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## FOREWORD

“When you cannot measure it, when you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of a very meager and unsatisfactory kind.”—Lord Kelvin

This archaic, technological, and reductionist view expressed by the nineteenth-century physicist-mathematician still influences our efforts to translate educational goals into observable, measurable outcomes.

As communities work toward developing mindful schools, they also reorient their concepts about curriculum, policies, organization of time, and assessment of progress. They set aside some of their outmoded nineteenth-century procedures to make room for mindful practices.

Outcomes of the mindful school include:

- The capacity for continual learning
- Knowing how to behave when answers to problems are not immediately apparent
- Cooperativeness and team building
- Precise communication in a variety of modes
- Appreciation for disparate value systems
- Problem solving that requires creativity and ingenuity
- The enjoyment of resolving ambiguous, paradoxical, and discrepant situations
- The generation and organization of an overabundance of technologically produced information

Growth toward these goals of the mindful school requires new, more authentic and appropriate forms of assessment. We cannot employ product-oriented assessment techniques to assess achievement of these process-oriented outcomes. Norm-referenced standardized test scores alone give us authentic numbers that reflect the achievement and performance of isolated skills at a particular moment in time. All of the outcomes above, however, are dynamic, experiential, and emotionally charged. They incorporate the feelings of mastery in problem solving and the energizing power of discovery.

In this volume, Kay Burke has collected a wide range of alternative forms of assessment. She presents them in a meaningful and practical format, which makes their use easily applicable to those in schools and classrooms searching for more authentic forms of assessment. They will prove valuable to teaching teams wishing to collect data to evaluate their curriculum and instructional decision making. They will assist in communicating more thoughtfully to parents. Most importantly, they will signal to students that self-assessment is the ultimate goal of the mindful school.

The format of her presentation builds conceptual understandings and practical applications of assessment strategies. Furthermore, her mode of presentation models how students, teachers, administrators, and parents might work together to gather data to reflect on, and communicate achievements of, the outcomes of the mindful school.

Kay cautions us that while all the forms of assessment have merit, no one technique is adequate in assessing all the outcomes of the mindful school. Having a range and a variety of strategies will more likely yield usable information, provide for a diversity of styles, and allow for a greater number of situations in which students may express their learning.

As Jacob Viner states, "When you *can* measure it, when you *can* express it in numbers, your knowledge is *still* of a meager and unsatisfactory kind."

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# INTRODUCTION

**“Our history is thin when it comes to standard setting and assessment. We know how to design basic skills testing; how to use test data to rank, rather than improve, schools and to sort, rather than educate, children. We have rarely developed productive, rather than reductive or punitive, assessment and accountability systems—despite the fact that our students are among the most tested in the world.”**

**—Wolf, LeMahieu, and Eresh, 1992, p. 9**

For many years the area of assessment has been relegated to a secondary role in the educational process. Many educators feel it has been ignored, misused, and totally misunderstood by administrators, teachers, parents, and students. In the last decade, assessment has emerged as one of the major components in the restructured school. One cannot open an educational journal, attend a workshop, or watch the news without reading and hearing about standards-based reform and performance assessment.

The emergence of authentic assessment coincides with an increase in the significance of standardized testing. Almost everyone is aware of the controversy surrounding standardized tests. Charges that standardized tests do not always measure significant learner achievement, do not measure growth and development, and do not accurately reflect what students can and cannot do have been made over and over again. Yet, despite the research and the criticism of standardized tests, policymakers, parents, and the general public base much of their perception of the educational system on the publication of standardized test scores and the comparisons of the scores in schools, districts, and states.



**In the last decade, assessment has emerged as one of the major components in the restructured school.**

## Standardized and Teacher-Made Tests

### *Standardized Tests*

Despite criticisms that standardized tests do not always assess what students are learning and that they emphasize factual knowledge rather than performance or application, they are still the yardstick that the public and policymakers use to measure educational progress. Standardized tests are viewed by many people as being valid and reliable and, for the most part, the most effective method to compare students, schools, districts, states, and countries.



**Standardized tests are viewed by many people as being valid and reliable. . . .**

Most people agree that standardized test scores are used to determine many important educational decisions. Some states are using high stakes standardized tests to track students, to award diplomas, to reward classroom teachers with bonuses, if their students perform well, and to fire teachers and school administrators whose students perform poorly.

### *Teacher-Made Tests*

Even though the press and the public focus on standardized test scores, most educators know that with the exception of placement decisions, bonuses, and probations doled out by some legislatures, teacher-made tests play a much bigger role in the day-to-day assessment process. Students receive grades from teachers. Unfortunately, many teachers do not have adequate training in preparing, evaluating, and using teacher-made tests effectively or in assessing student achievement and achievement of students.

Brandt (1992b) states that "Educators who have long protested the misuse of standardized tests must concede that most of the tests students take are devised by teachers, and that some of those are even worse than the published ones" (p. 7).

## Assessment Training for Teachers

Hills (1991) blames the classroom assessment problem on the lack of training teachers receive. Only a few states require prospective teachers to take a course on evaluation. Most colleges of education offer courses in evaluation, but not many students take them. Hills also laments the fact that few students in the evaluation courses he has taught are able to construct test items that are clear, high-level, and related to course outcomes.

“Our current assessment values may also be contributing to inadequate daily assessment of student achievement in some classrooms. Since we have rarely inquired into the quality of teacher-developed tests, offered training in classroom assessment, or included classroom assessment in the principal’s leadership role, we simply do not know how well teachers measure student achievement or how to help them if they need help” (Stiggins, 1985, p. 72).

Hills also criticizes teachers who allow discipline to enter into assessment. Students who do not bring their pencil, book, or homework to class or who get caught cheating on tests often get zeros or “Fs” on work. Other teachers assign zeros for late work. These zeros are then averaged together to arrive at a final grade. It takes only a few nonacademic zeros to result in a D or F for the term. Hills feels that “grades should *not* be used for disciplinary purposes. If a grade is altered as a way of inflicting punishment, it no longer accurately reflects academic achievement, and its proper meaning is destroyed” (Hills, 1991, p. 541). In order for teachers’ evaluations to be meaningful, they must be based on the same criteria. Many parents say they look to standardized tests to provide the norm-referenced or criterion-based data that is often inconsistent or erratic in classroom grades.

## Role of Administrators

The role school administrators play in setting standards for classroom assessments and monitoring their effectiveness is minimal. Like classroom teachers, most administrators have had little or no training in assessment themselves; therefore, they cannot provide the guidance to help teachers develop and use appropriate assessments that can meet the needs of all of the students (Hills, 1991).

Observation checklists of teacher performance are just beginning to include categories for assessment. It is also not uncommon to have good teachers create ambiguous assessments that do not measure what was taught and that penalize poor test-takers or poor readers. These teachers do not mean to cause students to feel insecure, to lower their self-esteem, or to fail, but they just do not know how to test. One still hears stories of teachers leaving blanks on tests for students to fill in the exact words of the textbook. Memorization is being emphasized instead of thinking skills. Administrators, therefore, need to assume a more proactive role by working with teachers



**In order for teachers’ evaluations to be meaningful, they must be based on the same criteria.**