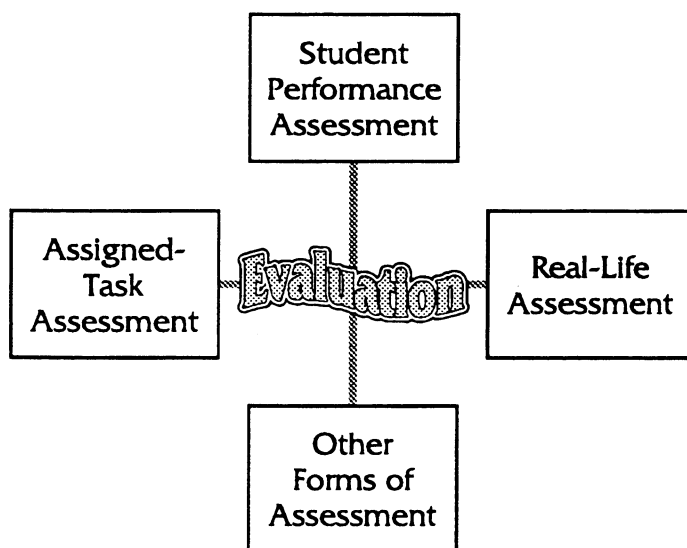
Assessment and Evaluation

What's the Difference?

Assessment and evaluation — these two words are often used interchangeably. However, for our purposes, they mean different things. Assessment, in this book, will mean the systematic and purposeful use of various methods of looking at student progress and achievement. Evaluation, on the other hand, will indicate the process of judging the assessment results for one purpose or another. If you assess a child's ability to solve a maths problem in September and again in December, you can evaluate the progress he or she has made by comparing the two assessments.

Using Portfolios for Assessment/Evaluation

Assessment using the portfolio method means gathering important information about the learning process over a period of time. Evaluation using the portfolio method means making some judgments about the amount and kind of progress shown by the collected samples and by the associated narrative comments (anecdotal records).



Rubrics in Action

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Suggestion to the Teacher: The script on this page and the rubric (page 9) were used to generate the examples of year 1 writing that follow. Use this script to generate your own set of writing samples. Then use the rubric to assess them. To use for portfolio assessment purposes, create a set for each of your students — include writing sample, script, and rubric — and place in their portfolios.

Prompt for a Writing Sample — Year 1

Teacher Script

Teacher Says:

Today you are going to show me how well you can write.

Writing Situation

Some children like to play ball games. Some children like to ride bikes or play with a skipping rope. What do you like to do?

Directions for Writing

Write about what you like to do. Put capital letters at the beginning of your sentences and full stops at the end. Spell the words the way they sound.

(Repeat “Writing Situation” and “Directions for Writing” if necessary.)

Prompt for a Writing Sample — Year 3

Student Writing Sample

Name Trent

Date 25 July, 1993 ✓

Favorite
food is

pizze. It has red and sae sars.
It has tost of cheese and cheese and
cheese..... It sa is like cheese
and bread and sars. When you put
it in your mathy you todaks the cheese
and bread and sars.

Suggestion to the Teacher: The directions on this page and the rubric (page 18) were used to generate the examples of year 4 writing that follow. Use it to generate your own set of writing samples. Then use the rubric to assess them. To use for portfolio assessment purposes, create a set for each of your students — include both the writing sample and the rubric — and place in their portfolios.

Prompt for a Writing Sample — Year 4

Teacher Script

Teacher Says:

Today you are going to show me how well you can write.

Writing Situation

Everybody has had a really special day a day that stands out, a day they will never forget. Maybe it was a special birthday or the day they got their first bike.

Directions for Writing

Write about a day that was special to you. Describe what happened from the time you woke up to the time you went to bed. Help the reader to see what happened and why it was special. Use correct capitals and full stops. If you are not sure how to spell a word, spell it the way it sounds.

