

# Authentic Assessment

Originally published *School Library Media Activities Monthly* 14, no. 5 (January 1998).  
Copyright © 1998 *School Library Media Activities Monthly*. Reprinted with permission.

**Daniel Callison, Associate Professor, School of Library and Information Science, and Director, Library Science and School Media Education, Indiana University, Bloomington.**

Authentic assessment is an evaluation process that involves multiple forms of performance measurement reflecting the student's learning, achievement, motivation, and attitudes on instructionally-relevant activities. Examples of authentic assessment techniques include performance assessment, portfolios, and self-assessment.

Performance assessment consists of any form of assessment in which the student constructs a response orally or in writing. Portfolio assessment is a systematic collection of student work that is analyzed to show progress over time with regard to instructional objectives. Student self-assessment offers opportunities for the student to self-regulate learning, and the responsibility of appraising his or her own progress. Integrated assessment refers to evaluation of multiple skills or assessment of language and content within the same activity. A written science report, for example, might include assessment of language skills, information selection and use skills, and reasoning skills as well as scientific content knowledge.

Other terms help to define the meaning of authentic assessment. In a broader sense, assessment is any systematic approach for collecting information on student learning and performance, usually based on different sources of evidence. Alternative assessment involves approaches for finding out what students know or can do other than through the use of multiple-choice testing. Authentic assessment, therefore, is a subset of these alternative evaluation processes, and is based on the assumption that there is a much wider spectrum of student performance that can be displayed than that limited by short-answer, standardized tests. This wider spectrum should include real-life learning situations and meaningful problems of a complex nature not solved with simple answers selected from a menu of choices.

## Moving toward Authentic Assessment

The increased interest in authentic assessment is based on two major issues: Current assessment procedures do not assess the full range of essential student outcomes, and teachers have difficulty using the information gained for instructional planning. Multiple-choice examinations, for example, have emphasized the assessment of discrete skills and do not contain authentic representations of classroom activities, social interactions, use of multiple resources, or real-life situations.

In their classrooms, students read interesting literature, write creative papers, integrate resource information with personal viewpoints, work on projects in teams or other cooperative settings, share information while summarizing their conclusions, and use information from one content area (such as science or math) to solve problems and integrate information in other content areas

(such as history or economics). The ability to select accurately one of a number of options to brief questions does not reflect what students will be expected to do in solving complex problems, communicating constructive ideas, persuading others on important positions, organizing information and managing human resources, and working cooperatively with others in the workforce.

J. Michael O'Malley, supervisor of assessment at the Prince William County Public Schools of Virginia, and Lorraine Valdez Pierce, of the Graduate School of Education at George Mason University, have listed characteristics of student performance that should be considered in authentic assessment.

- **Constructed Response:** The student constructs responses based on experiences he or she brings to the situation and new multiple resources are explored in order to create a product.
- **Higher-Order Thinking:** Responses are made to open-ended questions that require skills in analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.
- **Authenticity:** Tasks are meaningful, challenging, and engaging activities that mirror good instruction often relevant to a real-world context.
- **Integrative:** Tasks call for a combination of skills that integrate language arts with other content across the curriculum with all skills and content open to assessment.
- **Process and Product:** Procedures and strategies for deriving potential responses and exploring multiple solutions to complex problems are often assessed in addition to or in place of a final product or single-correct-response.
- **Depth in Place of Breadth:** Performance assessments build over time with varied activities to reflect growth, maturity, and depth, leading to mastery of strategies and processes for solving problems in specific areas with the assumption that these skills will transfer to solving other problems.

## Types of Authentic Assessment

O'Malley and Pierce have also categorized common types of authentic assessment and the student actions that should be observed and documented. Their examples include the following:

- **Oral Interviews:** Teacher asks student questions about personal background, activities, readings, and other interests.
- **Story or Text Retelling:** Student retells main ideas or selected details of text experienced through listening or reading.
- **Writing Samples:** Student generates narrative, expository, persuasive, or reference paper.
- **Projects/Exhibitions:** Student works with other students as a team to create a project that often involves multimedia production, oral and written presentations, and a display.
- **Experiments/Demonstrations:** Student documents a series of experiments, illustrates a procedure, performs the necessary steps to complete a task, and documents the results of the actions.
- **Constructed-Response Items:** Student responds in writing to open-ended questions.

- **Teacher Observations:** Teacher observes and documents the students attention and interaction in class, response to instructional materials, and cooperative work with other students.
- **Portfolios:** A focused collection of student work to show progress over time.

## Rubric: A Scoring Scale

Assessment requires teacher evaluation of student performance. To aid in making such judgments accurate and valid (teachers measure what is intended to be measured), and reliable (performances tend to be measured in the same manner from one situation to the next), a scoring scale or rubric should be established. Often the levels of evaluation in a rubric are classified as 1 = basic, 2 = proficient, and 3 = advanced. The criteria for each performance level must be precisely defined in terms of what the student actually does to demonstrate skill or proficiency at that level.

Examples of rubric scales that reflect student progression in the use of information are as follows:

Demonstrated indicator of student performance: Integrates new information into one's own knowledge.

**Basic:** Puts information together without processing it.

**Proficient:** Integrates information from a variety of sources to create meaning that is relevant to own prior knowledge and draws conclusions.

**Advanced:** Integrates information to create meaning that connects with prior personal knowledge, draws conclusions, and provides details and supportive evidence.

Demonstrated indicator of student performance: Distinguishes among fact, point of view, and opinion.

**Basic:** Copies information as given and tends to give equal weight to fact and opinion as being evidence.

**Proficient:** Uses both facts and opinions, but labels them within a paraphrased use of the evidence.

**Advanced:** Links current, documented facts and qualified opinion to create a chain of evidence to support or reject an argument.

## Role of Library Media Specialist

Barbara Stripling, past president of the American Association of School Librarians, has stated that there are several roles for the school library media specialist in the development and

implementation of authentic assessment. The library media specialist is in an ideal position to help teachers shift from textbook and multiple-choice exams to alternative techniques such as projects, exhibits, and multimedia productions.

The library media specialist works with teachers in the co-role of expanding the assignment and creating a learning environment that allows authentic learning activities to become possible. Secondly, the library media specialist facilitates the activity with the teacher so that many learning environments can be made available to students including different locations for information gathering and use outside of the school beyond regular school hours. Third, the library media specialist is versed in the authentic assessment process so that, as a professional teacher, the library media specialist provides an additional perspective to the judgment of student performance. The library media specialist provides input and evidence in the evaluation of the students ability to process information into meaningful communication.

## **Making Academic Experiences More Authentic**

An additional key role of the library media specialist is that of curriculum consultant. In this role the library media specialist, in collaboration with other teachers, examines the curriculum and the activities that compose it to expand typical academic exercises into more authentic or real-life situations. Moving from basic textbook exercises and multiple-choice exams toward more team projects is one step, but creating challenging activities that involve authentic resources should be the goal. Authentic exercises place the student in simulations in which he or she must seek and obtain relevant information to purchase a used car; finance a college education; plan a vacation for the family; invest in the stock market; care independently for a pet; determine key resources needed to start a small business; plan a reception for visiting officials; make a proposal for new state legislation; determine which health management organization to select; and more . . . much more. These authentic activities require extensive use of resources that are up to date and often only accessible beyond the school library media center. A key message to library media specialists in the implementation of authentic activities is that they must look, with their teachers, beyond locally housed resources and into the community for access to information resources that will support real-life decision-making assignments.

## **Additional Reading**

Newman, Delia. "Alternative Assessment: Promises and Pitfalls." In *School Library Media Annual*, Volume Eleven, edited by Carol Collier Kuhlthau, 13-20. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 1993.

O'Malley, J. Michael, and Lorraine Valdez Pierce. *Authentic Assessment for English Language Learning: Practical Approaches for Teachers*. New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1996.

Stripling, Barbara K. "Practicing Authentic Assessment in the School Library." In *School Library Media Annual*, Volume Eleven, edited by Carol Collier Kuhlthau, 40-56. Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited. 1993.