

An examination of technology's implementation to alternative assessment

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High stakes testing has taken a primary position in discussions of scholars, educational leaders, parents, politicians, teachers and students. With all this debate however there has been little talk of alternatives to standardized examinations even though they exist. In his popular work titled *A True Test: Toward More Authentic and Equitable Assessment*, Grant Wiggins discusses the importance of developing proper measurement tools as a vital factor in designing curriculum (Wiggins, 1989). This concept has been supported by other publications. Work by Barnes and Crow expressed that the whole child should be considered when designing curriculum to address the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (Barnes & Crow, 2014). Herman and Linn suggest that standardize testing be blended with authentic assessment (Herman & Linn 2013).

Authentic assessments are a true test of intellectual ability because it requires the student to perform model tasks that reflect actions and skills used by employees in the workforce (Wiggins, 1989). The term authentic relates not just to learning activities but to the assessment itself. Challenges are simulated and standards of performance that typically face workers in actual professional settings are presented. Examples of some tasks children are requested to complete during authentic assessment are writing essays and reports, conducting individual and group research, designing proposals and mock-ups, and assembling portfolios. Wiggins advocates for his view by stating that a genuine test of intellectual requires a dialogue where a student can request clarification and the opportunity to explain his or her answers (Wiggins, 1989). This is important because students are asked to solve 'big' problems that are not reduced to one single concept. Another important aspect of an authentic test is that it not only discloses student attainment to the examiner, but also discloses to the student actual tasks and standards of the 'real world' in which the evaluation is situated. Authentic backers feel the tests not only monitor standards, but also set them. Reform, they believe begins by knowing that the exam is essential to instruction. Wiggins goes on to write that all prior work shapes tests and final exams (Wiggins, 1989).

Wiggins, in another publication titled *The Case for Authentic Assessment*; compared authentic assessment to traditional standardized tests demonstrates that his alternative method examines student performance on earnest intellectual tasks (Wiggins, 1990). Alternatively, traditional assessment is based on indirect questioning from which information is extrapolated about the student's cognitive functioning (Wiggins, 1990). Also, authentic assessments allow students to be active users of acquired knowledge while traditional tests measure what the individual can recall from context.

Criticism of authentic assessment is centered on the question of what makes an assignment “authentic”. Attempts to clarify this definition have been based on suggesting criteria to measure the authenticity of a lesson or examination. If instruction is authentic, students must build meaning and develop awareness, use research to acquire knowledge, and focus their efforts to the creation of discovery, tangible outputs, and performances to a standard acceptable beyond school (Newmann & Wehlage, 1993). Five criteria are presented by Newmann and Wehlage that are used to separate points of authenticity. First they ask to what extent students are required to use higher-order thinking skills (Newmann & Wehlage, 1993). Next, what is the depth of student knowledge and understanding that is attained is the question they pose (Newmann & Wehlage, 1993). Third they want to know the value of the learning or assessment activity beyond the classroom (Newmann & Wehlage, 1993). They continue by asking to what extent are students required to discuss, learn, and understand the substance of a subject (Newmann & Wehlage, 1993). Finally, they want to know how well the assessment measures expectations, respect, and extent of inclusion of all students in the learning process. (Newmann & Wehlage 1993). These questions enhance and illuminate the discrepancies that critics have risen about the meaning of authenticity.

Another criticism brings up the lack of valid research to support the soundness of authentic assessment. A study by Herman and Winters (1994) determined that 7.8% of the research conducted during a ten year period contained technical data or used research methods that were acceptable (Herman and Winters 1994).

A major problem described by W. James Popham, professor emeritus at the University of California at Los Angeles and former president of the American Educational Research Association, is that educational leadership does not understand authentic assessment. He states

"Most of these policy makers are dirt ignorant regarding what these tests should and should not be used for. And the tragedy is that they set up a system in which the primary indicator of educational quality is simply wrong." (Popham, 2005). This situation can be remedied if scholars, educational leaders, parents, politicians, teachers and students advocate for this type of examination.

A substantial drawback of authentic assessment is the cost.

A bright spot is that technology can provide a new generation of assessment that can evaluate a variety of skills at lower cost. Educational Testing Service, which administers fifty million tests a year is field-testing that make use of new innovation (XXXX). The key factor is that these exams ask students to integrate multiple skills (such as evaluation and making judgments) at once, offering questions in real life contexts, and using a assortment of material forms, for example symbols, diagrams, and text. Even further students will explain why he or she chose an answer.

If we are to change the manner in which students are assessed then it must start with how students are admitted into college.

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