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Chapter 1

Assessment: From Knowing to Doing

Traditional Assessment

The current emphasis on testing as a tool of educational reform continues a tradition of testing dating back many years. In addition to standardised tests, traditional teacher-made tests (including multiple choice, true or false, fill in the blank and essay tests) still play an important role in today's schools. However, because these tests focus mostly on knowledge, content and skills, other assessments that focus on process, product and performance are needed. This 'balanced' approach to assessment means that teachers can assess the multifacets, strengths and weaknesses of each student and address them.

This 'balanced' approach to assessment is needed.

Performance Assessment

In this age of standardised testing, it is easy to lose sight of the truly meaningful methods of assessment that teachers use every day to evaluate students. When standards and curriculum goals are linked to real-life tasks, students understand why they need to know how to do something and are more motivated to learn. Meaningful assessments provide feedback to students, teachers and parents and help all the stakeholders know how well each child is progressing towards meeting or exceeding standards. Performance assessment requires the students to

Meaningful assessments provide feedback to students, teachers and parents.

know content, demonstrate skills and, most importantly, apply content and skills in the context of real-world problems or challenges. Students are more likely to transfer their learning when they make decisions, solve problems and personally assess their own ability to become independent and lifelong learners.

Performance Tasks

Performance tasks provide a meaningful context so that students recognise the relevance of the information and skills they learn in school.

A performance task is similar to a problem scenario presented to the students. The problem scenario usually relates to real-life situations, requires the students to engage in several activities that tap into their multiple intelligences and integrates several content areas. Performance tasks provide a meaningful context so that students recognise the relevance of the information and skills they learn at school. In addition, instead of addressing one or two isolated standards, performance tasks cluster several standards and integrate them so students see the connections among subject areas. Most

importantly, performance tasks engage and challenge students to learn. Students are motivated to work individually and in groups to complete their projects and performances because they value the task and they enjoy the work. Performance tasks usually include a problem scenario, group work, individual work and performance assessments to evaluate the subjective products. Figure 1.1 shows an example of a performance task.

Example of Performance Task

Performance Task: Your year 9 class has been asked by the vice-principal to plan an orientation program for students new to our school. As part of the program, you need to prepare the following: 1) a welcome letter to the new students; 2) a skit depicting the school's history; 3) a brochure of extracurricular activities; 4) a *PowerPoint* presentation of the key people at the school; and 5) a bulletin of important school-wide events. Be prepared to present your orientation program on 1 February in the school auditorium.

Fig 1.1

Criteria Checklists

Many teachers use rubrics to assess students' work with great success. Some students, however, do not understand rubrics and become confused about the requirements of a project or performance.

Checklists can be used to lead to the rubric. They comprise the missing link in performance assessment, preparing students by walking them through each step they need to take in order to meet the goal.

There are important things to remember about checklists:

1. Teacher-made checklists that incorporate the vocabulary from the curriculum standards are more valid than those without standards language because state tests already use the standards vocabulary. Therefore, teachers also need to integrate this vocabulary into their checklists.

Checklists comprise the missing link in performance assessment.
