Authentic & Differentiated Assessment

STUDY MODULE 6   **JANUARY, 2011**

"A form of assessment in which students are asked to perform real-world tasks that demonstrate meaningful application of essential knowledge and skills"
(Jon Mueller)

"...Engaging and worthy problems or questions of importance, in which students must use knowledge to fashion performances effectively and creatively. The tasks are either replicas of or analogous to the kinds of problems faced by adult citizens and consumers or professionals in the field."
(Grant Wiggins)

"Performance assessments call upon the examinee to demonstrate specific skills and competencies, that is, to apply the skills and knowledge they have mastered."
(Rick Stiggins)

Authentic and Differentiated Assessments

Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process. And like effective instruction, effective assessment is both an art and a science. There are a variety of assessment strategies that we should be including in our assessment toolboxes to help ensure the success of all of our students. This month, we are exploring authentic and differentiated assessments—two more ideas to integrate into our bigger picture of assessment. Many of you are already using some form of each of these with success with your students, and we hope that you will share your ideas and stories with your colleagues.

Authentic assessment can simply be defined as asking students to apply their knowledge and skills to real-world settings in order to measure what they know and are able to do. Authentic tasks are often measured with rubrics, and as always, performance criteria should be clearly communicated to students when the work is assigned, so they will know how to meet learning targets.

Differentiated assessment is using a variety of tasks that reflect the learning differences present in the class and allow opportunities for all learners to demonstrate what they know and are able to do.

According to Blaz (2008), in differentiated assessment, (1) students are active in setting goals based on student readiness, interests, and abilities. They may choose the topic and plan the practice, but they should also help decide how and when they want to be evaluated, as well as whether they should be evaluated on the basis of growth or

of attainment. This gives them a feeling of ownership in their own learning process and of partnership with the instructor, and generally motivates as well as empowers them. Motivation is an important factor in learning, and is all too often underemphasized in the assessment phase; and (2) assessment of student readiness and growth is ongoing and built into the curriculum. Teachers continuously assess student readiness and interest to provide support when students need additional instruction and guidance as well as evaluate when a student or group of students is

ready to move ahead to another phase of curriculum. (p. 3-4)

As you will see this month, authentic and differentiated assessment tend to go hand in hand. Authentic tasks appeal to a wider variety of students and adding student choice into the assessment plan from time-to-time helps to set students with learn-

ing differences up for success.

On pages 2 and 3, you will see examples of both authentic and differentiated assessments and will likely notice a great deal of overlap between the two. Authentic assessments are a powerful tool to be used in the differentiated classroom to motivate learners to engage in the learning process, to measure student learning across a variety of student characteristics and styles, and to provide teachers with a clearer picture of what students know and are able to do.

According to Damian Cooper, authentic assessment is::
> an assessment task that mimics real-world experiences by assigning students real-life roles and engaging them in contexts as similar as possible to those encountered in the world beyond the classroom... One of the great benefits of authentic assessment tasks is that they make academic subjects such as math more relevant and engaging, especially for those students who find textbook-driven math difficult to understand. By their very nature, authentic assessment tasks show how theories and concepts are applied in the real world. (p. 107-108)

"Differentiation allows students multiple options for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they have learned. A differentiated classroom provides different avenues to acquiring content, to processing or making sense of ideas, and to developing products so that each student can learn effectively." Carol Ann Tomlinson, 1995

Authentic Assessment—What is it and how do we use it?

From *Authentic Assessment Toolbox* by Jon Mueller

Authentic assessment usually focuses on tasks that students have to perform and a rubric by which their performance on the task will be evaluated. In Authentic Assessment, assessment drives instruction. Teachers first determine the tasks that students will perform to demonstrate their mastery, and then the curriculum is designed around those tasks to enable to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to perform the tasks. Authentic assessment has also been referred to as performance-based assessment, alternative assessment, and direct assessment. The question, "why use authentic assessment?" is not meant to suggest that you have to choose between traditional assessments such as tests and ore authentic or performance assessments. Often, teachers successfully use a mix of traditional and authentic assessments to serve different purposes. Authentic assessments help identify the level to which our students can apply what they have learned to authentic situations—this provides us with direct evidence of student learning and of their

Traditional Assessment	Authentic Assessment
Selecting a response	Performing a task
Contrived	Real-life
Recall/Recognition	Construction/Application
Teacher-structured	Student-structured
Indirect evidence	Direct evidence

ability to transfer their knowledge to specific tasks that have real-world meaning. A considerable body of research on learning has found that we cannot simply be filled with knowledge. We need to construct our own meaning of the world, using information we have gathered and were taught and our own experiences with the world. Thus, assessments cannot just ask students to repeat back information they have received. Students must also be asked to demonstrate that they have accurately constructed meaning about what they have been taught. Furthermore, students must be given the opportunity to engage in the construction of meaning. Authentic tasks not only serve as assessments but also as vehicles for such learning. Authentic assessment, in contrast to more traditional assessment, encourages the integration of teaching, learning, and assessing. In the traditional model, teaching and learning are often separated from assessment—a test is administered after knowledge or skills have been taught. In the authentic assessment model, the same authentic task used to measure the students' ability to apply the knowledge or skills is used as a vehicle for student learning. For example, when presented with a real-world problem to solve, students are learning in the process of developing a solution, teachers are facilitating the process, and the students' solutions to the problem becomes an assessment of how well the students can meaningfully apply the concepts.

Many of you are already using some type of authentic assessment in your classroom that are tied to instructional standards. A simple four-step process can be followed to develop authentic assessments: (1) identify your **standards** for your students; (2) for a particular standard or set of standards, develop a **task** your students could perform that would indicate that they have met these standards; (3) identify the characteristics of a good performance on that task—the **criteria**—that if present in your students' work, will indicate that they have performed well on the task (they have met the standards); and (4) for each criterion, identify two or more levels of performance along which students can perform which will sufficiently discriminate among student performance for that criterion. The combination of the criteria and the levels of performance for each criterion will be your **rubric** for that task (assessment). Examples of various authentic tasks are outlined in the table below:

Constructed Responses	Products	Performances
Short-answer essay questions	Essays, stories, poems, ballads, metaphors	Skits
"Showing your work" in math	Research reports	Role plays
Concept maps	Annotated bibliographies	Book talks
Writing a topic sentence	Literary or character analysis	Debates
Journal responses	Biography or autobiography	Oral presentations (teaching, speeches, etc)
Evaluating the work of others	Film or article analysis or review	Interviews
Self-assessment	Building models	Cooperative group behavior
Explain your solution	Designing (advertisements, experiments)	Auditions
Utilizing library resources	Data analysis	Dramatic reading or performance
Conferences	Planning for a task (procedures, directions)	Panel discussions
Class participation	Brochures, booklets, timelines, letters, etc.	Fishbowl discussions

Differentiated Assessment

From *Authentic Assessment Toolbox* by Jon Mueller and *Special Education* at About.com

If teaching were as simple as using the one best way to teach and assess everything and everyone, it would be considered more of a science. However, there isn't just one best way to teach everything and that's why teaching is an art. We all have different strengths and weaknesses in how we learn. Similarly, we are different in how we can best demonstrate what we have learned. Regarding the traditional assessment model, answering multiple-choice questions does not allow for much variability in how students demonstrate the knowledge and skills they have acquired. On one hand, that is a strength of tests because it makes sure everyone is being compared on the same domains in the same manner which increases the consistency and comparability of the measure. On the other hand, testing favors those who are better test-takers and does not give students any choice in how they believe they can best demonstrate what they have learned. Thus, it is recommended that multiple and varied assessments be used so that (1) a sufficient number of samples are obtained and (2) a sufficient variety of measures are used. Variety of measurement can be accomplished by assessing the students through different measures that allow you to see them apply what they have learned in different ways and from different perspectives.

Teachers need to create a variety of entry points to ensure that student differing abilities, strengths, and needs are all taken into consideration. Students then need varying opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge based on the teaching, hence *differentiated assessment.* Here are the nuts and bolts of differentiated assessment:
- Choice is key to the process. Choice of learning activity as well as choice in the assessment (how the student will demonstrate understanding).
- The learning tasks always consider the students' strengths/weaknesses. Visual learners will have visual cues, auditory learners will have auditory cues, etc.
- Groupings of students will vary, some will work better independently, and others will work in various group settings.
- Multiple intelligence is taken into consideration as are the students' learning and thinking styles.
- Lessons are authentic to ensure that all students can make connections.
- Project and problem based learning are also key in differentiated instruction and assessment.
- Lessons and assessments are adapted to meet the needs of all learners.
- Opportunities for children to think for themselves are clearly evident.

Examples of Differentiated Assessments

- Quizzes
- Tests
- Essays
- Debates
- Portfolios
- Projects
- Reports
- Models
- Exhibits
- Demonstrations
- Performances
- Books
- Simulations
- Maps
- Graphic Organizers
- Learning Logs
- Journals
- Timelines
- Observations
- Student-Created Rubrics
- Multimedia Presentations (Power Points, Videos, etc.)
- Brochures/Pamphlets/Postcards
- Songs/Musical Scores
- Self-Evaluations
- Peer-Evaluations

Using Rich Performance Tasks as Differentiated Assessment

From *Talk about Assessment* by Damian Cooper, 2007.

Performance assessment can be as straightforward as assessing a simple skill demonstration such as focusing a microscope or dribbling a basketball. A rich performance task, however, is differentiated by a number of characteristics, including the range of curriculum outcomes it addresses, the depth of assessment data it yields, and the amount of classroom time it requires. To create rich performance assessment tasks, consider the following seven essential design elements:
1. Rich performance tasks provide evidence of essential learning.
2. Rich performance tasks demand innovation and creativity on the part of the student.
3. Rich performance tasks present students with an engaging challenge that requires persistence to complete.
4. Rich performance tasks engage students in problem-solving and decision-making.
5. Rich performance tasks are appropriate to all students and a range of student abilities.
6. Rich performance tasks provide for individual accountability when the task involves cooperative work.
7. The assessment criteria for rich performance tasks should reflect the essential learning of the unit and be communicated to students before they begin work.

Tips for Assessing with Success

From *Differentiated Assessment* by
Deborah Blaz (2008)

- Assess daily
- Be formative whenever possible: a temperature check not just to measure knowledge but to give feedback
- Ask students to apply the knowledge and skills gained in basically the same way they have practiced that knowledge and skills.
- Be timely—make results quickly available to students.
- Extend knowledge, rather than merely measure it.
- Never surprise students. Tell them what they'll learn, how to learn it, and how they'll know they've learned it. No pop quizzes, no surprise categories. Test what was taught in the same manner is which it was practiced.
- Have clear criteria (a checklist and/or rubric) that communi-
cate how students will be assessed.
- Be authentic. Students should be asked to perform in as close to a real-life situation as possible in a classroom.
- Let students know right from the start what they are expected to learn.
- Have students study models of high performance and monitor their own progress, much like professional athletes or actors.
- Provide opportunities for students to learn from the assessment and how to demonstrate this learning in future students.
- Encourage students to ask, "How can I improve this?" or "How can I find more evidence to support my conclusion?"

Guiding PLC Discussion Questions

1. How can you work together to develop a variety of authentic and differentiated assessments?
2. Describe strategies you've used successfully to provide students with opportunities to perform authentic, real-world tasks as part of the assessment process.
3. Take a common standard or objective and creating an authentic assessment to measure student progress toward that standard, Select criteria and acceptable levels of performance to create a rubric to provide feedback to the students on their performance.
4. Working with the same standard used above or choosing a different standard, outline a plan for using a differentiating assessment to allow for learning differences and to give every student the opportunity to best showcase his/her learning.
5. What resources do you use for planning authentic or differentiated assessments? Are there websites or tools you can share with the group?
6. How can you make use of PLD's within your authentic and differentiated assessments?

Analyze individual strengths and needs

Strategically plan for each learner to improve and excel

Set new objectives

Explore abilities

Supply assistance and appropriate materials

Stress growth

Monitor for immediate intervention

Empower with self-directed assessment strategies

Nurture and support efforts

Translate needs and strengths into active learning