



## **J. M. Ahlbrand Consulting**

**Alternate insights on education and training.**

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### **Insights into Alternative Assessment: Portfolio Perspectives**

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Assessment is critical in today's schools and universities and there are many ways to assess student progress. But regardless of the methodology, assessment needs to be implemented in a way that allows for quantitative as well as qualitative measurement. With the help of technology, modern assessment should and can be balanced between traditional testing and portfolio analysis.

One of the greatest challenges facing schools is that current state assessment programs do not provide sufficient or timely feedback to the classroom teacher regarding student progress. For many students there is always a "disconnect" between assessment and the work that they've been doing in the classroom. This is essentially because the majority of assessments given to students are objective based and really only capture a snapshot of the students understanding of the content at a single point in time.

Current research indicates that just as students have multiple ways of learning; they also have multiple ways of engaging in assessment. Furthermore, many students have poor testing skills and do just as poorly on small multiple choice assessments as they do in large high stakes exams. This is due to an inherent flaw in assessment and technology. Simply, if you only measure students one way, then you only get one kind of data. Numbers and scores are meaningless without a contextual framework.

In the age of technology, we have now been able to create assessment mechanisms that require minimal analysis by the instructor. The market is filled with numerous products that are designed for creating and delivering formative assessment. Many of these programs provide the ability to do multiple standards driven assessments. Furthermore, the same programs are automated to deliver and grade multiple choice, or objective assessments. Unfortunately, these formative benchmark assessment systems tend to focus on Knowledge and Comprehension (Blooms Taxonomy) at the expense of Application, Analysis, Synthesis and Evaluation. The latter is best measured through some form of authentic assessment.

Authentic assessment is not new to education, but unfortunately it is not deployed as widely as traditional assessment. Authentic assessment is a task driven performance based methodology that provides learners with the opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge and skills they have acquired.



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To properly assess students and develop a comprehensive picture of learning, authentic and traditional methods of assessment should be combined.

Take for example the real situation of acquiring a pilot's license. The prospective pilot has to pass a written assessment as well as a performance-based test of skills. The same concept applies to many other areas of life. Medical professionals, military personnel and even new drivers are evaluated through a mixture of traditional and authentic assessment.

Within the context of blending traditional and authentic assessment, what is the best way to measure the collective accomplishments of students? Simple, the integration of student portfolios can provide a structure in which to build a holistic view of every student. Student portfolios are purposeful collections of work that showcases the student's efforts and achievements in one or more areas of the curriculum.

Already prevalent in higher education, portfolio assessment integrates traditional and authentic assessment types and is especially well suited to showing achievement in oral skills, writing, extensive reading and literature. Students need to be measured on quality and accomplishment in addition to how they meet standards and benchmarks.

In the K-12 setting, portfolio assessment needs to reflect not only student achievement but it should also provide a mirror to state and national standards. Students should be assessed on curriculum and content that is aligned to state and/or national standards.

Portfolios are not just a mirror of student comprehension; they are a window into the students mind and thought processes. Furthermore, they can improve efficiency within the classroom. Because students are being assessed through their daily work, teachers do not have to take time out of their schedule to administer, grade and analyze some form of a standardized testing. Furthermore, instructors do not have to be proficient with data analysis. Portfolio assessment provides immediate feedback to the teacher regarding the students' level of knowledge.

Lastly, Portfolios are more like real life. Students are measured not on what they can regurgitate in a slice of time; rather they are measured on accomplishment and quality of work. This is a life-lesson that all students need to succeed. It is not about what you know; it is about what you can do with what you know that counts in the workplace.

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Other Publications: Cappel, James J. and Jonathan M. Ahlbrand. "Learning Partnerships in Online Instruction: Exploring the Possibilities." Issues in Information Systems, Volume III, 2002.