



Assessing Differentiated Student Products

A Protocol for Development and Evaluation

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Developing and Assessing Products

Have you ever wished for a protocol that works for many different assignments? Have you wanted a ready scoring guide for developing and assessing products – a variety of products? If you answered “yes” to either of these questions, then the DAP (Developing and Assessing Products) Tool is for you! The DAP Tool is a protocol that, when adopted by a single teacher, a school faculty, or entire region, simplifies the assessment process, encourages and facilitates differentiation, establishes clear expectations and removes the learning ceiling.

This book is all about assessment, specifically *the assessment of student performance and learning that occurs while students are developing products*. In this book, the goal of assessment is to guide learning; therefore, it is assessment *for* learning. Assessment must be ongoing if students are to learn on a daily basis. Assessment is most effective when it is consistent across assignments and disciplines. The DAP Tool is a vehicle that consistently guides the development and assessment of products and promotes learning.

Now, let’s look at products and what they can accomplish. What do a podcast, technical report, monologue and poster have in common when they are the end products of assignments or units? All are designed to communicate information and/or demonstrate skills. Besides being a vehicle for communication and skill demonstration, the second commonality is that not only can a podcast, technical report, monologue and poster be classroom assignments, but they also are products used by professionals outside the school environment. They are assignments

with a future. Young people recognise that these products have relevance in the world beyond the classroom. Each product shares the goal of communicating important ideas in skilful ways to a target audience, but how each product looks and what is communicated and/or demonstrated vary widely. Target audiences even differ from product to product. Just like professional products, school products must meet high standards if they are to be effective in communicating ideas and demonstrating skills to a specific audience.

What exactly is a product then? *Products are vehicles for communicating information and/or demonstrating skills for specific purposes to authentic audiences.* In school, the product communicates information and/or demonstrates skills to you, the teacher, or to you plus another audience (hopefully, a real-world audience). In various professions, products are used to communicate information as well, once again to an audience specific to the job or position (an authentic audience). For example, a marketing director pitches an idea to a client through a Prezi presentation, an architect communicates a design via a blueprint and a travel agent creates a brochure for an upcoming cruise. In the world of work, products are essential elements of many professions.

Reasons Products Are Important

Products provide you with tremendous opportunities to differentiate instruction and facilitate continuous progress. *Differentiated learning experiences vary the content, process, product and/or assessment in order to address the interests, strengths and readiness levels of students.* The goal of differentiating instruction is to promote continuous progress. *Continuous progress is learning that is ongoing.* Continuous progress occurs when young people have opportunities to learn new content and skills every day. Indeed, the DAP Tool can guide you as you plan and implement differentiated learning experiences.

The following eight reasons tell why products are important in classrooms. They explain why products and the assessment of products are so central to learning that they have become the focus of an entire book.

1. **Products are engaging.** Products involve students in hands-on, minds-on learning experiences. Products require young people to create something and to become actively involved with the content as they learn. They make learning enjoyable, even fun.
2. **Products are motivating.** The wide range of products makes it possible to get students learning content that may hold little inter-

est for them until they have the opportunity to develop products in which they have high interest. For example, an artistic student who isn't very interested in history may engage in the study wholeheartedly if they know they'll be able to show what they've learnt through a painting, sculpture or set of illustrations. Products provide the hook that brings students into active learning.

3. **Products have “real-world” connections.** Products are important in the world beyond school. The carry-over from academic work to adult life is motivating, as it provides purpose. Products have a future beyond academics. They add relevance to learning experiences. Students can see examples of products professionals create for their work.
4. **Well-developed products require high-level thinking and problem-solving skills.** They engage students in thinking in new ways about the content being studied, as well as the development of the product. Expectations for high-level thinking and problem solving add rigour and complexity to learning experiences. Thinking and problem solving are keys to success in the 21st century.
5. **Products provide a practical way for teachers to match learning experiences to students' preferred ways of learning.** Such a match increases both motivation and task commitment. A student who loves technology will be more likely to work hard when they have opportunities to work on products that include technology. The same is true with kinesthetic, oral, visual and written learning preferences.
6. **Products allow for and encourage self-expression and creativity.** Both self-expression and creativity personalise the learning of content for young people. Products in one assignment will not duplicate each other when self-expression is encouraged. For example, an entire classroom of posters would differ from each other because of originality, personal insight and innovation on the part of the students. That is an advantage to both you and the students, as assessing products is more rewarding when students show self-expression and not cookie-cutter versions of the same product.
7. **Products foster pride in one's work.** Students are proud when they create products that require their best efforts. Expectations must be high enough to stretch the students' thinking about the content and the product but not too high for the students to meet them. Creating high-level products builds self-confidence,

and self-confidence nurtures a desire to rise to the next level of accomplishment.

8. **Products develop lifelong learners.** As students become interested in content via the products they create, they ask questions that lead to new learning. They see connections between concepts within and among courses. They establish patterns of learning. Learning becomes a habit and a passion. Reflecting on learning when a product has been completed leads to asking new questions about the topic and encourages lifelong learning.

If these eight reasons resonate with you, keep reading. This book addresses ways to make authentic assessment, significant content, creativity and self-reflection central to the discussion of products. These important concepts come together in the DAP Tool, a protocol for developing and assessing content, creativity, reflection and, of course, the product itself.

Innovations

One strength of the DAP Tool is its consistency. Every single product, regardless of subject area or content, will be developed and assessed by the same four components: Content, Presentation, Creativity and Reflection. In fact, even the criteria and descriptors for three of the four components remain the same; only Presentation differs because it is specific to each individual product. (Don't worry, you'll understand fully once you read Chapter 3.)

Another innovative aspect of the DAP Tool is that the varying tiers of expectations (there are three versions of each DAP Tool for every single product) allow for ease in differentiating. Each tier increases in sophistication so that once you match the appropriate tier to the student, you have a consistent, reliable protocol for differentiating. And a bonus is that the DAP Tool facilitates differentiating the scoring guide for students who are new to the product and to those with experience creating the product. (Chapter 4 will guide you through making that match.)

Finally, this tool will help you remove the learning ceiling in that the Performance Scale doesn't top out at proficiency or even one level beyond proficiency. This scale encourages learners to challenge themselves to perform at high levels and work for excellence. (Again, Chapter 4 will explain this in more detail.)

From ways to develop and organise product lists (Chapter 2) to methods for implementing the DAP Tool in an educational setting (Chapter 5),

this book will guide you from start to finish. For those of you who want a dependable way to guide students in developing products, you will find the DAP Tool incredibly useful. (And, Chapter 6 provides a plethora of DAP Tools for products to suit various learning preferences and a wide range of assignments!) For those of you who have been searching for continuity, reliability and ease in assessing student products, the DAP Tool is what you've been looking for.

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