

# Authentic Assessment:

Active, Engaging Product and Performance Measures

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# Preface

Since 1990 when I first wrote about authentic assessment, thanks to technology, the number of possible products and performances students can use or apply to demonstrate their learning has indeed mushroomed. But the basic reasons for assessing authentically remain the same. It is developmentally appropriate and student-centred, it emphasises life skills and abilities, it has the capacity to challenge students on differing levels of understanding, it engages students in their own progress and achievement, it empowers students, it acknowledges multiple learning styles, intelligences, aptitudes and interests, and ultimately celebrates diversity.

This book, which is based on my 1999 book *Authentic Assessment from A to Z: Using Product, Performance, and Portfolio Measures*, aims to help middle years educators align assessment measures (portfolio, product, performance options) with standards-based curriculum by providing active learning strategies that can be used formatively or summatively. The book provides nearly everything needed to understand and put into practice more informative and comprehensive assessments than can be delivered by standardised tests alone.

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

As Jill Spencer says in *Everyone's Invited: Interactive Strategies that Engage Young Adolescents*:

Twenty-first century adults need the capacity to continue learning new information and skills and to be flexible and adaptive thinkers. Creativity and problem solving or what we used to call “Yankee ingenuity” (at least in my part of the world) will continue to be integral to a vibrant economy and culture. These skills and habits of mind will not burst forth fully formed from an 18-year-old’s brain without incubation throughout their pre-K through 12 education experience. Since our students’ problem-solving and reasoning skills are just emerging, we have an obligation to help them to learn to think critically. We want all of our students to be successful in college-prep and challenging career-prep courses so that they have true choices when they graduate from high school. Taking the time to provide concrete learning experiences that develop thinking patterns must be integral to our curriculum and instruction ... *Remember, we are trying to build lifelong learners* (p. 34).

## Technology

*In Differentiating Instruction with Technology in Middle School Classrooms*, Grace Smith and Stephanie Throne make the case for technology as a bridge to high academic achievement through its use in relevant, meaningful, personalised learning. And research supports integrating technology into teaching and learning activities to help students achieve

academically (ISTE, 2009). That said, don't panic. There are all sorts of ways to ease into the use of technology in authentic assessments – and students will lead the way once they are engaged in projects that have real meaning for them. They will find (or already know) the fastest, easiest way to gather information and perform tasks; your job will be to help them think critically about their information sources and to help them focus on the important questions. You probably won't know all the answers to whatever they decide to explore, but you do have the experience and skill to help them problem solve, look at issues from multiple perspectives and challenge them to do their very best so they can be successful.

## **Book Organisation**

Part I, *Starting Points*, through a question-and-answer format, provides an explanation of what authentic assessment is and how it can be implemented. Following is a set of information sheets showing students the huge range of possible products and performances as well as research and internet guidelines.

Part II, *Fifty Assessment Strategies*, sets forth detailed explanations of specific activities that can be used to authentically assess student progress. Both teachers and students need to become familiar with the many possibilities, some of which are fairly complex and involved. In this way, individuals or small groups will be able to decide on an appropriate strategy to direct their work and demonstrate their learning.

Part III, *Additional Resources*, provides a wealth of authentic assessment resources including sample rubrics and criteria to use in designing rubrics. Again, both students and teachers should become aware of this collection in order to recognise the available resources.

Part IV, *Teacher Study Materials*, provides two pieces of literature for teachers or teams to reflect upon, discuss and clarify their thinking about. Guiding questions plus a glossary of assessment terms are also included as well as a bibliography of suggested resources for further study.